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PROCEEDINGS
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALTomARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
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COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
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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
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KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
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WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Thompson	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, May 20, 2022

*The House met at 10 a.m.***ORDERS OF THE DAY***(Continued)***GOVERNMENT BUSINESS***(Continued)***COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY****(Concurrent Sections)****ROOM 254****HEALTH**

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): Would the Committee of Supply please come to order.

Before we begin, I have a leave request for this section of the Committee of Supply. Our long-standing practice is for the opposition to sit at the committee table to the right-hand side of the Chairperson.

But because the minister is participating virtually today, I'm asking if there is leave of the committee to waive this practice? This would make it much easier for the members of the opposition to see the screens that are situated in this room. *[Agreed]*

Thank you.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Asagwara. *[interjection]* Oh—MLA for Union Station.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Good morning, everyone. And good morning to the minister.

I believe the last time we were in this committee, the minister was providing some information in regards to the surgical and diagnostic backlog, so I think we'd like to start there again today.

Specifically, I'd like to ask about spending allocations of the funds for the surgical and diagnostic backlog. Can the minister provide a breakdown?

The last time we were, again, in committee, the minister had provided a breakdown in regards to the \$50 million that was in the last fiscal budget, and what

that—what those dollars—I guess the breakdown of \$10 million. The minister articulated some clarity around that, and then 40.

But I'm wondering if the minister can provide a breakdown of where funds were spent. So, for example, how much was spent on private external contracts? And how much additional funds were spent to enhance existing public capacity, like, for example, enhancing surgical bookings in hospitals?

So, how much of those funds were spent on private, external contracts and how much was spent on enhancing public capacity?

Thanks.

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Good morning to everyone in Committee of Supply for Health today, as well as the honourable member for Union Station.

I would like to seek some clarification from the member in terms of the member's definition of private. So, is it service delivery organizations that we've had contracts with for decades, or is it the new proposals that have come forward to the task force that we have now contracted with through our requests-for-supply arrangement? Can I get more clarity on that question, please, Mr. Chairperson?

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: I appreciate the minister seeking that clarification.

I'm specifically speaking to private external contracts, so the RFPs. So any new contracts that were negotiated, agreed upon—as related to the surgical and diagnostic backlog—through private entities.

Thanks.

Ms. Gordon: I'm now able to respond to the question from the honourable member for Union Station with regard to arrangements to address wait times for surgical and echocardiography services for '21-22.

I do want to start by saying the ability to 'procore' services from multiple vendors has enabled service provision to Manitobans that would otherwise have not occurred given successive waves of COVID-19 and the unpredictability of the need for elective surgery cancellations in hospitals. So I'm going to

summarize performance on system efforts and refreshed contracts undertaken through the RFSA process.

So, the department estimates that vendors will perform, on average, approximately 85 per cent of RFSA-contracted procedures for '21–2021-2022. Western surgical centre will perform about 40 per cent of contracted plastic procedures, and these reasons are associated with closure of St. Boniface elective surgery slates during pandemic, and there was also a lack of anesthesia resources. Maples Surgical Centre will perform about 60 per cent of contracted general surgery procedures, such as hernia, orthopedic spine and laparoscopic 'colectomy.' Reasons for some of the underperforming are associated with surgeon availability and other issues.

* (10:10)

Public system vendor feedback continues to indicate that surgical services are continuing at a high level. Vendors awarded with endoscopy services through the call for interest posted on October 5th, 2021, have started provisions. Shared Health, HSC, will perform about 40 per cent of the contracted endoscopic procedures. LifeSmart cardio and Maples are also performing some of our surgeries. LifeSmart Cardio 1 completed 488 out of a possible 512 echocardiography procedures in '21-22. Maples completed 359 out of a total of 399 procedures in '21-22.

And the department is working with Procurement Services and the surgical diagnostic task force to plan for the '22-23 RFSA services. We are going to be issuing, I think it is next week, our sixth RFSA.

A six-month extension to '21-22 RFSA agreements has been signed by seven out of eight vendors currently providing services. Shared Health has confirmed that they will need more time to work on our RFSA's to ensure provision of continuity for April 1st to September 30th.

But that is what I am able to report today, Mr. Chairperson: that our RFSA's—five in total—have led to, I've reported before, 11,000 various surgeries. And we're continuing with our sixth RFSA.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response. I was seeking clarification—I'm not sure if she missed that part of my question, but I was specifically seeking clarification on the funds spent on those private external contracts.

So, if the minister could please provide a breakdown on the actual dollars spent and that have been—

sorry, been spent on the private external contracts. She just provided a breakdown on percentages and amounts of procedures completed, et cetera, but I'm looking for actual dollars spent on private external contracts.

Thank you.

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for clarifying that it is the dollars they are seeking.

I want to start by stating that the dollars that I will be sharing are current as of March 31st, 2022. They're not final or—nor have they been audited, and it does not include medical remuneration or payment to the actual provider that performed these services.

So, echocardiography through Cardio 1 is \$128,711.68. Echocardiography through Maples is \$105,998.34. Cataracts performed by Vision Group: \$776,250. Cataracts performed by western: \$3,319,200. Urology prostate cystoscopy performed by CCMB, which is CancerCare Manitoba: \$52,686. Foot procedures performed by Pan Am Clinic: \$54,560. Local hand procedures at Pan Am Clinic: \$291,550. Hernia, of which there are three types: laparoscopic—no dollars paid; hernia to Maples Surgical Centre: \$321,903.16; open hernia—again, to Maples—three hundred nineteen thousand, eight-hundred and—no, I'm sorry, correction—open hernia for Maples: \$318,333.60. Orthopedic spine procedures, of which there are three types, paid to Maples Surgical Centre: laminectomy—\$387,423; first level decompression—\$358,020; second level decompression—\$295,272.

And we also have procedures—ear, nose and throat—again, at the Maples Surgical Centre, of which there are four types: tonsillectomy—\$140,231.70; septoplasty—\$287,774.40; tympanoplasty—\$109,185.05; 'mastoidectomy'—\$779,976.50. Laparoscopic 'cholecystectomy' at Maples—\$330,267.50. Pediatric dental surgery at western—\$521,400. Plastics, of which there are four, paid to western surgical centre: breast—\$404,352; trunk—\$35,100; extremities—\$126,144; endoscopy—Shared Health, HSC and Winnipeg Clinic—we'll start with Shared Health, HSC—\$416,075; Winnipeg Clinic—\$36,588.09.

Again, I want to reiterate that this does not include medical remuneration. These are payments to the vendor and not to the provider, so those would be additional dollars that have not been listed based on the RFAs that have been issued. And, again, this is as of March 31st, 2022. The numbers are not final and have

not been audited for full accuracy, so I would like the member to consider these to be not final and an estimate at this point until it has been finalized. So, we're still waiting for end-of-the-year finalization of the spending around the RFSAs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for providing that breakdown. I may want to go back to that and—just to get a bit more clarity.

* (10:20)

But I'm wondering if the minister can provide a response to my—the second question I asked initially, which is: How much additional funds were spent to enhance existing public capacity? An example, just to help clarify the question for the minister, would be through enhancing surgery bookings in hospitals. So, if the minister can provide how much of the funds were spent to enhance existing public capacity.

Thank you.

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

I do want to begin my remarks by stating that some of the enhancements in hospital I have read it into the record in my earlier response. Shared Health is—as well as CancerCare Manitoba, those dollars are certainly in-hospital expenditures or additions that we made in funding.

I'm also going to provide other dollars that have been spent under our priority procedures and wait-time reduction. Again, these are preliminary estimates and, as of March 31st, they have not been finalized, and they do not include medical remuneration. So, again, it's payment to the vendor and not the providers.

Prairie Mountain Health, hip and knee surgeries: \$419,876; WRHA, hip and knee surgeries: \$2 million; Shared Health, for sonographers: \$409,000; Shared Health, MRI, CT scans and ultrasounds for Brandon Regional Health Centre and Health Sciences Centre: \$2,705,602.

We also have a line for miscellaneous expenses, but I would have to take—I don't have the breakdown—which is \$3,400.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response.

I'm wondering if the minister could provide, just for my own understanding, a better understanding of

what these enhancements might be. I can understand maybe the spending on, I suppose, procedural—procedures, like, fundamentally some of those things getting done to address the backlog. But, specifically, can the minister outline what enhancements—so what additional measures within that were taken, reflected in those funds, to address the backlog via public. So, I want to make sure that I'm really clear because I want to be able to get a clear response from the minister.

So, the minister has provided a breakdown of monies that were spent on private, external contracts. I've asked for the minister to provide clarity around the funds that were spent to enhance public health-care system capacity in addressing the surgical and diagnostic backlog.

What I'm looking for now is for the minister to provide clarity on exactly what those funds went into, what strategies were employed to enhance public capacity. So, not just the procedures that were completed and where but, specifically, additional measures that were supported by way of those dollars to enhance public capacity. If she could provide clarity on that, that would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

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

I would like to provide a surgery update as of May 17th here in Winnipeg. And I want to start by just putting on the record that I'm so pleased that we're at 115 per cent surgical capacity across the system. So, definitely back to pre-pandemic levels and doing above that. So, you know, my—once again, my thanks and my praise goes out to the health leadership and everyone that's on the front lines performing these surgeries.

But here in Winnipeg, just to give you a sense of that, there were 1,143 non-emergent surgeries completed the week of May 9 to 15th at Winnipeg sites. This is 150 more surgeries than the number completed during a similar week in 2019—so, May 13th to 19th, 2019—when 993 surgeries were completed. That means Winnipeg's surgery program operated at 115.1 per cent of pre-pandemic levels last week. And, Mr. Chairperson, the number of surgeries completed last week is 55 more than the week before, so this marks a 5.1 per cent increase week over week.

All emergent and urgent surgeries, including cardiac and cancer procedures, continue to be prioritized. Non-urgent surgeries are reviewed by physicians to

prioritize patients who medically should not wait any longer for procedures to be performed.

* (10:30)

And, as well, the number of emergent surgeries performed last week remains steady, as it has throughout the pandemic. There were 184 emergent or life-saving surgeries performed last week in Winnipeg. So, it's down 57 from the previous week, or 23.7 per cent, and down 53 from a similar time period in 2019.

But there were 261 surgical slates in Winnipeg last week, not including some of the private clinics such as western and others. So, this is up three from the previous week, but 12 below pre-COVID norms, meaning slates were scheduled at 95.6 per cent of pre-pandemic baselines. So, we continue to do more work, but I'm so pleased to see at Concordia 100 per cent of pre-COVID capacity; at the Grace, 103.2 per cent; HSC Winnipeg, we have some work to do, we're at 89.6 per cent; Misericordia, 95.7 per cent; Pan Am, 100 per cent; St. Boniface, 93.3 per cent; cardiac, 93.3 per cent; the Victoria, 100 per cent; and HSC women's, 100 per cent.

Again, as a reminder, the number of surgeries performed during a slate will vary depending on the acuity of the patient and the complexity of the procedure. So, for example, an endoscopy will not take as long to perform as neurosurgery. As well, the time allotted for surgical slates may vary from those performed pre-pandemic due to demand, that may result, from time to time, in fewer surgeries.

So, Mr. Chairperson, I did want to just put that on the record, and in terms—if we even look at the month of May, in terms of emergent surgeries: May 1st, 222; May 8th was 241; and May 15th as 184. And if we look at non-emergent for the same period: 1,068 for—at the start of May; and the middle of May, on May 8th, 1,088; and by May 15th, 1,143.

So, we continue to work on our surgical slates and our surgical capacity, not just to—I've been asked this question several times, are—do we just want to get to pre-pandemic levels? Well, no; we need to do more than pre-pandemic levels if we are to reduce our backlog. And so our health-care staff, our surgeons, our health leaders are very committed to ensuring that we go beyond the pre-pandemic levels.

But again, I'm just very, very pleased to report that we're at 115 per cent surgical capacity needed. Manitobans are getting surgeries.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response and, certainly, the minister and I are on the same page in recognizing that we need to go well above and beyond pre-pandemic surgery and diagnostic procedure levels in order to make sure that Manitobans get access to the care they need in a timely manner, that we mitigate poor health outcomes as a result of delayed access to care.

Dr. Matear did state pretty clearly a few weeks ago that the backlogs were increasing before the pandemic, unfortunately. And so, I think it's important for us to recognize that, while certainly the pandemic has had a tremendous impact, that in fact, in many areas, the surgical and diagnostic backlog was growing before the pandemic.

And I know the minister has heard me speak to this many times and talk about the impact of the cuts to health care under this government, closures of emergency rooms and the loss of critical-care capacity, as we lost expertise during those closures and cuts due to those folks who worked in those areas—you know, some of those folks not being able to continue working in those areas in the hospitals they were previously, and not being able to move over to other facilities, and just the impact of those changes overall in the system.

And so, certainly, I recognize it's important for us to get above and beyond pre-pandemic levels. It's also important to recognize that pre-pandemic levels were going in the wrong direction.

And so, with that, I do want to talk a bit about this year's budget. We've talked a lot about the previous year and the year before that, those budgets. We know that this year's budget includes \$110 million to address the surgical and diagnostic backlog.

The minister can certainly correct me if I'm mistaken, but I do believe it was made clear in the update provided yesterday that it doesn't appear as though those funds will be spent in full in this current fiscal year. So, certainly, I invite the minister to correct me on that point if I'm mistaken, but my understanding is that the \$110 million allocated this year to address the surgical and diagnostic backlog will not, unfortunately, be spent in full in this fiscal year.

I'd like to, with that in mind, ask the minister about operating capacity at Concordia Hospital. When does the minister expect—and by when, I mean what date, what month, year—does the minister expect additional operating capacity will be in place at Concordia Hospital?

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

In her preamble leading the question, some comments were made that I would like to address, Mr. Chairperson. One of those comments is that backlogs for surgeries and diagnostics was occurring prior to the pandemic, and I want to assure the member that steps were being taken to address—

* (10:40)

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): Order. Order.

Point of Order

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): The member for Union Station would like to raise a point of order.

MLA Asagwara: I just want to remind the minister that I do use neutral pronouns, and so I'm sure she didn't even realize it, but I just want to flag that so that moving forward it's not an issue.

Thanks.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): The member has a point of order, and I'd just ask all members to be respectful of each other's—the way we all want to be addressed.

* * *

Ms. Gordon: I do apologize to the honourable member for Union Station for misgendering the member. That was not my intention, and I truly apologize for that.

I will continue with my response that steps were being taken before the pandemic to address the issues that came out of the Wait Time Reduction Task Force report, which was in 2017, and as a result of that, priority procedures wait-time reduction, there's a \$10-million allocation to the department's Health budget continuing year over year. So, the first appeared in budget '20, 2020-2021, and continues 2021-22, and it will show up in the budget again for 2022-2023 to address the need to focus on priority procedures wait-time reduction. So, I do want to bring that to the member's attention.

I also wish to share that the member for Union Station may not be aware, being recently new to the NDP's caucus, that during the NDP's time in office they shut down the following 18 emergency departments. In the Southern Health-Santé Sud: Emerson in 2002; Pembina Manitou, 2004; MacGregor in 2004;

St. Claude in 2005; Gladstone in 2008; Vita in 2012. In Prairie Mountain: Reston in 1997; Erickson in 2003, Rossburn in 2003, Wawanessa in 2006, Birtle in 2006, Rivers in 2007, Baldur in 2007, Benito in 1997, McCreary in 2004, Winnipegosis in 2012. And in the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority: Whitemouth in 2000 and Teulon in 2016.

I also want to address the member's comment about the—Dr. Matear's comments related to the allocation of the \$112 million for the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force. And I want to read his response verbatim: Yes, meeting the needs of the patients, the government has committed one hundred and ten million dollars to our efforts this year. Our intention is to spend all of that, if we can, on efforts to reduce the diagnostic and surgical backlog.

The other aspect is that the sum of that will be investment in longer term sustainable capacity of the system, which is based on patient needs, based on target wait times and is one of the components of the task force plan. I think the time that it takes to properly plan for each of those service lanes and the diagnostic and surgical services within scope, being able to identify what we need, then look at—we obviously have proposals we're looking at currently. Where does that—to what degree do those proposals address the backlog and then being able to identify what is the remainder and how do we solicit proposals that can help address the whole of the backlog.

So, all of those processes take time, and I think the workup of not just the plans but working through the proposals, supporting the proposals are coming forward so that they are—

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): The minister's time has expired.

MLA Asagwara: I can appreciate the minister enthusiastically providing information. However, I did not hear in her response an answer to my question about when the minister expects additional operating capacity to be in place at Concordia: what month, what year, the date.

So, if the minister could please provide that response, I would appreciate it.

* (10:50)

Ms. Gordon: Mr. Chairperson, I also want to add, for the honourable member's information, that after receiving the wait time task force report in 2017, in response, in November 2018, it was announced that an additional \$5.3 million would be invested to reduce

wait times for hip, knee and cataract surgeries. And the additional funding resulted in an estimated 2,000 additional cataract surgeries in 2019, which was a 16 per cent increase, and an additional 1,000 hip and knee replacement surgeries performed in 2019, a number which represents a nearly 25 per cent increase in Manitoba volumes.

The 2019 incremental volume will be delivered—at that time, it was announced that it would be delivered in Winnipeg facilities. Approximately 4,100 hip and knee replacements and 12,900 cataract surgeries were performed in Manitoba in 2017 to 2018. Of this volume, 3,000 hip and knee replacement surgeries took place in the WRHA and greater than 10,000 cataract surgeries.

So, again, increasing the volume of hip and knee replacements and cataract surgeries was previously recommended by the wait times task-reduction task force, and in addition to the added funding that I've mentioned, service innovations also included offering cataract surgeries with freezing only—to patients meeting clinical criteria—rather than with sedation, and offering same-day hip surgery.

So, for example, no hospital admission to select patients, as well as reducing the number of hospital stays and implementing a hip and knee clinic to reduce the number of people referred for surgery. So I just wanted to share with the member some other enhancements that I did not refer to.

And I want to talk a little bit, again, about the \$110 million in Budget 2022 for the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force and the important work that they're doing on behalf of Manitobans. So our government has invested these dollars to address the pandemic backlog, but I want to be very, very clear and emphasize that there's no amount that our government won't spend to address the backlog.

So, the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force is planning and working on initiatives, several proposals and several ideas that have come forward from industry and from within the system, Mr. Chairperson. And we know that these initiatives will lead to spending every penny of the \$110 million with a goal to approach the government for more.

So our government is confident in the work of the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force and we know that outcomes are already being achieved. This is demonstrated by the updates that are being provided at one of the announcements at the Concordia Hip and Knee Institute. We had a patient from Sanford—who

went to Sanford for spine surgery; at three weeks post-surgery was able to join us at the announcement to share her outcomes of her surgery.

And we want to tell Manitobans more good news, but as a result of the by-election blackout restrictions we couldn't elaborate on those. But we are going to have more good news for Manitobans coming in June, and look forward to the honourable member hearing of those.

In terms of the start-up date for Concordia, the fifth operating room, it will be in 2023. It's difficult at this stage to pin down the date, the month, as a result of supply chain issues and disruptions and construction and timelines. It's not always in the hands of the project team, but we are aiming for 2023 and know that it will be operational and that members of the public will be able to get their hips and knee surgeries.

MLA Asagwara: Well, the minister really seems set on exhausting every second of the time available to provide a response to a question I've asked multiple times. I do thank the minister for eventually getting to answering the question that I've posed multiple times. So, thank you for providing that response.

I would like to ask about the reporting actually—the updates, rather, on the surgical and diagnostic backlog. The minister just touched on that a little bit.

I mean, Doctors Manitoba—like the minister, I was at their gala last night. It was really a wonderful evening to lift up and acknowledge the hard work of Manitoba physicians and to celebrate a few folks who have really stood out and that their colleagues refer to as heroes in the work that they've done during this pandemic. Dr. Reimer is an example; Dr. Lavallee, Dr. Anderson, were just a few of the folks who were honoured; Dr. Postl—I didn't capture all of the folks who were recognized last night, but certainly we thank all of them for their efforts and recognize their significant immeasurable contributions to the well-being of Manitobans.

And Doctors Manitoba has been wonderful in providing regular updates to Manitobans about the surgical and diagnostic backlog, and what I hear consistently from Manitobans, not just my own constituents, is their disappointment that the best information, most consistent and regular information that they can receive and they've been receiving, has not come from this government. It has come from, instead, Doctors Manitoba, and we thank Doctors Manitoba for their efforts in this particular area. But it does beg the question why the minister hasn't been able to

similarly update Manitobans on the backlog and why she still has yet to commit to a date by which the backlog will be cleared.

So those are my questions to the minister. Why has the minister not been able—not been willing, not been able, to regularly update Manitobans on the details of the surgical and diagnostic backlog, and why has she not committed to a date? We've asked many, many, many times and, more importantly, Manitobans have been asking relentlessly for a target date, a timeline for when the backlog will be cleared.

* (11:00)

Why hasn't the minister provided either of those things to Manitobans?

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

I know that the honourable member for Union Station also worked in the health system and would be familiar with what I'm about to share, that many surgeon offices maintain their own wait-list. I know one of the offices that I worked with actually had it on an Excel spreadsheet that was maintained by the main nurse in the clinic where these surgeries and diagnostics were being completed.

So, it takes time. It requires working with doctors' offices and service delivery organizations to pull that information, also looking at the centralized wait-list for other procedures.

So, you know, I think Dr. Matear also mentioned this yesterday, that Doctors Manitoba is using CIHI data mixed with a lot of other data sets, and they themselves have said on a number of occasions—and I—yes, I was at that dinner last night and had some conversations about that, and they have been very open with the public that it's not accurate. It's what they have available to work with.

And what our task force is attempting to do is to get accurate information in the hands of Manitobans, and that's why they're meeting, even this week—it could be today, because this is the end of the week—with Doctors Manitoba. This is a group that is working collaboratively and around the table of solutions with service delivery organizations and organizations like Doctors Manitoba. It's not an adversarial approach at all to helping Manitobans. It's about how do we get the best, accurate information in the hands of Manitobans.

The Manitobans that are talking to me about their surgeries are wanting to know about their wait time.

And that is what we're working on in collaboration with Doctors Manitoba. And I look forward to seeing that work completed.

But I do want the honourable member to know that we're coming—this Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force is coming around the table with Doctors Manitoba. They've had many discussions with our chair of the steering committee, Dr. Peter MacDonald, many in-person meetings. Everyone is doing what—the best they can to get accurate—let's—I want to emphasize that word—accurate information. Again, it requires speaking to several physicians' and surgeons' offices and pulling data, and that changes.

And I think Dr. Matear also spoke yesterday that the way diagnostics are going to be counted is about to change.

And so all of that has to be taken into consideration. We don't want to do a rushed job. We don't want to do anything that will provide inaccurate information to the public. So, Doctors Manitoba has their mandate. They have been sharing information with the public. They've said to the public that it's not accurate.

And we respect the organization and the information that they have shared, and we respect and thank them for the incredible work that they're doing to come to the table with the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force to provide accurate data to Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: With all due respect to the minister, her response was really, sort of, in a—sort of was an—a bit of an indictment on her and her government's failure to provide the information that Manitobans have been asking for.

Highlighting that Doctors Manitoba has—without the—without even a semblance of the level of resource the government has—has been able to provide Manitobans with consistent information, albeit maybe imperfect, but certainly much more comprehensive and consistent and dependable than this government has yet to do. This—the minister's response really and truly has only amplified the fact that this government is failing wholly to provide details and information that, quite frankly, the government should be readily and consistently providing to Manitobans at this point.

The minister talks about people coming around the table and working collaboratively. We know that. We know that Doctors Manitoba, physicians offices across the board are willing and wanting to work with

this government to make sure Manitobans can get answers to the question. The issue here is the minister and her government being unwilling to put their resources to good use, to proper use, and provide this information.

The minister—I'm actually a bit—I'm a bit blown away by this minister downplaying the role that she plays, her government plays, in being able to, you know, coalesce all of this information and accurately—perhaps imperfectly, which I think many Manitobans would be perfectly fine with. They recognize it may not be perfect but, certainly, after all of this time has passed for the minister to basically, I mean, just say Manitobans are just going to have to keep waiting, and to act as though she doesn't have all of the resources available to her to get this information out to Manitobans in a consistent and transparent and comprehensive way is not acceptable. And it's, quite frankly, just not believable.

And so, again, I will ask the minister: Why has she not committed to a date to clear the backlog? Why has she and her government failed to provide consistent updates and transparent information and reporting on the surgical and diagnostic backlog? Because according to the minister, everybody who needs to be around the table to make that happen is there.

And so that really and truly—to me—highlights that the issue here is the government. And perhaps the minister can speak to the barrier. The—what is it exactly that is inhibiting the government from doing what Manitobans have been calling for, and which would certainly put, you know, well over a hundred—almost about a hundred and seventy—imperfect number—thousand Manitobans at ease to have access to that information.

So, why has she not committed to a date? And will she commit to a date to start providing transparent, comprehensive, regular updates on the surgical and diagnostic backlog to Manitobans?

* (11:10)

Ms. Gordon: Mr. Chairperson, can I ask for a five-minute break, please?

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): Is it the will of the committee to have a five-minute recess?
[Agreed]

The committee recessed at 11:11 a.m.

The committee resumed at 11:16 a.m.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): All right, the five-minute recess is over. I call the committee back to order.

Ms. Gordon: I do want to say and place on the record that the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force does provide monthly updates, and so, to give any impression that they're somehow not doing that would be factually incorrect. They provide monthly updates.

During the last by-election for Fort Whyte, we sent all our materials to the review committee for a by-election blackout. We were advised that—of what we could say and what we could not say, and we followed through with an online update. And Dr. Matear was out yesterday with an update. And so, we do provide updates.

I also want to address the member's comment about Doctors Manitoba and the information that is being provided currently to Manitobans by stating that Doctors Manitoba does have representatives on the task force that is under Dr. Matear. And they have assigned two representatives on behalf of their organization that are part of the task force and are working with the steering committee. Those individuals are Dr. David Hochman, who is a general surgeon, and Dr. Pam Hebbard, who's an oncological surgeon, as well.

So Doctors Manitoba is represented at the table. And so, it's not just the organization that—as a stand-alone organization that we're working with. They have representatives on the task force.

And I do have concerns with the member's comments about the availability of information, because as I mentioned before, the member, like myself, worked in the system and should have an understanding of how these surgery clinics operate. And many of the doctors have their own wait-lists, and they're in different formats. And the task force is at work collating a monumental amount of data, and that's not easy, and it's not simple and it's complex.

And so, it's not just about, you know, having press conferences and putting out information for information's sake; it's about providing Manitobans with accurate information. And Doctors Manitoba has been very forthcoming in stating that they're putting out estimates, it's not accurate. They, I think I recall, said in one of their statements or media availability, that they are working with the task force on trying to

collate data and pull data from many different sources to provide the most accurate information.

* (11:20)

So if the member's asking for the task force to go with inaccurate information just to have information out there, I think that would be wrong. And so we are going to continue to provide updates.

Manitobans are receiving their surgeries. They're receiving their diagnostics—tests, and they're aware that they can also approach their individual surgeons and physicians to ask about their wait times for their surgeries. And that has always been available, and they're aware that we are working diligently to get more robust information available, dashboards and more, but most individuals are saying to me that they're talking to their physician, they are getting updates on when their surgery or diagnostic may be upcoming.

And the—I thank the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force for the work that they're doing with all our partners and stakeholders and physicians within the system and outside of the system to collate and pull all this monumental data together so that we can make sense of it and provide accurate information to the public. And I support their work, and I also support the two members from Doctors Manitoba that sit on the task force currently for their efforts.

MLA Asagwara: So, it's very clear that the minister is not willing to provide Manitobans with increased greater regularity, in terms of surgical and diagnostic updates on the backlog. It's also very clear that this minister will not provide Manitobans with a date or a timeline by which they can expect the surgical and diagnostic backlog to be cleared. And that's unfortunate.

It's incredibly disappointing because, as this minister is well aware, there are nearly 170,000 Manitobans who have been desperately awaiting those more regular updates and a timeline, target date for when the surgical and diagnostic backlog will be cleared to really provide and instill some hope so that they can have an end date in sight to their suffering. And I don't use that word lightly. That is what folks are using as a word to articulate their lived experiences as they wait for a life-changing—life-saving, in many cases—surgical procedure or diagnostic test.

And so that is a really difficult—rather, disappointing response from the minister, and I know that it's going to be really disappointing for many Manitobans

who are hopeful that perhaps they would get a different response from the minister in regards to those questions.

What I'd like to move to is to talk a bit about a response to a matter under advisement last year that the Health Minister explained that a physician—and this is in regards to Lifeflight, so the minister's aware.

So, in her response, the minister explained that a physician accompanies interfacility transfers only 30 to 50 per cent of the time. Further explained—it was further explained that a doctor on board for out-of-province transfers is rare.

The previously government-operated—and I'm sure the minister is aware of this—the previously operated government—sorry, government-operated Lifeflight included a dedicated team of medical professionals, including doctors, who responded. So I think that's a really important distinction to be made. And I'm sure, again, the minister's well aware of this.

So my question is, why are doctors on board for only 30 to 50 per cent of interfacility transfers?

Ms. Gordon: I do want to respond to the member's question by stating unequivocally that these are clinical decisions that are being made—physician-related decisions. They're certainly not specific to a government. And even in the NDP's government—time in government, these clinical and medical decisions were being made, not here at the Manitoba Legislature, but based on the circumstances of the injury the person may have experienced.

And there's a medical director, as I understand it, on call to assess whether clinicians need to be on the Lifeflight or the STARS, for example, air ambulance. And, in some cases, they may even require a specialty service like respiratory therapy to be on the flight. But it's a medical director, a clinical decision that is being made.

And, again, it's been in place for decades, and even under the previous NDP government. It's not specific to a government. It's not specific to a government's decision whether an individual who has sustained a certain accident or injury should have clinicians onboard on the flight. They do not call over to the Leg. for those directions. It's not based on a government. It's based on a medical director making a clinical decision.

And, again, that has been in place for decades, and I don't see it changing, because I don't see politicians at any time being asked to make medical decisions at

the bedside or at a scene of an accident or at an injury. It will be medical professionals that are trained to assess a patient's health status and what the needs—clinical needs are of that patient and to make the decision about who needs to be on a flight.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for her response.

What strikes me, however, is that the—previously, the government-operated Lifeflight did include a dedicated team of medical professionals, including doctors, who responded.

* (11:30)

And so, there has been a change, and that change in terms of who was on these flights occurred when government changed. And so how does the minister account for that difference?

Ms. Gordon: I just want to correct some inaccuracies that are being placed on the record, Mr. Chairperson, factually incorrect information.

And so, I want to go back to some information from 2011 wherein it states the Lifeflight program mandate requires, in brackets, through regulation, closed bracket, staffing with aeromedical attendants, in brackets, critical-care registered nurse qualifications, closed bracket, for moderate-acuity patients with the addition of an on-call emergency or intensive-care-qualified physician to provide care to the most unstable patients from rural and northern Manitoba.

So, I want to be very clear that this does not mean that a physician or certain clinicians were always on the plane, sitting on a seat. It means that the team had access to these specialties and the—not necessarily that they were physically on the flight. And the decision as to who would be physically on the flight is—was being made by medical directors, clinicians within the program area. They always have access to on-call emergency or intensive-care-qualified physicians—does not mean they were physically on the flight.

This goes back decades. I'm reading from information in 2011 that says Lifeflight is the provincial specialized air ambulance program with a mandate to provide intervention, stabilization and air transport of critically ill and/or injured residents of Manitoba to the city of Winnipeg's tertiary hospitals.

Again, they have access to on-call emergency or intensive-care-qualified physicians to provide care to

unstable patients. Doesn't say that they are always on the flight, but they are always available.

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: The minister still hasn't answered my question. It's my understanding, it's our understanding, that when government ran this service, when government ran the Lifeflight service, the presence of highly trained doctors and nurses was much higher.

Now, this is something that I've heard from numerous folks since 2019, certainly, since I was elected: it was much higher when it was ran by government. The minister hasn't actually disputed that point.

My question is: why now? Why that change? Why is it that medical professionals are on board so infrequently since the change from Lifeflight being run by the government to a private entity?

The minister surely must have an answer for that decrease in the presence of doctors and nurses—highly trained folks—being a part of these interfacility transfers. What's the answer to that?

Thanks.

Ms. Gordon: I am deeply concerned with the direction that the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) is taking with putting information on the record that is not factual and to place anecdotal information and hearsay on the record. If the member has an exact situation they would like to bring forward or my office to look into, I'd be happy to do that. But I can't answer on anecdotal information or hearsay information.

What I can state and the factual information I can put on the record is that when Shared Health was created, staff from the emergency response services, under the direction of Dr. Rob Grierson, went to Shared Health. They are—so there's a strong emergency response service program for the air ambulance under Shared Health that is—consists of critical-care experts that are available to these air ambulance services. To my knowledge, that has not changed.

And so I just want to put the facts on the record and not anecdotal information or hearsay possibly shared with the member where there is no accuracy of that information. Staff are—went to Shared Health. They work under the direction of Dr. Rob Grierson. There's a strong emergency response service, and it's able to respond to the needs of Manitobans for these types of services.

Again, if the member has a specific situation or circumstance or incident they would like to bring forward, my office would be happy to look into it and provide a response. The member knows. They have written many letters to me on individual cases and case work. Happy to look at those individual cases, but the information that's being provided is anecdotal, I can't respond to it, and it's hearsay.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): I thank the minister, and I would just ask, if possible, if the minister could centre herself on the camera for the sake of the broadcast, that would be greatly appreciated.

MLA Asagwara: So the minister is—should know, because I stated it at the beginning of this line of questioning, that I directly referenced a matter under advisement last year. The minister explained—the minister actually explained—that a physician accompanies interfacility transfers only 30 to 50 per cent of the time; further explained that a doctor on board for out-of-province transfers is rare.

Okay. With that in mind, and also knowing that these transfers, since this service has moved from being run by the government to being privatized, we know that doctors—highly trained doctors and nurses—being on board has decreased.

* (11:40)

The question is, is why are these medical professionals on board so infrequently? That's a pretty straightforward question for the minister to answer.

This is the minister's responsibility. This is an incredibly important area of provision of care in our province. The minister, I'm sure, has heard many times from folks who've had experiences being transferred this way. She's well aware of what this service is; she's providing information on what this service is.

So, I mean, the minister certainly isn't surprised, I'm sure isn't surprised, that the presence of highly trained doctors and nurses was higher when it was run by government. My question is, why? Very straightforward, direct question: why are these medical professionals on board so infrequently?

That's a really important question for the minister to be able to answer and to have a comprehensive understanding of why that's the case and what the implications are of that in terms of health outcomes for Manitobans, you know, many of which are in incredibly vulnerable medical states.

You know, as we've seen during this pandemic, we saw 57 Manitobans transferred out of province. Very tragically, we're all well aware of the tragic outcome with the young mother, Krystal Mousseau, which, still, there are questions around that particular tragedy. And so it is—I'm not asking these questions because I'm trying to just, you know, fill time. I'm asking these questions of the minister because I believe she has the answers and these answers are really important.

It's incredibly important for people to know when they're going to—if they should need an interfacility transfer, should they need to access this service, what the prevalence is that highly trained medical professionals will be on board and who those professionals are. And there has been a change since this service has no longer been run by government. The minister should be able to clearly communicate why that change has occurred and the impacts of that change.

So, again, why is it that doctors are only rarely on board for transfers out of province? We do know that, that doctors are rarely on board for transfers out of province. Why is that?

And why the decrease in the presence of highly trained medical professionals, be it doctors or nurses, when folks are being transferred interfacility?

Thank you.

Ms. Gordon: I do want to—I'm not sure why the member is putting on the record that I am unable to answer the question as to the why, as they stated. The why will always be a clinical decision that is being made by medical directors and clinicians that are part of this program. There is—a doctor is always available to go. The decision on whether or not the doctor goes on the flight is a clinical decision, and so that's the answer to the why.

I do want to state that there's a fundamental disagreement with the facts in terms of what the member is stating, that there has been a decrease in the clinicians being part of the flight. And I would like the member to provide the Committee of Supply with evidence that clinicians were on the flights more frequently.

Where is the evidence? Because there's a fundamental disagreement with these facts, and if the member has available data and concrete information, specific information that shows that there was a higher rate that my department is not aware of, I would like that information to be provided. That is not the information that I have available. And again, the decisions

are not being made in my office, in my department. It is being made by clinicians based on the injury or the accident that an individual has sustained. And it is my role, as a minister, to allow for that autonomy in medical decision-making, and once those decisions are made, to feel assured that the medical profession—professionals have made the right decision in the best interests of the client that they serve.

And, again, a fundamental disagreement with the facts exists and I'd like the member—the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara)—to provide evidence that there—that clinicians, physicians, certain specialities were on flights more frequently. If the member could provide that information, I would appreciate it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: Well, thank the—I thank the minister for that response.

Interestingly enough, the minister just clearly stated that what I've stated is different than what information the minister has on hand. And the minister, being the minister, and having access to that information and just clearly stated that what I've said to be our understanding is different than the information she has available to her.

I'd ask the minister to table that, please, if she's willing to provide that.

Ms. Gordon: There appears to be an inability to come to some agreement or some understanding on the facts. But what I can state for the Committee of Supply is some of the incredible investments our government is—and it's factual—is making to the health system, Mr. Chairperson. So, \$7.2 billion total for health care in Budget 2022, and that is the most significant health-care investment in the history of our Province.

I say it many times—I'm able to share this information with my constituents that are subjected, on a regular basis, to hearsay and anecdotal information and that—it is the most significant health-care investment in the history of our Province. And it's \$1 million more than the previous government ever invested in health care.

I also share with my constituents and all Manitobans regularly, that \$3.1 million is going towards pandemic supports to protect the lives and livelihoods of Manitobans, and \$630 million is also invested to strengthen the fight against COVID-19 and

prepare for other variants and pressures on our health-care system.

* (11:50)

Mr. Chairperson, just today our Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, Dr. Roussin, mentioned that we have in—across Canada, two cases of monkeypox, and 20 are under investigation. Luckily, we don't see any of those cases here in our province yet, but there will be other variants; there will be other strains of illnesses. And so, \$630 million has been invested, and \$30 million to add 28 additional beds to our intensive-care units, raising our bed baseline up to one—*[inaudible]*—72.

So, our government has taken proactive steps. We're not looking at the problem, researching the problem, surveying the problem. We are making key investments in our intensive-care units and our acute-care facilities.

And just to share again: with the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force, \$110 million to address the surgical and diagnostic backlog, for a total—we tend to talk just about the \$100 million, but it's a total of \$160 million. And then \$10 million continuing year over year after year to improve priority procedures and wait times.

And then our incredible investment and partnership with the Concordia Hospital, hips and knees to 400—\$4.9 million to add a fifth operating room that will add 1,000 surgeries, annual. And \$400,000 in the Spine Assessment Clinic to increase the number of assessments for Manitobans, ensuring 900 patients receive their treatment or care plan sooner.

And I answered a question in the Chamber this week, and so pleased to talk about our new mobile CT unit and two, Mr. Chairperson—two—new mobile MRI units which will soon deliver nearly 12,000 CT scans and over 7,000 MRIs annually.

And then our investment in people: \$19.5 million to add 259 additional nurse training seats this year. It's part of our plan to increase seats to 400. And \$11.6 million to add the next phase, permanently expanding our nursing seats in Manitoba.

And I was so pleased to be in Thompson yesterday and talking with the head of the University College of the North—went on a tour of their nursing simulation labs. And it is because our government is investing in University College of the North by way of \$4.3 million for 37 additional nurse training seats. And I got to see the housing units for those nurses that

are coming in from many different areas to take advantage of those supports that our government has put into University College of the North.

And then \$23,000, Mr. Chairperson, for each internationally educated nurse to go through their licensure process, become 'licened,' obtain their licence and join our incredibly rewarding and fulfilling health-care system.

And in addition to these investments, we're hiring 35 more paramedics across our province.

Our government remains committed to the health system, whether it's in a facility, air, land. We are committed to Manitobans.

MLA Asagwara: So, the minister has made clear—the minister has stated very clearly multiple times now that there's a fundamental disagreement over the facts. The minister has also clearly stated that what I have stated about the presence of highly trained professionals—doctors and nurses—during these interfacility transfers has changed. The minister has stated clearly that what I've stated is different than the information they have available to them, that they are looking at.

This seems like a wonderful opportunity for the minister to clarify this disagreement over the facts and to simply provide the information the minister has available to her to clarify this point. I truly do not understand the resistance to providing that information transparently. The minister has stated clearly she has the information. I would ask the minister to simply provide it.

Ms. Gordon: I don't know how I can be more clear to the member for Union Station's (MLA Asagwara) question that it is always the medical director, the medical professional that makes the decision regarding who—which medical specialty goes on the flight. And that has not changed for—it has not changed and has been in place for decades.

Again, if the member has specific data and specific information they would like to bring forward—table, perhaps, and if not table, I would be more than happy to accept that information here in my office and—for review and will respond to the member's specific circumstance or incident or situation. But, again, it's the—it hasn't changed for—and has been that way for decades. It is medical clinicians that make the decision regarding who accompanies a patient, a client on an air ambulance.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): Thank you, Minister.

MLA Asagwara: Well, you know, I have to say that, unfortunately, again, I'm disappointed that the minister won't provide a clear response to that question. She's clearly stated there's a disagreement over the facts, and the minister also clearly stated that what I have articulated is different than the information that she has.

And so I can't wrap my head around why the minister wouldn't be eager to provide that said information in order to clarify this disagreement over the facts. This is very important information that this minister, for whatever the reasons are, will not provide today.

And, you know, this decrease in medically trained—highly trained medical professionals, rather—doctors and nurses being on these flights as frequently they had—as they had been in the past when this was run by government is a significant change. And it's one that warrants a clear explanation from this government and an articulation from this government, in terms of what the implications have been and the impacts have been.

So I will move on from that line of questioning, and I will simply encourage, if the minister has a change of mind or heart and decides that she does want to provide the information she stated she has, maybe via email or at a later time, obviously, I would love to receive that information. And, of course, Manitobans would, I know, be very grateful to have clarity on this particular matter.

I'd like to move on and ask the minister a question around an issue that has been very visible lately, and that is around the college of physicians recently putting the University of Manitoba on notice that its programs were at risk if they didn't address deficiencies in residency.

This is something that was flagged very recently. There continue to be concerns in this area, I'm sure the minister is well aware. Simply put, our hospitals are so overrun, are so beyond capacity, that the quality of education for interns is suffering.

The minister will recall that Dr. Brian Postl, who we both saw receive a service award last night at the Doctors Manitoba gala—and very deservedly so—stated, and I quote: COVID arrived into a system that was not prepared for it and was already stressed remarkably thin and had been living with budgets of austerity for several years. End quote.

That's a significant statement and it's one that clearly outlines that decisions made by this government under an austerity agenda have compromised the ability of residents to successfully complete their residencies, that the program is, in fact, at risk as a result.

* (12:00)

So, my first question is, what is the minister actively doing, currently doing, to address the concerns of the college?

And my follow-up question to that—if the minister could maybe provide an answer to both in her response, I would appreciate it—what is the minister doing to ensure that core internal medicine internships, which we know is essential for these residents, is not put at risk?

Ms. Gordon: I just want to read some facts into the record and not take out excerpts that suit a certain narrative of a very highly recognized program. And it's a March 26th memo from Brian Postl, dean and vice-provost, Rady Faculty of Health, signed, says: To the Max Rady College of Medicine faculty staff and learners—and the top—the subject is PGME accreditation site visit 2022.

This morning, we received a debrief from the PGME accreditation external review team. There were 46 programs that were reviewed—let me make sure I'm sitting in the centre—that were reviewed during their visit over the last week. There were many remarkable strengths noted at our institution, which included our deeply engaged and collaborative leadership at all levels, the depth of our clinical resources and the support for residency training programs.

The preliminary feedback is that we are an accredited institution with follow-up by action plan outcomes report in nine areas as follows. Follow-up report in two years: residents are appropriately supervised, resident education occurs in a safe learning environment, resident education occurs in a positive learning environment.

Follow-up report at next regular review: there is a post-graduate dean with authority and responsibility for all aspects of residency education, the post-graduate dean has appropriate time and support to oversee residency education, there are 'adequate'—adequate resources and support to allow residency programs to meet accreditation standards, resident leadership is encouraged and promoted, there is a process of systematic teacher assessment and feedback, there is an effective process for the professional

development of administrative personnel involved in resident education.

Our institution was noted for having one lead in practice innovation related to the work of the PGME TRAP Committee, Ongomiizwin and the disruption of all forms of racism policy.

The status of the 46 programs that were reviewed this week is as follows. Thirty-one programs received full accreditation: adult interventional cardiology, anatomical pathology, anesthesiology, cardiac surgery, child and adolescent psychiatry, CIP colorectal surgery, critical microbiology, neurosurgery, ophthalmology, orthopedic surgery, otolaryngology, head and neck surgery, pediatric emergency medicine, plastic surgery, physical medicine and rehabilitation, public health and preventative medicine, respirology—adult, rheumatology—adult, surgical foundations, thoracic surgery, urology, vascular surgery.

Seven programs achieved accreditation with follow-up by action plan outcome report: general internal medicine; neonatal perinatal medicine; pediatrics; gynecological oncology; nephrology—adult; psychiatry; medical genetics and genomics.

Five programs achieved accreditation with follow-up by external review: family medicine; cardiology—adult; radiation oncology; enhanced skills; nuclear medicine. Three programs are on notice of intent to withdraw: internal medicine; neurology—adult; obstetrics and gynecology.

I wish to thank everyone that participated or contributed to the PGME accreditation for their efforts. We are generally pleased with the results, although there is clearly more work to do. We will begin meeting shortly with specific programs to discuss next steps.

I would also like to sincerely thank Dr. Cliff Yaffe, Dr. Kurt Skakum, the PGME dean's office and the IAU for their hard work and dedication.

And, Mr. Chairperson, I'm so pleased to read into the record—

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): The minister's time has expired.

MLA Asagwara: Well, that was—I mean, I'm always willing and happy to hear the words of the esteemed Dr. Brian Postl; however, it is yet again disappointing that this minister chose to deflect and avoid clearly, concisely communicating what, if any, steps she is actively taking to ensure that core internal medicine internships are not put at risk.

* (12:10)

We cannot afford to lose a single physician from Manitoba. We need to bolster our public health-care system. We need every doctor doing their residencies, working, practising, aspiring to—here in Manitoba, to stay in Manitoba. And what we're seeing are physicians leaving the province due to the lack of support and resources from this government and the state of disarray, burden on the system as a result of this government's decision making.

This question was an opportunity for the minister to clearly state what steps she is taking within her capacity as the person who is leading Health in our province to ensure that we retain the necessary expertise to improve health-care outcomes for Manitobans. I am incredibly disappointed that the minister instead chose to deflect and provide no response that would show she is being accountable to the physicians here in our province.

With those final remarks for the day, I would like to cede the rest of my time to the member for River Heights.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): Minister, I—you would have an opportunity to respond if you like, or I can hand the mic over to the minister for River Heights. Just let me know—the member for River Heights.

Yes, go ahead. The honourable minister.

Ms. Gordon: Sadly, the—and maybe due to the member being new to the NDP caucus and unaware of times under the NDP government's governance of this province that programs were—within our health system were also placed on notice, and there was absolutely no expectation on the part of the university that they would lose their standing to train doctors.

I have asked my department to obtain that information, which will be tabled at a later date, because we don't have that handy right now, but it did happen during the NDP government's governance, and we will make that information available.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): I thank the minister.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, thank you for the opportunity.

I'd like to start with several questions dealing with the backlog in eye surgeries.

In the information provided earlier today from the minister, there were contracts to vision health and to Western Surgery.

Was there money also provided to the Misericordia eye centre? And how—what's the minister's view, moving forward, of what the balance will be in terms of surgeries done at the three locations?

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for River Heights for the question.

The request for supply arrangement is the process by which the service delivery organizations and hospitals can make requests above their baseline funding for these types of surgeries.

To date, Misericordia has not submitted a proposal, and I'm seeing that today—as of today, they have performed—they are at 107.3 per cent of their pre-COVID capacity. Prior to that, what I do see is that the regions are globally funded to provide dollars to their various surgical slates. And, obviously, due to COVID, they were not able to reach their baseline. But, again, I see, as of today, they're at 107.3 per cent.

So, I don't—I can understand why we haven't seen an RFSA come forward from the Misericordia because, during the pandemic, they were below their baseline funding for their eye surgeries. So, the answer is, we do fund them and we can provide beyond—and the regions can, as well, go beyond the baseline funding, but the Misericordia was not at their baseline.

But today, again, very pleased to see they are above 100 per cent, and I'm sure that will continue to be the case going forward.

Thank you.

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

Now, it's my understanding that there are approximately 9,000 people waiting for eye surgery and that's, I think, primarily, perhaps almost exclusively, cataracts.

I wonder what the minister's goal is over time: probably not to reduce that to zero but to reduce it to a low number. What would that number be? Or, to reduce the waiting times, and if it's a goal to reduce the waiting times down to a certain level, what would that be?

* (12:20)

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) for his supplementary question related to eye surgeries.

The Wait Times Reduction Task Force report in 2017 did call for—had a recommendation that called for an infusion of dollars for priority procedures, which included eye surgeries. And that is why our government has added \$10 million to the budget for the department to provide for these priority procedures.

And, immediately, in 2018, which is just the year following the Wait Times Reduction Task Force's report, our government added 2,000 additional cataract procedures to help reduce the wait times. Again, we thank all the service providers, including Misericordia hospital, western vision centre and others that are assisting with reducing the wait times for eye surgeries.

The current task force and the experts that are part of that task force will provide advice on the appropriate volumes and levels going forward to reduce the—and, really, our goal is always to eliminate, because for one individual who's waiting, their ability to carry out a fully rewarding life is impacted. So it is always our goal to eliminate, but certainly our focus is on reducing very quickly the wait-lists for individuals that are waiting for eye surgeries that could include cataract surgeries, and we look to all our service delivery organizations.

If, at this time, the Misericordia Health Centre or hospital feels that they want to put forward a request for a supply arrangement proposal—we're issuing that request, it will be going out and we accept proposals. And eye surgeries are certainly part of the volumes that we want to see increased and the waits decreased.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister for that comment and for that answer.

There's a bit of an interesting situation happening, in terms of how the wait times are calculating, as I understand it, for eye surgery. Many of the cataract procedures, there would be two surgical procedures, one for each eye because both eyes would need to have their cataracts addressed.

And so a person, for example, might come in and see an ophthalmologist, have the recognition that there's two surgeries. That person then waits, let's say, 32 weeks for the surgery on the first eye, and then the

person waits an additional, say, four weeks, for the second eye.

So, the first eye, there's been a wait of 32 weeks; the second eye there's been a wait of 36 weeks. But, in fact, what is being calculated is the second eye wait time is only after the first eye is done, so it's calculated as four weeks.

So you end up with an average of those two wait times being reported as 32 plus four, 36. Average is 18 weeks instead of the average being an average of 32 and 36 weeks, which would be 34 weeks.

So it seems to people who are actually receiving surgery that the wait time being shown is actually shorter than what they're experiencing.

I wonder if the minister would comment or be prepared to have a look at that and see if there could be some changes.

Thank you.

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for River Heights for bringing that forward.

This is something that the ministry and the department and the task force is working collaboratively to review. We're looking for a standard approach that is similar to what CIHI uses, which is a national approach to how we calculate the wait times for not just cataracts included, but other procedures as well. And right now, we're very heavily focused, as well, on diagnostics. I think Dr. Matear shared some information at the press conference yesterday about that.

But, yes, we are committed to taking a look at this and developing a standard approach. It will align with the national approach being taken by the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Gerrard: A fairly quick question because we don't have much time left.

Is the responsibility for preventing diabetes with the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) or is it with the minister of mental health and wellness?

Ms. Gordon: The response to the member's question is that primary prevention rests with the ministry of community—Mental Health and Community Wellness, and secondary prevention, because that often involves practitioners in the clinical and health system, lies here in the ministry of Health.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): In the 15 seconds that remain, would the honourable

member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) like to ask something else?

Mr. Gerrard: Just perhaps, for next time, the minister could give me an answer about what that secondary prevention effort under her department looks like.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): Order.

The time for our meeting this morning has come to an end. I thank the members for their co-operation and good behaviour.

And, the time being 12:30, committee rise.

ROOM 255

MUNICIPAL RELATIONS

* (10:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): 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 Municipal Relations.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Municipal Relations): I do. Good morning to my—

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, just—*[interjection]* The honourable Minister of Municipal Relations.

Ms. Clarke: I want to say good morning to my colleagues as well as opposition colleagues. Happy to say that it's not raining this morning, even though I listened to the storm all night long. Hopefully, we have better days ahead.

I want to start by indicating that we are all on Treaty 1 territory this morning, home of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene people, as well as the Homeland of the Red River Métis. And I'm pleased to do that.

I'm also pleased to be able to make a few comments with you this morning on '22-23 Estimates and discuss some of the important activities of our Department of Municipal Relations.

But I would also like to acknowledge, before we start the hard work of the department staff and the professional work that they do within the Manitoba municipalities, the City of Winnipeg, as well as with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, the Association of Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities, planning districts, mutual aid districts, non-profit and community development organizations as well as our many other clients. I know that this good work is also

being recognized by the communities and the municipalities that we do serve.

Despite challenging fiscal times, this government continues to make significant investments that support the operational and infrastructure needs of local governments. These investments are instrumental to economic development and the well-being of Manitobans and their communities.

Our department maintains the Strategic Municipal Investment Fund of \$313 million for municipalities to sustain key services, core programs as well as priority capital projects; \$172 million of this funding will be provided to the City of Winnipeg and other municipalities unconditionally as municipal operating grants, allowing the municipalities to prioritize support that best fit with the needs of their community. This will include \$1.7 million for the Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program.

In addition to the municipal operating basket, Budget 2022 will continue to provide operating support for key strategic public safety priorities, including continuing support for the Gun and Gang Violence Action Fund and Gang Response and Suppression Plan, drug-impaired driving, school resource officers and maintaining annual public safety funding for policing services that is provided by the Department of Justice.

Resources will also be provided in other departments for solid waste reduction and recycling, composting programs, West Nile virus larviciding, as well as public library services. This dedicated operating funding from other departments will total over \$65 million in '22-23.

An additional \$137 million will be earmarked to support key strategic capital projects, which includes water and wastewater treatment plants, solid waste facilities, public transit, roads and bridges and recreation projects. Specifically, this includes a 28 per cent increase of \$4.2 million to \$20 million to the annual budget to support municipal water and sewer products administered by the Manitoba Water Services Board.

Overall, the capital basket will also serve as a source of funding for green infrastructure projects supported under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, including the City of Winnipeg's North End water pollution control centre and their transition to zero-emission buses.

We will continue to monitor the impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on municipalities

across the province. Since the onset of the pandemic, almost \$283 million in incremental funding has already been provided to communities in Manitoba. This represents an increase of 45 per cent from base provincial grant funding over the two years, and I want to commend the shared effort of all municipalities in mitigating these impacts and share my positive outlook on the reopening of our economy for continued growth and vibrancy in our communities.

In recognition of the impact of recent severe weather on Manitoba's roads and highways infrastructure, our government is investing \$15 million in a one-time grant program that will provide municipalities with financial support for road construction, rehabilitation and preservation projects. Of this \$15 million, the City of Winnipeg will receive nearly \$9 million, with the balance being distributed to other municipalities on a per capita basis.

In addition to our government's Budget 2022 investments in highways and municipalities, we are pleased to offer this extra support to reduce the financial burden on the City of Winnipeg, as well as all municipalities.

Our government has continued to enhance its support to community-based organizations all across the province. This year's budget more than doubles the provincial budget for Building Sustainable Communities program to \$25 million from \$10.3 million.

The BSC communities program helps build thriving, sustainable communities that provide a high quality of life for Manitobans. This funding leverages investments in community development by local governments, non-profit organizations, as well as other partners.

Our government is also increasing funding from \$4 million to \$9 million for the Province's Green Team program that will give more than 20,220 young Manitobans work in the summer months. An additional \$1 million is provided in Environment, Climate and Parks for Green Team staff and provincial parks, resulting in a total of \$10 million in youth jobs for this year.

The Green Team funding is provided to improve neighbourhoods, promote community involvement and help develop young leaders ages 15 to 29. These projects also stimulate local economic activity and improve job creation in urban as well as rural communities, particularly through the recovery from the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our government is committed to helping young Manitobans develop and succeed while at the same time ensuring the strength of Manitoba's economy in the workforce as we move forward.

Our government's committed to reducing red tape and promoting development. To support this operating grant, funding to the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region increased to \$540,000 towards implementation of the capital planning region.

We've also provided \$500,000 for the capital planning region servicing study, which aims to develop a co-ordinated approach to provincial investment in new infrastructure and strategic infrastructure improvements that will grow economic development throughout the capital planning region. Our investments in the capital planning region will help reduce barriers to development, thereby promoting economic recovery and growth and ensuring Manitoba remains attractive and competitive for businesses.

Our government recognizes the importance of training the next generation of Manitoba's emergency responders. We are 'maintaining' capital investment allocation of \$1.7 million in '22-23 to support a purchase of new equipment and capital improvements for the Office of the Fire Commissioner, including upgrades at the Manitoba Emergency Services College and practical training site in Brandon. These investments will ensure that all Manitoban communities will have access to emergency response training opportunities and the expertise that our staff can provide.

Our government promised a new era of collaboration and partnerships, and we have delivered and will continue to 'limmer' on this promise. The Manitoba government established individual working group tables on the collaboration with the City of Winnipeg, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, the Association of Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities as well as the Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association.

* (10:10)

Through these partnerships, our government will see direct input on ongoing municipal operating and infrastructure funding needs. We will engage in enhanced discussions with the City of Winnipeg to improve practices in areas of mutual interest.

And, finally, after the proclamation of the first-ever Municipal Government Awareness Week of recognition of municipalities' exceptional dedication to service Manitobans, we will annually celebrate the

work of municipal governments, recognizing them as an integral part of democracy and effective service delivery at the grassroots. Our government recognizes that working together is the key to building a stronger Manitoba, and we are committed to moving forward together with our partners from all across the province.

We're working hard to support Manitobans and Manitoban municipalities during these very unique times. We are committed to providing the funding and resources that will allow Manitoba communities to thrive economically, culturally and socially. Through collaboration and partnerships with advocacy and community groups all across the province, we will move confidently and purposely into the future.

Mr. Chair, would you like me to introduce our staff at this time as well?

Mr. Chairperson: Not at this time.

Ms. Clarke: Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: There will be time later. *[interjection]* No, sorry, can't hear you.

Ms. Clarke: I just need to remove a phone that I did not expect was here that's going to cause me disturbance, so I'll just be 30 seconds.

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

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

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Well, I do when the minister is—I'm not going to make a statement without the minister.

Yes. Ah, there she is. Is she good?

Mr. Chairperson: Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

Mr. Wiebe: I do, thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member from Concordia.

Mr. Wiebe: Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I do hope that the minister can hear us here today. I see her head nodding, so that's great.

I'll try not to take too much time. I realize that we don't have much time this morning, so I do want to get to questions as quickly as possible. But I did want to start by thanking the minister for coming to committee

here today and for hopefully answering some questions. And, again, if we can move through things quickly.

I do want to just, you know, recognize that, you know, the minister, I think, is—has taken a different tone with regards to her—the way that she handles this particular department. Obviously, that's noted by municipalities and the relationship that she has with them, going back to her previous life, I could call it. But I think that's extended to the work that she's doing here in the Legislature as well. So, hopefully, we can have a good conversation in that spirit.

That being said, I'll just put on the record, I am, you know, somewhat frustrated by the fact that, right now, I'm staring at a camera instead of looking in the face of the minister sitting across the table from me. And while I recognize we—you know, technology allows us to operate from different places now, I think there is something different that occurs in committee when we can sit across from one another and have a conversation.

So, I just wanted to start by saying that, you know, obviously, the building block of the relationship between the provincial government and the municipalities in this province begins with the municipal basket funding that municipalities rely on to deliver services to their ratepayers. And, you know, this is now the seventh budget in a row that we are discussing a funding freeze. And the impacts are starting to be felt—they've been felt over the last number of years and they're continuing to be felt, I should say.

I know that that's a message that the minister has heard, loud and clear, from the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. I know that she has done the work to go out and speak to municipalities, so she's hearing that individually from them as well. And I may have mentioned it a time or two in question period as well, and probably will, going forward. But I just think that it's so foundational to, again, to that relationship that we expect to have with our municipalities. If we want to see them as true partners—as a level of government that we respect—it begins with respecting the work that they do in delivering those services.

And what we're hearing over and over again from municipalities is they're trying to do, you know, 2020 projects and deliver 2022 services in 2016 dollars, and that's just not sustainable. It hasn't been sustainable for a while, and it continues to not be sustainable. So, the frustration is there.

Again, I know that the minister's heard this, you know, to the extent that, you know—and usually a cordial relationship that's held between the minister and the association, you know, maybe boiled over a little bit the last—in the last public meetings, because I think the frustration is getting to the breaking point.

Layered on top of that is, you know, right now a crisis situation in—with flooding across this province. And municipalities are on the front lines. They are the ones who are dealing with this. And I anticipate there's going to be a lot to talk about coming out of the flooding season. Certainly, there is some items that we might be able to talk to—talk about today in terms of long-term mitigation projects.

But I, you know, I think this just highlights crumbling infrastructure, you know, a lack of services or a declining level of service that municipalities are able to deliver. And then an emergency situation on top of it, such as the flood, really highlights where that core basket funding really makes a difference.

In addition, I do want to spend some time today talking about the 50-50 transit funding agreement, which, of course, this government saw fit to eliminate fairly early in their term. But, you know, the minister has talked about—and did so in her opening statements—the electrification and zero-emission goals of not just the City of Winnipeg, but other municipalities, and so I do hope to get some information about how we can—how she sees that they can meet those targets.

And, you know, again, if we're talking about overall level of—levels of respect, you know, the minister's words are one thing, but she inherited a set of—suite of legislation known as bill 37 in the last Legislature. And, you know, it continues to be a bone of contention with municipalities, because they see the erosion of their autonomy and their ability to be accountable to their citizens in the way that they should be.

So, there's a lot to talk about here. At the end of the day, as I said, I believe that the minister's coming to this in a very honest and forthright kind of way. What I question—I continue to question—I think all of us have questioned on this side of the House—is, you know, how different will this government really be when, you know, it seems like the policies of Brian Pallister continue to be the policies of this new government. And while the words may sound different, the actions to this point have been the same.

And I've had a chance to read through our very paltry Estimates book—which, you know, I think my colleagues have spent lots of time talking about the frustrations of not having all the information in front of us—but I see nothing different in terms of, you know, an increased level of respect.

So, maybe I'll just end it there and hope to get to some questions. Thank you.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate of the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department and the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 13.1.(a), containing—contained in resolution 13.1.

At this time, we will ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance.

Ms. Clarke: Very happy to introduce a staff that I am very comfortable with and very honoured to work with.

We have on the call today with us Deputy Minister Bruce Gray. We have Mike Sosiak, who's the assistant deputy minister; he's also the executive financial officer, administration and finance. We have Nick Kulyk, and Nick is the director of outcomes and strategic policy. We have Ryan Schenk, who is the fire commissioner for Manitoba. Lesley McFarlane, who's the assistant deputy minister of Municipal Assessment and Advisory Services division, as well as Stephen Walker, who is the director of planning.

So, we have a full complement of staff with us today.

* (10:20)

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

According to our rule 77(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put separately on all resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wiebe: I'm glad you mentioned the global nature of the discussion, because I'll be honest, with the short amount of time we have here, I may be jumping around a bit more than usual, but I appreciate if the minister hopefully can accommodate that.

Very quickly to start off, on page 20 of the Estimates book, the final paragraph, 7(a), refers to the Municipal Relations mandate letter dated March 2020. I'm wondering if the minister has an updated mandate letter, or if she is still operating and carrying out the directives under her predecessor's mandate letter from 2020?

Ms. Clarke: I'll just acknowledge by my hand when I'm ready to speak. And I want to thank my respected critic for his opening comments—very well taken.

I do apologize for being virtual. However when the—with the distance I have from the city of Winnipeg, I also have a lot of constituency work that needs to be done, and, this weekend in particular, I have some really serious issues to deal with in regards to constituents that are struggling with a tough issue. So I was able to deal with that very early this morning prior to this meeting.

But I do thank you for your comments. I feel we've got a respected working relationship in a 'vory' short period of time. And I also want to acknowledge your attendance, again, at Association of Manitoba Municipalities spring convention. I think it was well-attended. And you're right, a lot of municipalities are frustrated, as, you know, a lot of people are struggling coming out of COVID and even more so now when I see the devastation of the water on my drive home late last night. So, we are a province in crisis, for sure, but I look forward to discussing all the issues that you asked about.

I actually am one of the ministers that really enjoys this process of Estimates, and it gives us an opportunity to discuss things that we don't 'nimally' get in question period. So I also want to acknowledge that my door is open to you at any time. If you want to discuss any issue in particular in person, I would be more than please to do that.

I will respond to your inquiry about mandate letters. Premier Stefanson has not issued new mandate letters and—but when she asked that I return to Cabinet and offered me to go back to Municipal Relations, of course, I was very honoured to do so. I have a passion for municipalities. I understand both sides of this particular department, and I look forward to working with them.

I think we've gotten off on a good start. We will not be getting new mandate letters from this particular Premier (Mrs. Stefanson). She's indicated that we will be working together as a team, and that is something that I really appreciate. So she has placed her trust in

me to move this department forward, and I look forward to that.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the minister for the comments.

I'd just let the—just—at this time, I'd just like to remember—remind members of the committee to direct comments and questions through the Chair.

Mr. Wiebe: Try my best to direct my comments through you while staring at a camera while having the minister off to the side on a screen. It's a brave new world, I guess, but here we are.

So, I appreciate the minister's comments, and, you know, I think she recognized me, you know, maybe I counted four or five times in her speech at AMM. So, you know, she's done the work to recognize the work that we're doing as an opposition and, you know, time we're spending with municipalities as well, so I do appreciate that.

So, further I guess, to that—the question that I asked—or maybe just a further comment and then I'll ask a different question. You know, I think—and there's a lot to criticize about the style and workings of Brian Pallister. Again, I think we've done that a few times here in the Chamber. That being said, having those mandate letters, I think, you know, had set a certain tone.

So, I just want to be clear—I guess, well, I guess I will ask a question—I want to be clear that the minister—the Estimates book refers directly to a directive from the mandate letter.

So is she operating and, again, trying to meet the goals of that mandate letter? Or is she saying there is no mandate that the Premier has given her publicly to move forward in her department?

Ms. Clarke: In regards to the mandate letter, as I've indicated, the Premier has not issued new mandate letters, Mr. Chair.

Having said that, I was briefed when I became the minister back in January in regards to the main issues that the department was working on and will be continuing to work on, which are related to the collaboration tables that I mentioned in my opening comments. I think that has been a very strong move forward, and in this department in particular, especially when we're working on a—very serious changes within our province and the Winnipeg metro region.

And you referenced bill 37 in your opening remarks as well. I think that is one of the most important changes that I have seen going forward when I think about bill 37, and you have indicated that you have heard that there are concerns. I did make it very public at the AMM convention that I was also called with concerns, regarding the very significant changes that are coming forward, from individual municipalities.

And I also indicated at that time that I took a four-week period to do my own review—not with staff, but I did it personally, myself, and reached out to many different stakeholders to ensure that I knew very clearly what the concerns were—who was concerned, who was not, who was supportive. And I felt that I had a really good understanding when I made the decision to move forward with bills 33 and 34, which are directly connected to bill 37 in the planning and permitting.

* (10:30)

So, the planning and 'permanding' were recommendations in the previous mandate letter, as well as the Capital Region growth plan, stable 'bastek' funding. From that perspective, I do believe the department has really gone a long ways in reaching the goals that were set out in the original mandate letter of 2020.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

And I would just—again, I'd like to remind—mind you, maybe I didn't explain it fair enough last time—but when you're making a reference, not to be using the word, you, towards another member, just referencing the member.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, I appreciate your guidance, Mr. Chair. But just so the minister knows, I didn't notice, and I don't know if it's—anyway, it's nice to just have a conversation rather than be quite as formal.

Anyway, through you, Mr. Chair.

So, I just—you know, I think what I'm hearing from the minister is—I mean, it's in her Estimates book, there are elements of the—if not wholesale, the pieces of the mandate letter, which she continues to execute, which I think is telling in terms of, again, the overall actions of this government.

Couple of routine questions that I'm hoping we could maybe just take as notice—or, if the minister has the information in front of her, and I'll do a twofer here, so hopefully that counts.

And can the minister undertake to give a list of all technical appointments in her department, including names and titles, and undertake to give an organizational chart that lists all employees and program areas beyond the very high-level chart that's in the Estimates book?

Ms. Clarke: Very little changes in our department going forward with my appointment in January. There was also a new special assistant that was hired into that department, and—Daniel Stokes—as well as a new executive assistant who came soon after that, as well, and that's Nicole Turner.

In regards to a more detailed organizational chart, our department would—does not have that available today, but we would be very pleased to take that under advisement and to present that to you.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

And in the same vein, can the minister provide me with the number of vacancies and the vacancy rate within the department and, more specifically, the current vacancy rate for land-use planning in her department?

Again, if she has that second vacancy rate handy, I think that's helpful for the rest of the conversation. But if that is something that needs to be taken on notice, that would be appreciated as well.

Ms. Clarke: At this current time—and this is as of February '22, so it's very current—we have a vacancy of 74 out of 362. A good deal of this vacancy is created by attrition and retirements that have currently taken place. That equates to about 20 per cent. We are actively recruiting, and we have very—since that time, we have ordered new—ordered—hired new municipal services officers, which I was able to meet at the AMM convention. And that recruitment continues. So, that seems to be going well.

In regards to the planning, I don't have a specific number taken out of that number, but I once again would be more than happy to get that to the member and take it under advisement for today.

Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I appreciate that. I think that is an important number to return to the committee as soon as the minister has that available.

I think overall, you know, a 20 per cent vacancy rate across a department is staggering. And I can appreciate the minister is saying that she's—you know, they're trying to hire up, but, you know, the work

needs to be done now. And as we talked about, the impact of COVID, issues around flooding and infrastructure struggles, not to mention, you know, the uncertainty that comes around with bill 37, I think really speaks to the fact that not having enough staff to do the work is a major issue. I think that's certainly a concern going forward.

So, again, you know, just to build on the discussion around bill 37, you know, I did, as the minister mentioned, spend some time at the AMM and—including hearing the presentation from the planning board about their work that they're doing. I do think that there's a hope among municipalities that, certainly, the—or, I guess, maybe more so among the CAOs of municipalities—but that there is a hope that, you know, the—some of the burden, the bureaucratic burden, that bill 37 imposed on municipalities will be alleviated and—by subsequent legislation, as well as the fact that, you know, any kind of delays that were anticipated will be dealt with, hopefully, in an expeditious manner.

* (10:40)

But, you know, certainly there is a major concern around the ability of municipalities to have autonomy and a say, so maybe can the minister just, at a high level, give us, you know, sort of a—the Coles Notes on some of the discussions that she's had around those concerns, how she plans to address those and maybe more specifically within the Manitoba—or the Winnipeg Metro Region, how she is sort of trying to deal with some of those concerns around autonomy for surrounding communities that have been sucked into this Manitoba—or the Winnipeg Metro Region planning district.

Ms. Clarke: I'm pleased to be able to discuss with you—as you've indicated, you've had concerns, which I have openly admitted that I have listened to a lot of those concerns as well.

I have—since I've taken the oath to be this minister for municipalities, my conversations continue. Sometimes it's municipal officials calling me, or sometimes I just take the opportunity to call them, and I have to share with you that my special assistant, Daniel Stokes, has been making several phone calls the past couple of weeks, just reaching out to mayors and reeves for an open discussion to gather more information on my behalf that will serve me well in going forward.

And I was very clear at the municipal convention during a fireside chat with Reeve Blight, that I plan on

working in a very open and transparent way going forward. There is going to need to continue to be a lot of communication, and our collaboration table is actually working on a communication strategy, so that it's very difficult—and I certainly understand that, when you have this number of municipalities working together on one strategy, that not everyone is going to be at the same place at the same time.

And so, I take it as my responsibility to ensure that those who need who additional communication, those who need additional understanding and want to have a voice and input in this bill going forward, whether it's bill 37, 33 or 34, that our department is listening and that we will ensure that correct information gets out there, not hearsay and not gossip or communication that isn't factual. We will make every effort to ensure that very distinct, factual information is shared.

I was at an event just yesterday with the Winnipeg [*phonetic*] metro region, and I have to say that there was a lot of excitement in that room on some of the initiatives that they are working on going forward as a united group of officials across this province. But specifically in the metro region, they have a lot of enthusiasm. And we'll make sure that those that aren't quite there yet, that they get the information that they need on a timely basis.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, you know, and, you know, I think I heard the comment from my colleague here from Transcona that, you know, excitement isn't necessarily enough. I think the devil's in the details, which is why we're trying to get—you know, ensure that the current framework as it exists, you know, is respecting those—that local autonomy, understanding the different needs of municipalities.

So, just to be a little bit more specific in my questions here, one major concern that the bill generated was that it granted developers the ability to appeal municipalities' land-use decisions to the provincially appointed Municipal Board—so, sort of take a decision that was made at council and supersede it by going straight to the Municipal Board.

So, specifically, I wanted to know, can the minister tell us how many land-use decisions have been appealed to this point? And can the minister say how many of these appeals were upheld?

Ms. Clarke: In response to the question for our department, we are only aware of one appeal at this time, and it has not yet been concluded.

I do want to say that appeals—we see appeals as being a last resort. There is now going to be the opportunity to have an arbitrator and to mediate prior to going to appeal. And we are quite certain that with—done with the proper mediation, that we can avoid a lot of appeals.

We've been working with municipalities recently to make sure that all their bylaws are very clear, and this already has—I've probably served in appeals not going forward sometimes, as we've come to find, it is a lack of communication and bylaws not being completely clear.

So, you know, this is meant to be timely in order to move projects forward. We don't want to be taking up additional time and we need consistent decisions. And further to that, we are working very hard to shore up the Municipal Board, to make sure that they are very knowledgeable on the issues that they are dealing with and have a good experience in understanding what exactly they're dealing with.

We have not had problems with that in the past, but we are making extra efforts to make sure that, if it does go to an appeal, that they will get a very fair hearing and it will be 'expedited' as quickly as possible.

Thank you.

* (10:50)

Mr. Wiebe: Well, this is, I mean, a very serious issue. And, you know, I hear the minister say there's only one current land-use decision that's being appealed—currently being appealed that—before the Municipal Board. And I may know which one that is, but I may not. So, if the 'minisker'—minister can feel free to correct me if I'm wrong on the specifics on this particular case.

But the concern that I heard related to a proposed development for East St. Paul—heard directly from councillors out in that community—certainly gave me quite a bit of concern. The proposal has to do with the proposed housing development on the former Meadows golf course. The proposal, as I understand it, is a very significant proposal in terms of the number of homes that will be in that particular piece of land.

For those of us that know the area, it's—you know, it doesn't have great access. You know, McGregor Farm Road was the former access and now you have to go all the way up to Birds Hill Road, come back down. You know, there's a whole bunch of issues that have been identified by the community.

And, you know, the frustration that I've heard is, is that, you know, councils feel quite clear about this, that it didn't fit with, you know, the—anything with regards to the land use, or the land development policy, or, you know, the plan that the municipality had. And yet, unfortunately, because of bill 37, it was possible now for the developer not to go to arbitration, as the minister would like to see all of them go to, but simply just go to the Municipal Board and challenge it there. And the frustration then becomes for not just the council but the residents that they also represent, that their voices are being discounted, or not being listened to.

And, you know—and again, a, you know, municipality like East St. Paul; I don't think anybody could argue that they're not developer-friendly. They've done great work to ensure that they are working with all kinds of different housing developments and commercial developments and the rest. I mean, there's lots going on and there's lots of room there yet to build out in East St. Paul.

They have a very specific way of looking at that. Again, a proposal like this comes forward, doesn't fit with what they're looking for, would ultimately cost the municipality a lot of money, and the ratepayers, ultimately, to pay for this development, and they feel like their voices are being drowned out.

So, again, I might be barking up the wrong tree. That might be a case that's already been settled. So, I guess the question is, is, you know, if it has been settled, can the minister identify that and maybe comment about how that process went? Or, if that's the one that she's referencing, how can she justify that the ratepayers in a community like East St. Paul don't have a say about the future development in their own community?

Ms. Clarke: Today, at this time, I am personally not aware, nor is my staff, if the current appeal is the municipality that the member is suggesting.

But I do want to express that, you know, it is a quasi-judicial Municipal Board. They're there to speak in fairness and to understand and listen to both sides—the applicant as well as the municipal representation. This is their opportunity to be heard in a very transparent way.

If the municipality at this hearing would have to give a very clear decision for their—or a very clear understanding on their decision, but, ultimately, the board of—you know, for the appeal, and the board is also responsible to give reasoning for their decision.

In the past, municipalities have not—they can make a decision to not move forward with an applicant, and they have not had to have any reason, particular, they can just move—they can make that decision and it can be. So this provides a fair playing field for both the applicant as well as the municipality.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I—you know, I mean, I would take issue with that characterization that it's somehow a level playing field when you balance the democratically elected will of an entire population of an RM versus one developer. And then they are all now of a sudden on a level playing field, you know. And, you know, to—being decided by this, you know, quasi-judicial board that's—you know, has binding decision-making powers granted by the minister that it—all of a sudden, everybody has to adhere to.

Now, I think that the reason I mention this particular case—and again, I don't know if that's the one that the minister is referencing here—and I hope, you know, I hope her officials could find that out—I believe the Municipal Board is within her purview, so I think that's something that she should be able to share on the record. But, you know, again, the concern here is that, you know, this board that, you know, makes these decisions is now being tested in a way that I think will have wide-ranging precedent-setting implications going forward.

This is the exact example that AMM and all those municipalities that fall within the Winnipeg Metro Region, planning district and then beyond that, you know, across the province and other places where this might come—become an issue because of the powers of bill 37—have all identified this as the exact example that they were fearing, that, you know, there's—you know, they do all this work to plan and execute a well-thought-out development plan and then—you know, I—again, with the, you know, the—you know, coming from their democratic right and their democratic mandate that's given to them by the citizens that they represent. And then it's thrown out the window, potentially.

* (11:00)

So, I mean, I think if there is only one case before the Municipal Board, this would be—appeal, I should say—this would be the one that I would hope that the minister is paying very close attention to, and, you know, ultimately, she makes the decision on who sits on that board so, you know, the buck stops at her desk as far as I'm concerned. And so there's a big concern

about how this one is handled, and I do hope that, ultimately, the citizens have—the residents have their say.

But, that, you know, despite whatever happens with this particular case, I think we'll see more of these coming forward, so I'm sure the minister will hear more about these from—not from just from us, but from municipalities themselves directly.

I do have some questions—maybe I'll just end off with the—end off this portion on bill 37—I do have some questions with regards to Winnipeg Transit, the 50-50 funding agreement and electrification of buses, but maybe I'll just allow the minister to respond to those concerns about bill 37 and its impacts.

Ms. Clarke: I understand, you know, the concerns that the member is putting forward, and this is exactly why I have made it very clear to the collaboration table that is working on these particular bills in regards to planning in the Winnipeg Metro Region.

But I've also made it very clear to our own staff that I will be following this process. It is new, and as I've already indicated, there are partners and stakeholders, some that are a bit—that are very, very aggressive with this when it comes to the industry, and some in regards to municipalities.

And I will also share with the member that not all municipal councils are in agreement within themselves eternally in regards to this process and this bill. And, consequently, we get very mixed communication sometimes.

I also am very aware that we're facing a municipal election this October, which, ultimately, could very much strain—change the structure of who's been working with this for the past three years. It'd be, you know, the members from each council that have been working collaboratively to move this forward, and, consequently, we could be having a large number, perhaps a small number, of changes in the partners working on this collaboration group when the Winnipeg Metro Region—so there's a lot that I am being very attentive to and that I have made it very clear to our department as well as the collaboration table for the Winnipeg Metro Region that I will be watching and I will be listening.

But I think I would also like to share with the member, having been a mayor myself, and even prior to my time as being a mayor, I have been a business person in my community for 50 years, and there has been developments stopped because of the council

that has really done harm to our community and held us back in the past.

I've also seen this in Winnipeg. I've talked to developers who were very interested, as have—other departments within our government, where there are investors that are very interested in investing in Winnipeg or the metro region or other places in Manitoba, where they've basically been so frustrated by the process and the wait times that they have left, they've gone to other provinces and we have lost out.

And economically, that's a big loss. It's a loss of income for our Province, it's a loss of jobs. There's a lot to be considered here, and yes, it's going to take time, but we need to move forward. We want to promote our province as a great place to invest in, and we will do so, but in order to do that we need to have one set of planning rules, cut the red tape and make sure that we are a welcoming province and that we can move forward in a really positive way.

So, I thank you for your questions on that issue, and I'm more than happy to collaborate with you—or with the member opposite going forward as we transition.

Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I mean, I do think that that deserves further comment just because I'm quite shocked, to be honest with you, that the minister would so blatantly put on the record that she believes that the goals of the Winnipeg Metro Region should supersede the will of democratically elected councils.

You know, hopefully, I'm not overreaching in that characterization, but I heard her say that, you know, money's left on the table. Well, sure, sometimes money is left on the table because the residents of a particular municipality deem it to be contrary to their—to the well-being of their citizens. That's how government works. We want government—we want people to have a say. We don't want it to just be, well, this is, you know, what's best for our developer, you now, what's best for the bottom line.

And just to put very clearly on the record, from what I understand, the development, the proposed development that we're talking about here would propose—so just to set in context or, you know, from what I understand, the municipality of East St. Paul has around 3,000 homes and residences. And the proposal, when it first came forward, was to put 1,500 new homes in what is now zoned as, I think, commercial or light industrial in an area that's not serviced by water, not serviced by sewer, is built on

top of a major drainage system for the municipality, that has no access by—for services in any other way, has no roads built to it, is completely outside of the development.

And, again, we're not talking about a municipality that's like a stick in the mud that's saying, we're not going to do anything here. There's huge developments that are being built up through the, you know, the Esso lands are being developed as we speak—huge, huge opportunity to build within the RM of East St. Paul. But this is completely outside of their plan.

And when the developer was told, well 1,500 homes, and we're talking, like, you know, what, 30-foot lots or something like eight-storey condos, like, doesn't fit with the development plan whatsoever. Maybe does down the road in Transcona—in parts of Transcona, not to bring in my friend from Transcona once again—but certainly doesn't fit with—if anybody lives out there, I mean, understands this just inherently besides the kind of the technical pieces that have been shared with me.

But, again, so what was the outcome of that rejection at the city council—at the municipal level? That's fine, we'll go to the Municipal Board. Oh, and by the way, the development, now, it's actually 2,000 homes. And we're going to put even more homes in there. I mean, it just—so this is, again, it's precedent setting, and what it shows to all municipalities and, you know, for the benefit of Manitobans, to understand what the metro region is—18, I think it's 18 municipalities. I mean, this is a massive piece of land.

Selkirk, for goodness sake, is included in the metro region. Selkirk, who came to bill 37 hearings to say, you know, I'm not sure the minister understands—the premier didn't understand, apparently—we're our own city. We draw people in. We have our own metro region. Like, Selkirk is not part of Winnipeg, you know? Government services, hospitals, you know, industry, like—anyway, I'm getting off track. But I think all—what my point is, all municipalities are recognizing that this is the potential risk that comes with this kind of legislation. And so this is precedent setting.

And, again, the minister appointed every person on the Municipal Board. The minister has the ability to set the tone, here. And for her to say, there's money left on the table; we got a development first, who cares what the ratepayers are saying? Again, I don't want to put words in her mouth, but I just—like, that's the tone I feel.

And to say, well, there's municipal elections and we're probably going to have more—you know, again, I don't want to guess what the minister was trying to say there, but are we going to have more, you know, developer-friendly councils that are coming forward in the next election or does she anticipate that the opposite is going to be true? Because that would be my guess, is there's a lot of people who are going to say, wait a minute, why don't I have a say in this, and who are the councillors that stood up with me during bill 37, during this process that the minister is overseeing now?

* (11:10)

So, anyway, the minister can correct me if I'm wrong on any of those points.

Ms. Clarke: I certainly do want to correct the member opposite. He is very much misinterpreting my comments.

When I have given him examples of projects in the past that perhaps were overlooked by a council, I'm referring to councils with councillors that have their own agenda, councillors that have invested interests that go against what the project might be. This is not your everyday projects that are proposed, you know, in any particular municipality, and I don't want in any way to indicate what I spoke was referencing the one municipality that he keeps referring to. I was speaking a very generalized manner.

I am very aware of this, having worked with AMM for seven and a half years. I'm very aware of it back in those days. I'm also aware of it in my own community in the past, and I am aware with—during the time that I have been in provincial government. It does exist. It is typically council members, whether it's head of council or any other council member, that can get other councillors on board to pursue a vote that goes in his or her direction that will either keep a competitor out or get a competitor in; it goes both ways, absolutely.

But I am saying I am very aware that this does exist in the past and it has kept development that could be good for a municipality, could be good for the metro region. And I'm not singling out the Winnipeg Metro Region here at all. I am not singling out a municipality. I'm speaking very generally. It has existed, it does exist and it would be my hopes that we can find a balance to this.

This is not to, in any way, overrun a council in their decisions, what's good for their municipality and regulations are still being worked on. We are still

listening to municipalities; we will continue to listen to municipalities. This is not a done deal.

We—this is working. There will be a review every three years. The next one is already scheduled for 2024. So, this conversation continues. It is not a one-and-done deal just because bill 37 is passed. Bills 33 and 34 have committee on Tuesday night, and I look forward to further discussion on this.

And as I've indicated to the member, I am open to discussion at any time if there's particular cases that you—that are talked about or heard about. I do not have any knowledge on the municipality that he is presenting, and today I'm actually glad I don't because I don't want to give a biased information on anything like that.

But I, myself, do not fear the future. I have always been very optimistic, always looking forward to growing my municipality. When it was my business, I always looked for better ways, I always looked for better outcomes and I always try to be very aware of our changing world. And I know a lot of the municipal councillors are the same, and I've already indicated that not everybody's on the same page. I am very, very aware of that, and I will always take that into consideration.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wiebe: So, yes, I do want to move on. We could spend, I'm sure, all day talking about some of the details there.

But I did want to spend some time talking about the municipal 50-50 transit funding agreement. And on page 17 of the minister's Estimates book, the—one of the stated goals of her department—and again, she mentioned this in her opening comments—is to support the City of Winnipeg's transition to zero-emission buses.

So, I mean, you know, one of the—the 50-50 transit agreement, again, for those of you who are following along at home and may not be quite as well-versed on this as the minister would be and members of—in this committee, the 50-50 transit agreement was a binding agreement between the Province and the City of Winnipeg that allowed for, you know, not only base-level funding that would in—help ensure that fare stayed low or reasonable, that service was of a certain standard that was equitable across the city, but also—and this is, I think, the most important point for my discussion—or, my point that I want to make here today is—is that it allowed the City—or, it allowed the Province to have a seat at the table, right?

So, you know, transit within the city of Winnipeg is a municipal service, but because the Province had this binding agreement, they were able to sit at the table and they were able to—and I remember this very clearly from my days back in government—that we were able to sit at the table and to say, what are the priorities that we're hearing from our constituents and from the people of Winnipeg.

And we would sit down in the same way that the City of Winnipeg would do so, we would hear from Functional Transit Winnipeg, we would hear from community activists and groups, we would hear from the City of Winnipeg bus drivers and their union. We would listen to, you know, kind of all sides, and then we would also look at priorities like what the minister is identifying here, you know, a transition to zero-emissions buses. This is—I mean, this—again, so I don't want to bring in the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare) every single time I speak, but I have to bring him in here now, because, of course, New Flyer Industries is in his constituency.

And I was very honoured to join him and the Leader of the Opposition in a tour not too long ago of the plant. And, like, you know, I mean, if you ever want to see incredible, amazing work that's being done in this province by the average, hard-working people of Transcona—I didn't mean to call them average, I mean that, you know, they are very much like many of us in Winnipeg, but have taken on not just, you know, the work in terms of building buses, but building some of the most state-of-the-art buses in the world.

And what struck me when I was there was, like, I felt like we were walking through like a—*[interjection]* Yes, we saw buses that were going all over the world just when we were there. And what I remarked afterwards was, it—I expected it to be like an assembly plant like you might find in Oshawa, or, you know, in these big assembly plants. Instead what we saw was it was almost like being in a Ferrari plant, because every single bus, from start to finish, was customized, was hand built and individually built for the customer that it was going to.

But we saw these going all over the world, instead of, like, down the street, you know. Like, I can't take a zero-emission bus from Kildonan Place mall to the Legislature, but I can go to, you know, San Francisco, and I can take one down the street there, or in Toronto now, I guess—the latest contract.

So, anyway, my point simply is—because I did want to talk about New Flyer, because I was blown

away by the people there, the amazing work that they're doing—but just to say, because of the lack of the 50-50 transit agreement, we've lost that ability at the provincial level.

So I just wanted to ask the minister, how does she—how is her department going to meet this goal without having the kind of structured agreement with the City of Winnipeg and other municipalities around their transit needs?

* (11:20)

Ms. Clarke: I'm sure the member opposite is aware that the transit funding was moved to the basket funding back a few years ago when that was done with all municipalities, where their basic funding comes through a basket model where they have the ability to spend it where they so choose.

The City of Winnipeg has adapted and—a new transit master plan which we are very aware of, and I just want to, you know, when you indicate that we don't have a seat at the table, the transit is a very much a topic of the collaboration table that I shared previously that has been struck to work on any issues between the City of Winnipeg and our government.

That working table has gone really well, and I spoke to Mayor Bowman when I was first put in this position in regards to that working table, and he also indicated that this has really been very positive going forward and that we have a much better working relationship.

And I just want to emphasize as well that my working relationship with Mayor Bowman is extremely good. It was in the past and it continues to be. We speak on a regular basis very casually or very quickly when anything comes up; we contact each other and that's working very well.

I do want to make the member also aware that, just in the past couple of weeks, we've added the conservation department to that collaboration table as well. And this will cover off, you know, concerns where you have going to zero emissions because we are very proactive in that respect. So, it will include active transportation, clean water and wastewater and a lot of those other issues that we are facing as a province. That will also now be a part of this collaboration table, and I really want to acknowledge that I feel this is a very good step forward.

I'd like to make the member also aware of the ICIP request that was sent through our Province to our

partner in the federal government for funding for transit, to go along with the transit master plan.

And our Province has committed to \$170 million for the first phase in this master plan. To date, we have committed \$92 million to the transition to zero-emission buses. We've also committed \$61 million to our new transit garage for the City of Winnipeg, which would be well-equipped for electrification and the buses that would be expected to be there.

And in regards to those funds that I've just mentioned to you—the member, we have already flowed \$40 million of that funding to date.

Mr. Wiebe: So, I just—I do have a lot of other questions that I do need to get to, but I just wanted to get a little bit of further clarification.

So, the minister is talking about the table. I guess what I'm asking is whose plan is—are they following? Are they following her own department's plan as, again, referenced in the Estimates book? Is she—are they following a plan that has been developed by the City of Winnipeg to meet their zero-emission targets and is she getting direction from them? Or is she following a plan that is being developed by the minister of climate and the environment, and I—very happy to have my colleague from Wolseley here, who's obviously our critic and very knowledgeable with this.

So this is and—a report that's coming forth, we understand from the advisory council, to the minister of conservation and climate. Who's in the driver's seat here, no pun intended, with regards to this goal of transitioning to zero-emission buses? Are they taking their lead directly from the City of Winnipeg and then sort of being the arbiter of what goes forward, or are they driving the plan within the department, their own department? Or, again, are they taking direction from the overall climate strategy being dictated over in the department of climate and the environment?

Ms. Clarke: Now, I would just like to share with the member opposite the master plan—the transit master plan that I'd just spoke of was—that is directly under the supervision—under the direction of the City of Winnipeg. They created it. They did have large public hearings. They listened to their ridership. That is their plan.

What I am saying, our Department of Municipal Relations is one of the stakeholders at a collaboration table that has been formed between the City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba so that they can internally, with our staff, discuss whatever issues

come to the table so that they don't erupt; that they can work collaboratively to come to the best decisions and make the best decisions that can be brought back, whether it's to the Department of Municipal Relations.

And I'm—I do want to be very clear that the department of conservation was added to that table most recently. It is very recent. I'm not even sure that they would've been on a meeting at this point, but it was recognized that some of the issues that need to be discussed would definitely include that department of our government.

Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: I do want to move on to a new set of questions, but I neglected to mention something, so I'm just going to throw this in as a one-off, and if the minister wants to give any insight, that's fine. If not, that's also okay.

It was mentioned by my colleague from Wolseley and others that, you know, active transportation is a major part of the transportation solutions for not only the City of Winnipeg, municipalities across the province and provincially, right? So we, in the past, have had a direct—director or at least a staff person within the department that was charged with building or monitoring or furthering active transportation in the province. I know that that position was eliminated.

So, again, just as a one-off, if the minister knows any—knows—has any information about priorities when it comes to active transportation and if they plan on hiring somebody to fill that position?

But I do want to move on with regards to the RCMP funding issue. This is, of course, the minister knows, comes out of the settlement with regards to pay for the RCMP. This impacts many municipalities.

In the past, we've gotten into kind of a back and forth in the—in question period. You know, not to criticize the format of question period, but it's not always the most conducive to get to solutions.

And, in fact, in the past, when I've asked this in QP, I think it was answered by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen)—there might have been others that stepped up and answered this. Anyway, but—I—it does fall under this department, because I think there's some municipalities actually, in fact, are paid the Province; the Province gets paid from the feds. This is a big problem. This is impacting budgets.

* (11:30)

I'm just wondering if the minister has—if there's been a resolution to this issue in terms of the funding shortfall that municipalities will be facing?

Ms. Clarke: I just want to revert back very quickly to the member's questions about active transportation and, you know, dedication to those—that particular issue.

I do want to make it very clear that our government is very committed to active transportation, regardless of where it is. There is funding that comes throughout several different departments that are taking this into consideration and working with persons for this 'active' transportation.

So, Transportation and Infrastructure; the department of mental health; Sport, Culture and Heritage as well as our department all are actively involved in this. And there is funding—or there has most recently been a lot of funding gone out through building sustainable 'communities,' but there's also several other funding models within our government that support active transportation—certainly something that we are very, very interested in pursuing and building on.

I want to address the question in regards to the RCMP funding and the member's question. There was a joint letter that went out from Justice—because Justice is handling a lot of this on behalf of our government—but it was jointly signed by the former minister of Municipal Relations. And I want to add that we have not received a response to date, but it is an issue that I've had significant conversations with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities on behalf of their members.

Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: Well—and I appreciate the update. And, you know, maybe I won't, you know, ask too much more with regards to the details. But I just wanted to put on the record that, you know, as the minister indicated, this is a major concern.

I guess the question I would have, to follow-up and then we can move on, is, you know, for those municipalities who had to, this spring, put together their budgets with a 23 per cent hole in their policing budget shortfall, how is it that the minister has supported those municipalities, at least in the short term?

And, I guess, again, you know, I mean, we're hearing about this, this is a concern, but it's also like a—has real-world impact on what municipalities are able to deliver to their ratepayers. So, you know, is the minister—what kind of steps—this should be, I imagine

the highest priority when it comes to negotiations with the federal government—what sorts of, you know, additional steps outside of the letter and sitting back waiting for a response has the minister undertaken to get this issue resolved ASAP?

Ms. Clarke: I just want to share with the member opposite that we are not aware that any municipality has, to date, had to financially output any of these additional funds that are being put upon them.

This is a multi-year funding that we're looking at, and there's still a lot of discussion in regards to retroactive. So it's an issue that is still very much under discussion, and I'd be pleased to see if I can get an updated report from the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen) on this issue for you.

Mr. Wiebe: I appreciate that clarification and commitment to get additional information. Likewise, with regards to budgetary impact coming from—ultimately coming from the federal government, is the direct result of changes made by this government with regards to the education property tax rebate.

Now, I know we've spent the last few days in the Legislature debating this, so I will restrain myself from going too far down the road about overall comments with regards to that rebate and the way that it was administered.

But one of the impacts that we've seen with regards—unintended, I would imagine—is the impact from the payments in lieu of taxes paid by the federal government. So, when the Province reduced the commercial and institutional property taxes by 10 per cent, the federal government also reduced their payments in lieu by the same. And this doesn't matter too much to most municipalities across the province, but the minister will know that this impacts some municipalities. You know, most notably, I guess, the Stony Mountain municipality that contains Stony Mountain Institution—it impacts them to a great degree.

* (11:40)

And so the minister will know I wrote to her about this matter, and I'm simply looking for an update to ask her the status of those negotiations and whether that shortfall has been addressed by the federal government or by the provincial government, if she could give us some insight with regards to that impact.

Ms. Clarke: I would just like to have a comment on the education tax rebate that has been robustly debated, for sure.

I've never gotten to give my focus on it, but as a municipal official in the past, and as an AMM director and vice-president, and as a nomination candidate, and as an election issue—the rebate on education tax in rural Manitoba has been one of the biggest issues I've been hearing about since 2007. It has been ongoing; it has been loud and it has been very clear. And I understand, in rural Manitoba, the impact on taxes and how it affects one individual, whether it's a farmer, a residential owner, a multiple-residence owner, it's very different. But from my perspective, every—I only had one issue that was more important in the past—and it was the Neepawa hospital—in this whole area.

And education property rebate—and I want to be very clear, the people across Manitoba realize and understand that education has to be funded. We all know that, and everybody is in agreement. We want our kids to have the best education. We want to have quality teachers. We want to have proper, safe schools for all the children and we want Manitoba to do really well in the department of education. However, there has to be a better way to fund it, and we are absolutely adamant that we are going to find and move forward in a better way of funding education. Education will in no way go short because of this change in taxation.

This type of taxation for education has been not used across all of Canada for many years, and I will be upfront and saying that we are behind time, and it's time that we look at things differently. There is adequate revenue in this province. We are building this province; it is growing, and education is the foundation of that. So I want the member to be very assured that this is a good step forward, and we will ensure that it will be the same people paying taxes. It's the same people that pay taxes, call it whatever you want, but there will be a proper funding for education moving forward.

And, in regards to the tax that you talked about that will be lost to municipalities from this through the federal government's portion, the provincial government is covering 100 per cent of that shortfall. It equates to approximately \$3 million; I don't have the exact number at my fingertips. But this will be included in their fall payment, their basket funding. We put forward 75 per cent of the basket funding early in the year, which is at this time, and then there's a second fall payment for the additional 25 per cent, and any municipalities that have that shortfall that was in lieu of taxes will be receiving it at that time.

And I thank you for that question.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, you know—and not to take the bait on getting into the discussion and the debate that we've already had over the last number of days—what I think I've heard from municipalities and, you know, sort of the worries that they've had over the last number of months because of this change, is indicative.

I mean, there's a lot we could argue about—and again, we have in the Legislature—about the nature of this tax rebate, who it's going to—you know, whether we should prioritize this massive tax break to corporations and folks who have expensive homes. But I won't get into that.

What I would say is, is that, once again, I'm hearing from residents in my own constituency who are saying, why are my taxes going up? And then they're waiting for a cheque to come in the mail, which, you know, was—I thought I had heard the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and others say that last year, we had to get it done quickly, so that's the reason we're doing it this way, but it would be different going forward.

Here we are in the same situation. And I think that this situation that the municipalities are facing is that same, you know, sort of rushed, poorly planned out, poorly thought out and very poorly executed plan that this government continues to have with regards to tax rebates. Again, I'm not going to get sucked into the debate, you know, despite that minute and a half that I just did.

Okay, I do have other questions that I want to get to. Specifically, I wanted to ask the minister about the concerns that I'm sure she's heard from number of municipalities with regards to section 83(2) of The Municipal Act. This is the section of The Municipal Act which gives authority to council and in—has been very recently used by council in certain RMs to censure or limit the ability of the mayor in those municipalities to have the powers that, you know, normal, average Manitobans would understand that they're electing their mayor to have.

And, you know, specifically, I know that there's been concerns that have come directly to the minister and there's also wider concerns that have, you know, circulated amongst the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and others who are saying that, you know, no matter where you land on individual cases within municipalities, there is concern about section 83(2) and that, even if that's not the intent of the legislation, because, you know, I mean, it was never abused for 25 years, it was—you know, it was in place and nobody ever, you know, used it in this way—

lately, because it's being used this way, that there is a loophole that, quite evidently, needs to be closed.

So I'm wondering if the minister has looked at this particular aspect of The Municipal Act, and whether she has some comments about the way that this particular clause is being used in the real world on democratically elected councils?

Ms. Clarke: I will share with the member opposite that I have not specifically sat down and looked at this particular section of The Municipal Act, and I will also acknowledge that I am aware, from calls that I've had in regards to individual cases which I will not discuss in this manner, at this particular time.

In regards to loopholes, this is clearly something that I will have to look at.

We're seeing a lot of discrepancies within councils, and that concerns me. It's—I'm—we're in a very short time frame here between now and the next election, and I know that there are a lot of stresses internally with probably more councils than the member opposite even is aware of. And that does concern me.

We have become a very intolerant bunch of people in our province, and I think it goes well beyond. I'm seeing behaviour, and I've—I'm seeing it more since COVID. I think we have all been through some very emotional and very stressful times. I think people's ability to cope has been really compromised. That concerns me.

* (11:50)

I met with a lot of councils, I've talked to council members and they're really struggling. And I am *[inaudible]* a psychologist by any means, but as you've indicated, there is a section in The Municipal Act that speaks to this. And I'm really—I will be honest, I'm really at a crossroads. I don't know if this is just a particular response to what's going on in our province and our world right now where people have become so intolerant and disrespectful of each other, but, ultimately, The Municipal Act does speak to specific actions.

And I would like to commit to the member opposite that I would be very open to having a very in-depth discussion with the member as well as with my staff, and that we do look at this, because we are facing an election in October and I've already discussed with the AMM that I am very concerned about what people—the general public are seeing and hearing.

Is this going to deter people—good people from running for these positions? Whether it's school trustees, we're seeing the same disrespect at that level, or, you know, even within our own government. We talk about it during question period, and the decorum—and I will be very open in saying these—this type of behaviour really concerns me. It is not the type of behaviour that I would ever be a part of.

So, I will just leave it at that. I am very concerned. I will look at this section of the act and decisions will have to be made going forward.

Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: I'm encouraged by the words of the minister and do take seriously her commitment here to undertake a thorough review of not only this particular section but, you know, ways that we can enhance our local democracy.

I share her concerns about overall decorum. You know, I guess I would just add, you know, predominantly, the words that I've heard, or the concerns that I've heard have come forward from—particularly from women who have, you know, stepped forward to serve at the municipal level. And, you know, so I—and so, just further to her comments, to the minister's comments, I would just say I think there's also a big concern there when, you know, in particular, if folks are not feeling like they want to come forward, in particular for women to feel intimidated or, you know, that they would be somehow threatened or made to feel uncomfortable or belittled—I mean, there's a whole number of examples we could go through, but as the minister said, maybe not the forum.

So I would just say that I would gladly take her up on this—on that discussion, and if there is a way that, you know, we can work together in a non-partisan way to look at this particular issue, understanding the timelines with regards to the municipal election that's coming up, you know, I would one hundred per cent be open to those conversations. So, I'm very happy to hear her say that.

Again, just in the—under the understanding that we would be jumping around quite a bit, just wanted to ask about the minister's—on page 20 of the Estimates book, the minister's—the department's goal of reducing the number of—total number of regulatory requirements, the red-tape-reduction mandate.

So I see that there is a target of a 2.5 per cent reduction—just reading the numbers out of the book, here—45,044 current regulations that the department—fall under the Department of Municipal Relations.

And so, you know, my math is maybe not as quick as it should be or could be if I had this written down, but that 2.5 per cent from such a large number seems like quite a number of regulatory requirements that are being reduced or eliminated.

Can the minister just give us a, you know, a full list, if she could, of regulatory requirements that will be eliminated this year? Or if, you know, I would imagine the list is ongoing or being developed, and if it is, then just, you know, maybe the top five that they're trying to work through at this time?

Ms. Clarke: I just want to go back, just very briefly, to the member opposite in regards to our comments in decorum.

And I don't know that the member was present—AMM did have a morning breakfast that had a panel in regards to women in politics or women in council, and there was some really good discussion there. And I have openly offered AMM to work with them prior to the next municipal election to become very public, and I've already participated in a video that they're putting together in regards to this issue.

So I would very much look forward to working with the member opposite as well as the member from the Liberal caucus as well, going forward. I think this is something that is a responsible step forward for us to do, and I think that would be a good decision.

In regards to reducing red tape, there are a few that I can give you examples of that are currently being worked on. And one—some of this relates more specifically to the City of Winnipeg in regards to demolition. We have removed a 'quirement' of having duplicate requirement to do demolitions that has been really withholding unsightful properties because of tax arrears, et cetera. So, in the future, they won't have to have both the tax collector and the demolition to do with the tax arrears. To go forward, they will only need one item to be in place.

Also, from our government perspective, we are really streamlining in regards to electronic hearings and other communications and meetings, et cetera. So a lot of these, when we're talking about reducing red tape, are more in line with, I guess you'd say, modernizing government and modernizing those steps that follow within the Department of Municipal Relations.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wiebe: So, very quickly, to the minister's mention of the women's breakfast at AMM.

And, you know, I spent some time speaking with—actually speaking with a number of women who attended afterwards because I wanted to, you know, know more about what was talked about and ways forward that we can all work together. But, you know, over and over again they said, well, why weren't you there? And I said, well, it was a women's breakfast. I didn't know I was allowed.

And, you know, as somebody who—as a man who tries to give as much space to those who traditionally don't have as much space, I'm always willing, you know—women's breakfast, more power to you, and I want to be giving you that time and that space. They're like, no, no; you're an ally. Like, you should be there and you should be listening.

So, lesson learned, and in the future, I'll be there, albeit very quiet and listening, but definitely want to be there.

* (12:00)

I don't want to spend too much time on the regulatory requirements. I was hoping to give time to the Liberal member, who I know I can't comment on—anyway, maybe if the Liberal member is watching somewhere, participating, they can be aware that we are hopefully going to have some time at the end of today's session to give her some time.

But just very quickly on the regulatory requirements, I—you know, I mean, I think there's a broad consensus with regards to modernization, especially around technology, and, you know, the example that was given, I think the minister, you know, that there's definitely a lot of room to improve.

My concern is, you know, once again, I see a hard target within the department, and this is another one of these Brian Pallister hangovers that this government continues to adhere to. And, you know, Brian—you know, in the pantheon of these hard and fast red-tape-reduction warriors, you've got the—you know, such auspicious names as Brian Pallister and Donald Trump, who, you know, who said, to come hell or high water, I'm going to reduce the number of regulatory requirements—red tape, so to speak—every single year, no matter what.

And, you know, it's often pointed out to them, well, wait a minute, what if, you know, they're really good—like, what if we don't have any bad regulations that need to be removed? But, again, when, you know, that target is in the Estimates book, it just speaks to that idea that, no matter what, those regulations have to be cut.

So maybe I could just ask the minister could follow up with a commitment to give us that list, the complete list? Maybe, you know—I'm not sure when that would be, maybe she could tell us when it would be complete: is this an ongoing process? Maybe she could give us the list of all the regulations that have been slated to be cut or are—have been cut to this point? And then maybe just a commitment to update the—update me going forward?

Ms. Clarke: I would be pleased to see what we can put together, what's already exists on that list.

But I do want to assure the member—and I think he knows me well enough by now—that I will not be reducing any red tape that I don't believe is in the best interests of municipalities. I am there and I understand municipalities, and I would never intently move forward with red tape reduction that I don't deem in a responsible manner.

And I will just reflect back to my previous term as municipal minister, and I worked on the red tape reduction then, too. And just to tell him, the individual, that when we're talking about red tape reduction, this has not been undertaken for so long.

One of the red tape reductions previously, that I was responsible for, was the requirement for frost shields no longer to be on vehicles. And, you know, it's those type of small things that are literally filling our books that just are—they just don't exist anymore. So I would not fear these reductions as quoted by number specifically.

We need to have goals. I think goals are a great thing to have. I think we all need that to keep us moving forward in a positive manner. But I certainly would indicate that there's no fear of red tape reduction that is not constructive.

Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: Just wondering, again, to switch gears fairly quickly—hopefully, the minister can accommodate this.

Just a question with regards to a letter that she would have received back on March 18th from the Pembina Valley Water Cooperative, and it just outlines, I think fairly well, the concerns that those folks in that part of the province have with regards to the crunch that they're facing with regards to potable water as well as water for agriculture, for irrigation.

And, you know, the situation that the—or the circumstances that they're painting, again, that I believe the minister would be aware of, are pretty dire. You

know, they are—and that region of the province is growing, they are looking for, you know, looking for—or there's lots of business industry that wants to set up. There's certainly a lot of people that are moving into the area, and one of the limiting factors—and, in fact, this has had a real-world economic impact, there have been businesses that are relocated; they've gone elsewhere because the ability of the district to deliver water.

So I ask this in the context of the Water Services Board and, just, if the minister has any insight, has into the—and, again, I know this minister was one of many that have—should be aware of this issue, so if she could direct me to the, you know, correct department, if need be, but I just wanted to get—if she could give me some insight as to what the—what her response has been to the Pembina Valley Water Cooperative and the situation that they've laid out to her?

Ms. Clarke: I'm happy to share information.

We had—our department had a very good in-person meeting with Pembina Valley Co-op within the past month, and I have to say that their growth and their expansion is very exciting. I will also share that I think they have done an amazing job within their co-op—their water co-op—as have many others. I've talked to Cartier most recently as well. And Pembina Valley has a very good plan put together going forward, absolutely.

And I would also like to share with the member that we have a working committee within our government that is working with Pembina Valley as well as other stakeholders in that region as well. So, those conversations will be continuing.

Mr. Wiebe: Can the minister just inform us—inform the committee of who is on that working group? Who sits on that working group?

Ms. Clarke: Of course.

Municipal Relations—we are certainly engaged with them. Government Services—we've been working with Minister Helwer very closely on other projects in that area as well. As you've said, it is a growing area. They are attracting a lot of industry. So, the Minister of Economic Development, of course, is included in this as well as environment and climate and parks, and definitely Agriculture is a part of this as well.

And I want to add to that, you know, it's not just Pembina Valley Co-op. We have also recently met the ministers—basically, all the ministers that I've already indicated. We met recently in Brandon with a very

large group of Keystone potato producers. So this—what we're facing isn't just in the Pembina Valley; it's all across our province.

There are a numerous great projects moving forward. And, of course, a lot of it involves water, so we are looking very closely and working on our water strategy going forward.

And we happen to have the Keystone potato producers—we happen to have industry represented there as well, and we're very fortunate that two of the executive members for, I believe it was McCain, who were in attendance, and they were very impressed with our meeting and also very impressed that the steps and the commitment that Manitoba is taking to work with the producers as well as the water co-ops in our area to ensure that we can move forward and we can supply the needs—not just of the communities for clean, potable water, but also for the ag producers, and extend that into industry.

* (12:10)

And we have had other new projects come forward most recently, so this is something that will—it will be a very top priority going forward.

Mr. Wiebe: And, you know, and just—I don't want to spend—again, I have too many more questions to ask, but maybe I'll just throw this out there—it's just a sort of understanding: is the minister saying it's a working group of the ministers, or individuals within departments? Again, maybe we could talk about this offline, or she can give me some indication whether she has just a quick answer to that.

The—once again, I'm just going to put it out there that, you know, the member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux) had indicated that she wanted to ask some questions. I'm—I don't know if she's on the Zoom call; maybe she's watching somewhere in the ether. Anyway, just trying to summon the member as the whip for, I guess, both caucuses right now.

Anyway, very quickly, the MPP program—the Mitigation and Preparedness Program—obviously, with the sort of immediate disaster-level, you know, situation in many municipalities across the province with regards to floodwaters right now, this is obviously a very much an evolving situation, but I'm wondering if the minister can just kind of comment.

There's going to be, obviously, a lot of impact with regards to the flood. I think the budgetary impacts are, you know, are still being—are still rising and are still being, sort of, trying to be understood, I'm

sure, across government, you know, as I look out the windows right now and see rain, you know, having fallen or falling right now.

So, the question is simply with regards to the MPP program, if the minister has any insight as to, you know, what impacts this flood season will have on that program and funding impacts going forward and potential shortfalls.

Ms. Clarke: Yes, this is definitely a topic that we should discuss; it's very concerning.

I've worked—I've been up front and centre, back in 2011, in the flood and every flood since then, and more recently 2020 in my area and in the Westman area.

We've had significant communication with our municipalities going forward and throughout this, and it's very clear that this particular event, whether it's on the east—southeast side or the western side like we're experiencing now, the damage—the assessment of this damage is going to be significant; there's no doubt about that.

I think the Minister of Transportation indicated yesterday that we're well over \$100 million and there's no idea or any way of knowing right now what that final figure will look like. It's probably going to be several weeks before we'll get anywhere close to a final figure on this. Having said that, I am very pleased that this is a government that has a very large contingency fund for these types of emergency expenditures and a great deal of confidence in that.

So, working—we will continue working with the municipalities very closely to ensure that all the DFA claims are dealt with in an expedient manner. I think this is a good opportunity—I just have to really send a big thank you to the minister of infrastructure and transportation, as well as all his department staff, but also to emergency measures. We've had really good responses coming in about how helpful they've been.

I have not had any distress calls from any municipality, and I think we're in the 30 range of municipalities—and that's about 25 per cent of municipalities in this province that are under a state of emergency right now. And I have not had one call in fear or panic that they are not getting the help that they need right now. And I also have to speak to the mitigation that's been done in the past few years, and even since 2020, to ensure that our communities and our municipalities are better prepared for these types of events. We're seeing them more often and they're, in some respects, getting more severe.

So, no lives lost. Yes, people displaced, but not to the level that it certainly could have been that we saw back in 1997. So I feel very confident going forward that we're on top of this, and that municipalities are also knowing and understanding there are also responsibilities and how to move forward in regards to their claims.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I think this warrants some further discussion, but I take the minister's point about sort of the evolving situation that's happening right now. And so, you know, depending on when we get back to Municipal Relations in Estimates, this actually might be an appropriate conversation for the fall.

Just very quickly on this, I do think that the minister, you know, quite rightly, pointed out some of the mitigation projects that have been undertaken in Manitoba. And, you know, you don't have to look too far, even in Canada, certainly in the United States, around the world, really, the impacts of climate change are really testing the mitigation projects that have, you know, happened over the last number of years. And, you know, I mean, this isn't, I guess, something to be happy about, but maybe something to be proud about here in Manitoba, that we have faced flooding; we have faced this kind of impact to our communities for so many years that we're pretty good at it, right?

But that being said, there's kind of a new level now that we're seeing, again, because of climate change, that I think communities are grappling with and always work to be done with regards to managing the water that we deal with here in this province. So again, I'm sure we'll have more to talk about there.

Again, quickly, I'm not sure how much time I have, but the Municipal Service Delivery Improvement Program, M-S-D-I-P—I don't know if that's the right acronym—you know, maybe the minister can help me out with that acronym. But, anyway, the municipal services delivery program. Just as a point of information, wondering if the minister could tell us how much was paid out through that program in—from—in the last budget year.

So—sorry—not what was budgeted, but was actually paid out. What made it out to municipalities from that fund that was allocated?

* (12:20)

Ms. Clarke: Lots of great information on this program to share with the member.

I will start out by putting on record that this is a \$5-million program that was to be spent over four years. And in the first year we had—actually, we were well oversubscribed. We had 49 municipalities apply for the first year, which was beyond what we could capably handle in the first year.

So, anyways, we worked with 11 municipalities for a total of \$1.1 million for the projected applications; \$700,000 of that was already paid out and \$400,000 was—is overlapped because they were continuing into this fiscal year. So, there's another \$400,000 from those first 11 projects that will be paid out this year.

I would add to that, the applicants are finding this process to be very worthwhile. So, it's a good project, and I actually look forward to talking to some of the municipalities that have been involved in this and just getting some feedback from them.

I will add, you're probably interested into knowing that Winnipeg did not apply in the first round, but they have expressed interest and do want to apply likely going—there will be another intake later this year. It has to go back to Treasury Board, of course. And we're looking forward to that coming later this year.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, appreciate that.

And again, I have more to ask there, but in the interest of getting as much in as possible: one of the, you know, major concerns, again, expressed through the Association of Manitoba Municipalities last June, I guess—yes, we're coming up on a year—I spent a lot of time virtually travelling the province at our district meetings—this year, looking forward to actually being in the communities, but last year it was still virtual. One of the major concerns at that time, of course, was ICIP funding, and delays that were happening at that time continue to happen, I'll put on the record.

But the question that I have, very specifically, is on those projects that have been approved. And one of the issues, again, that came through AMM and in talking with individual municipalities who have projects that are—that have been awarded ICIP funding, they have indicated an issue they are now running into where the application was originally done in 2019.

The Province—you know, and again, we could quibble about why it's held up—but, you know, the money didn't flow until just very recently. And now, they're going back and they're looking at, you know, shovels in the ground and they're saying, wait a minute, you know, construction inflation has—I mean,

inflation in general's gone through the roof—but construction inflation especially has gone through the roof. And those projects that we had priced out under 2019 dollars, now we're looking at, you know, building in 2022, and there's no—we don't—the amount awarded and the amount that we had originally negotiated is not sufficient. They can't go back to the federal government. They don't have the money to make up the shortfall in some cases.

So, I'm wondering if, you know, if the minister has any insight into what, you know, initiatives her government is going to take to rectify this situation, and maybe she can just give me maybe a list of those projects that have been awarded ICIP funding, but have not begun construction.

Ms. Clarke: Unfortunately, we're quickly running out of time here, so I will reply to this on our next time.

I just want to take this opportunity to thank the member for the—

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Hour being 12:30 p.m., committee rise.

CHAMBER

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INVESTMENT AND TRADE

* (10:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Good morning, everybody. 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, Investment and Trade.

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

Could the minister and critic please introduce their staff in attendance.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade): I'm joined by my deputy, Kathryn Gerrard; and the assistant deputy minister, Melissa Ballantyne, from Finance and Corporate Services; and assistant deputy minister, Michelle Wallace, Industry Programs & Partnerships.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): So, last time we chatted and discussed during the Estimates process, I ended with some questions around minimum wage. And recognizing that minimum wage is not the minister's responsibility; it's—under the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), but it will undoubtedly have an impact on the economy and on labour markets.

It's been stated this government is concerned with the later—labour shortage. And so wanted to get the minister's perspective on the low minimum wage that we have here—soon to be the lowest in the country come October—and the impact that will have on the economy in Manitoba, with specific comment on the labour market in Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister. *[interjection]* Will speak in a moment.

Mr. Cullen: Just for the member's information, I know we did some work—the department has done some work compiling some information from Statistics Canada, the Fraser Institute as well as some labour force survey data, and made some projections modelling data.

Unfortunately, this is a couple years old, so—dates back to 2019. We can probably make some interpretations of where we're at now in terms of the—today's labour market. I'd say it probably has changed somewhat since then. Obviously, there's a real demand for labour which I think is clearly driving up wages.

But just for the member's information, back in 2019, and this again, these are Manitoba numbers, they found that it was most common, it was the younger workers working part-time while living at home and attending school, were those that were making minimum wage.

So, again, 2019 figures, they estimated just over 31,000 Manitobans were minimum wage earners, which at that time was about 5.6 per cent of the total workforce. And it was estimated that just over half of those workers were part-time, and a little less than half were full-time, so about 17—close to 18,000 part-time, approximately 14,000 full-time. And more than half of those workers were in that 15-to-24 age category, and then another 34 per cent were in the working-age employees, the 25 to 54.

It was predicted at that time that just over half of the minimum wage earners had a high-school education or less, and about 30 per cent have completed a post-secondary education.

And further, most minimum wage earners are a son or daughter or relative living with their family, which was over half, and almost half had other household arrangements, including as a couple, a lone household head, or single. So, certainly, that gives us a bit of a perspective from 2019.

* (10:10)

I would suggest—and I would very interested in what—how many—what percentage of the workforce are actually on minimum wage now. In my discussions with the business community, there is a tremendous demand for labour, and they're telling me that they're being forced to pay increasingly higher salaries to employ people and keep people employed.

So I would expect that we would have less than that 5.6 percentage of the workforce actually on minimum wage. We're certainly digging into this a little deeper, see if we can get some more up-to-date numbers in respect of minimum wage and who, in fact, and how many are on minimum wage here in Manitoba.

We are certainly open to having a discussion about minimum wage here in Manitoba. We are doing some work, having a look at what other jurisdictions are doing, in terms of their changes to minimum wage. Certainly, that's all part of it.

And the other thing that we're looking at, too, is historically—and I think the trend still exists—Manitoba has the lowest cost of living anywhere in the country. So that, certainly, is—can be a Manitoba advantage for sure.

So there's a lot of factors to bring into play here. We are doing some work on it, you know, across government, to see what the impacts of changing minimum wage would be. But we're prepared to have those conversations and do that work.

Mr. Moses: So by the, you know, the minister's statement, I think he acknowledges that there is a labour shortage in—*[interjection]*—oh, yes, thank you for the reminder. Just—I'll take the opportunity to introduce my staff here, Rylan Ramnarace, who's joined me today.

To follow up on my question, the minister, during his previous response, said that there is a labour shortage that we're facing here in Manitoba. I think that's, you know, pretty clear. And the minister also said that, to address this shortage, private sector is being forced to increase their wages and pay higher to

attract labour into the positions that they're trying to fill.

And so wouldn't that same principle apply when the government is trying to address and solve the labour shortage problem: that we should increase wages for workers in order to attract them into these jobs?

And the wage that the provincial government controls is the minimum wage. So if we're trying to address the labour shortage in Manitoba, wouldn't the minister follow the same principle that the private sector is taking to solve the problem by increasing the minimum wage to address the labour shortage we're facing?

Mr. Cullen: A couple of things that I do want to point out in respect—again, these are 2019 statistics. Manitoba actually, at the 5.6 per cent rate of minimum wage earners in comparison to across the country. The country was at 10.4 per cent, so almost double the rate across the country versus where we are in Manitoba in respect of those making minimum wage. I think that's important to note. And I would suggest that our people here in Manitoba making minimum wage are probably lower now than they were then, given the demand for labour and the fact that employers are having to pay more to attract employees and to keep employees.

Just a little more on the—on this sector here, it appears that, you know, minimum wage can occur across all industry sectors, but it would appear that the retail trade, the accommodation and food services would tend to be the most common sectors where minimum wage employees occur. So I just wanted to pass that on for the member.

Going back to 2018, and the report said 33 per cent of minimum wage earners in the country worked in retail trade and 26 per cent in accommodation and food services. I would expect those trends are probably similar and probably similar for Manitoba as well.

I think the other thing to bring to bear here, when we do the Manitoba labour market outlook report, and this was for the '21-25 period, we were expecting over 140,000 job openings over the next five years and figuring that more than half of those jobs would require post-secondary training. So, clearly, those folks in this market will not be making minimum wage.

And I think the other thing too, and to my point about labour demand, we have, I think, as of the

'latist'—latest report, we had the second lowest unemployment rate in the country.

So, clearly, there's a demand for labour here in Manitoba, and I would expect, as a result of that, Manitoba businesses are being forced to pay more for employees. I think the last report had us at 5 per cent unemployment rate, again, second lowest in the country from—if memory serves me correctly.

Mr. Moses: So the minister doesn't clearly see, I suppose, how increasing minimum wage would perhaps have a positive impact to addressing the labour shortage as, I suppose, given his response.

But the point I want to address in this question is the fact that, by the minister's own admission, the private sector is increasing their wage in order to attract more labour into those positions. So we know that there are some positions, specifically, you know, higher positions, above minimum wage, with those wages are increasing, by the minister's own admission and statement today. So those wages are increasing. And yet, the people at the bottom who are earning minimum wage have seen very little increase in their wage.

And so the policy the minister has of not increasing the minimum wage to keep up with the rate—wage increase we're seeing in the private sector means we're going to see a wider gap in income inequality in Manitoba. This is the policy that we're currently seeing in this government, and so I want to address this with the minister. That income inequality gap that is continuing to increase, how is the minister justify that, and why doesn't he increase the minimum wage to close that gap?

* (10:20)

Mr. Cullen: Well, I think the member's making a lot of assumptions here, unless he has material to justify his comments here this morning. And quite frankly, if he does, I would love to see those numbers because that's exactly the type of information that we're trying to ascertain, as well.

Again, we're referencing information that's a couple years old, and we're looking—trying to drill down to get some relevant information, in respect of more timely information. So, if the member has that type of information, I would love to see it.

I would suggest the demand itself is creating an increase in wages, and I would think that's—that would pertain to the minimum wage category which, I'm sure, is much less than the 5 per cent—5.6 per cent that

was referenced some time ago. So, I think the marketplace on its own is driving up minimum wage, and that's why we're curious to try to get some up-to-date information.

To the member's question: I did admit we are taking this seriously, and we are looking at our minimum wage, what can be done and what other jurisdictions are doing. I think the member—I don't know if he's had the opportunity to review legislation that was brought in about six years ago that, quite frankly, does tie our hands to some degree in terms of increasing minimum wage, so it was a cost-of-living provision in that legislation. And, obviously, that's something that we're having a look at, the existing legislation, what could be done to, you know, potentially make increases or at least have a look at it.

The industry has told me, the employee side—employers side, pardon me—would certainly like to be consulted on this as we go forward. So, any movements we do, we would certainly invite consultation from Manitobans on this, and really look forward to having that discussion.

Mr. Moses: Well, we know that minimum wage is well below the poverty line in Manitoba, regardless of our cost of living. It's absolutely well below our poverty line.

Many other jurisdictions in our country are moving up to the \$15-an-hour minimum wage, and in many cases, that \$15-an-hour minimum wage still wouldn't put people up to—above the poverty line or into a living-wage category.

And so, the minister's been saying this 5.6 per cent are making minimum wage, and—without data, you know, suggesting that it's less than that. I don't know if there's evidence to suggest that it's really less than that. But irregardless, the minimum wage at 5.6 per cent is below the poverty line, below that \$15, and so, everyone else who is making \$12, \$13, \$14 is still below the poverty line. Increasing the minimum wage up doesn't just affect the 5.6 per cent who are making minimum wage; it affects all the other people who are making just above it, and are still below the poverty line, and are still not at a living wage.

So, the minister has to realize it affects far more than this 5.6 per cent. I want to know if the minister can acknowledge that, and if he can provide any numbers to say how many people are working full time and are still living below the poverty line?

Mr. Cullen: Obviously, we're into some—clearly, government policy discussions, when it comes to establishing a living wage and wages that would meet the poverty line. And that's some of the work that we are undertaking across government to see what other jurisdictions are doing and how our legislation works and how the—what the implications would be to making increases.

In terms of the direct question about poverty line and employment, I mean, that's probably some information that the Department of Families may be able to provide the member. So when the Minister responsible for Families comes up, that might be a question to direct to Families.

The one thing that we have found—this is pre-pandemic versus where we find ourselves this February. So over the course of two years, February to February, we have found that the average weekly earnings have gone up 10 per cent in Manitoba.

So I can't say for sure that that would be reflective of those making minimum wage, but I would suggest that that correlation may certainly be in place. So I think that's a signal, as we are rebounding from the COVID era, again, the demand for labour and short supply of labour are clearly driving salaries up, and I would expect that would be the same thing for minimum wage earners.

I think the other thing, too, that the members opposite quite often forget is the basic personal exemption when it comes to income tax; something that I know the previous government had no interest in raising the basic personal exemption, so those making fairly low income were subject to taxation early on.

And we as a government have decided that that's not fair, that we should be at least indexing the tax brackets to at least the minimum increase in consumer price index. So we've done that year after year, and that has taken tens of thousands of Manitobans—low-income Manitobans—off the tax rolls completely.

So, again, it goes back to my comment about life being more affordable in Manitoba than anywhere else in the country. We're taking those measures to make sure that we're addressing those affordability issues that Manitobans are facing.

* (10:30)

Clearly, now more than ever, with inflation and hyperinflation and increase in food costs and gas tax, that's why we think it's so critical to provide as much

assistance to Manitobans as possible. And indexing the tax brackets for income tax is certainly critical. We know we have more work to do, but at least we're certainly headed in the right direction on that front.

And speaking of assistance to Manitobans, we're happy that the opposition finally came onside yesterday and supported our—probably the biggest tax rebate in Manitoba history to property owners in respect of the education property tax. That is probably—that will put \$350 million into the hands of Manitobans over the course of the next several months.

So, this is much-needed tax relief when it comes to Manitobans, especially in this time of higher costs of living. So we're excited about that; I'm just glad the opposition finally decided to agree with our stance on that and provide those rebates back to property owners. And not only property owners, but those that are renting, as well. A significant new policy shift to renters who may be on the lower income spectrum, and I think very supportive of that as well. So, I would view that as a step in the right direction, and a \$350-million assistance to Manitobans, I think, is going to be quite timely.

Mr. Moses: I'm disappointed that the minister's—beginning of his comments couldn't provide any perspective and referred this to the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires). I know that predecessor had taken an approach and use terms like whole-of-government approach to solving problems.

So, I'm really disappointed that now, it seems that we're back into these silos where the minister can't reference things that are, you know, even significantly related to his Department of Economic Development, but are tangentially also related to a department like Families, and the minister won't respond to a question about how minimum wage and the impacts of increasing it to up to \$15, for example, would have a significant increase in impact on the economy for people who make above minimum wage but not up to a minimum wage, like \$12, \$13, \$14. And so it's disappointing the minister won't even make a comment, and the government is still so siloed with some of its operations.

But I think the question I want to ask around minimum wage is that it's clear the studies have shown the higher minimum wage is—higher wages—means more money put back into the economy through spending, right, and I think that's something that we would, you know, want to see. And especially true with the lower income folks, because they use that as

disposable income instead of saving it like wealthier Manitobans.

So, can the minister explain what sort of economic impact and benefit we could see from raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour would have on, as the minister said, the 31,000 minimum wage workers in Manitoba?

And, as well, Mr.—yes—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses), to continue.

Mr. Moses: And that 31,000 number that the minister said is only the people earning minimum wage. Raising the minimum wage would have, undoubtedly, an impact on all the wages in between, so it would be a much larger number than the 31,000 if we were to raise it up to \$15 an hour.

Can the minister explain what all that extra disposable income going into our economy would mean for the businesses in Manitoba?

Mr. Cullen: To the member's question, we actually are taking a whole-of-government approach to this, and we did have a wholesome discussion about minimum wage and impacts to Manitobans. So we are taking a whole-of-government approach to this.

I certainly don't have the figures in front of me in respect of his question, and—I would—I'm just trying to expedite a solution for him and an avenue to address it expeditiously.

But I will say, we are taking a whole-of-government approach to looking at minimum wage, the impacts to Manitobans; the impacts to the economy; certainly, what it needs in respect of what other jurisdictions are doing as well. So the work is certainly under way on that front.

In terms of, you know, the member's questioning, that would be a huge undertaking, because there would have to be a lot of different assumptions made in terms of the impact of raising minimum wage. I don't know if anyone has done that in the country; that's something that we'll try to ascertain if that work has been done with governments or with any consulting organizations. But that's some of the—that's the work we're prepared to engage in.

Now, I recognize the previous government was all about how do we make sure Manitobans are making more money so that we can tax them. That was the tax-and-spend mentality of the previous government, and in respect of the previous government

not indexing the basic personal exemption when it comes to income tax, not indexing the brackets in respect of income tax, taking more money from the lower-income Manitobans, and we've taken a different approach.

Our approach is to give as many low-income Manitobans assistance. We've taken tens of thousands of low-income Manitobans off of the income tax roll completely, whereas the NDP chose to ignore that. So we're providing assistance there.

We have provided additional increases, too, to different sectors including child-care workers and those in the CLDS sector, as well, recognizing support for them.

The other thing is, we're working with the federal government in terms of enhancing child care, providing \$10-a-day child care for those Manitobans making lower incomes. We're going to be expanding the child-care subsidy to thousands of low-income Manitobans, which will certainly help those low-income Manitobans.

In terms of some of the other benefits, we've provided increased shelter benefits to low-income Manitobans, Rent Assist, EI. Rent Assist has been indexed and, you know, \$12 million for new income support programs for people with long-term disabilities.

So we are taking measures to assist those on low-income families. And probably the single biggest thing that we did as a government was to reduce the provincial sales tax, when the opposition—NDP government at the time—increased the provincial sales tax. That had an impact of—to Manitobans of over \$300 million, and probably the most affected by that were some of the low-income Manitobans.

So we've reduced the provincial sales tax. Today it would probably be in excess of \$350 million we're saving Manitobans each and every year, and, again, the low-income Manitobans would be the—probably the most impacted by the reduction in the provincial sales tax.

And, in addition to that, we've also taken the provincial sales tax off of a number of goods and services, which, again, will impact low-income Manitobans quite substantially.

* (10:40)

So we recognize the challenges those on low incomes face. At the same time, we are looking at the implications of raising the minimum wage, as well.

Mr. Moses: I think the minister's last comments kind of show a little bit how out of touch he is with Manitobans because some of the items that the government has taken the tax off, the PST off, are not the items that an average low-income Manitoban will spend money on: expensive haircuts, for example. These aren't the costs—average, everyday costs that a low-income Manitoban earning minimum wage or thereabouts might choose or be able to spend their money on. You know, so I think it really shows how out of touch the minister is with the lived reality of some Manitobans.

But just to talk a little bit—just to, you know—I want to get the minister's thoughts on what, you know, raising that minimum wage up to \$15 would really mean. And, I mean, just even rough numbers or—minimum wage in Manitoba is just a shade under \$12 an hour right now. If you were a minimum wage 'werner' working 40 hours a week, and you worked 50 weeks a year, Minister—the minister ought to know that that \$3-an-hour wage for 31,000 people would be about an extra \$186 million flowing through our economy; that that would go a long way to boost the disposable income for folks. That would benefit some of those same retail sectors where minimum wage workers are working.

And so, this has a benefit for the minimum wage workers; it has a benefit for the retail sector where there's greater disposable income flowing through our economy.

And so, I want to know what the minister really objects to raising the minimum wage, which would benefit low-income Manitobans and boost our economy in a time when we need it.

Mr. Cullen: I didn't say I was opposed to increasing the minimum wage, so I just caution the member opposite on that. I'm saying we're taking a whole-of-government approach to evaluating the implications of the—increasing the minimum wage. We've always been a government that consults on issues in respect of minimum wage and other policy-type issues with Manitobans, and we will continue to do that.

And our government certainly has rolled back provincial sales tax, and we have taken provincial sales tax off of a number of—besides haircuts, I mean, everybody—most people will be getting haircuts. Preparing wills, any type of insurance or tenants' insurance you want, personal income tax returns. Vehicle registration fees have been reduced, eliminated probate fees as well.

In fact, our government has provided \$886 million in tax savings since 2016. That includes \$607 million to families and individuals, another 279 to Manitoba businesses, so that Manitoba businesses can employ Manitobans.

We made a commitment of a 2020 tax rollback, and in fact, we've gone above and beyond that. We have provided the average Manitoban with an average of \$2,400 in tax savings. That's an average of \$4,000 for tax savings per household.

So, we're taking a lot of measures to make sure that we leave as much money in Manitobans' pockets as possible. We know the previous government and their ideology in terms of taxing Manitobans as much as they can, and we've taken a different approach to that.

Mr. Chair, we certainly are investing in Manitobans. We've committed in this year's budget over \$100 million for the—training and upskilling Manitobans. We have delivered employment and training services to over 27,000 Manitoba job seekers to assist them. We've supported 15,000 Manitobans with employment and training services through 13 of our Manitoba job, skill and developmental centres across the province. We've supported 7,500 Indigenous job seekers, and more than 7,800 newcomer job seekers were also supported through some of our programs over the past year.

We've committed to working with Manitobans to make sure they have the skills that the market is demanding today and the skills that the market will be demanding into the near future. So that's why we're excited about this year's budget. We're excited about the money that we've allocated in this department to assist Manitobans to get to work and to move on and move up in their labour market.

So I would say we've taken a whole-of-government approach on this. We will continue to take a whole-of-government approach when it comes to the issue of minimum wage.

Mr. Moses: I just want to say that I think it's—again, it's completely out of touch for the minister, and quite frankly, outrageous, to think that a low-income Manitoban who maybe doesn't even own a home would benefit from a tax decrease on probate fees. Or, you know, can barely put food on their table but would benefit from tax break on an expensive haircut. I mean, this is just this government telling on itself saying that it doesn't understand the challenges that low-income Manitobans really face.

But I'll move on away from the minimum wage debate, Mr. Speaker, and—deputy—Mr. Speaker? Deputy Speaker? *[interjection]* Deputy Speaker, thank you. *[interjection]* Chair. Mr. Chair. Thank you.

And I want to just ask about the Communities Economic Development Fund. Since 2017, March, it's been under a business loan moratorium, meaning no 'lew'—new loans have been approved for businesses since then.

Can the minister explain why? Clearly, during the last few years of COVID that there's been a need for business loans to benefit the economy in the North, and it seems that the Communities Economic Development Fund clearly has a role to play. But it's, under this government, not done so, in providing business loans for businesses outside of the fishery industry.

So, why is this the case, and will the minister lift the loan moratorium for non-fishing-industry businesses from the CEDF?

* (10:50)

Mr. Cullen: So, in terms of the Communities Economic Development Fund, that organization is working directly with northern businesses and communities. They are responsible for programs and services that would provide opportunities for business development and growth to companies and individuals in northern Manitoba. The loan component of what they did was only one aspect of the economic development work that the corporation has done in the past and, quite frankly, continues to do, into the future.

The member is correct. CEDF does continue the loan program, financing program, for the fishing industry and commercial fishing industry. I think, as of December '21, there was 251 loans, for over \$1.8 million were—have been disbursed, so obviously, an important component to the commercial fishing sector.

I will say, even though the Communities Economic Development Fund is still working closely with communities in northern Manitoba, we have created another department to deal specifically with northern resources and northern development, and we're excited about the work that department is doing. So that department will be working closely with CEDF over the—over time. Certainly, my department will be working closely with that department and CEDF, as well, to see what opportunities exist.

Certainly, access to capital has been a topic of conversation in Manitoba for quite some time. There is, obviously, lots of—plenty of other lenders in Manitoba that are willing to find—fill this space, and I think that's an important role for CEDF, is to work with the business community in northern Manitoba, work with the other lenders that are willing to fill the space and, you know, provide that type of financing.

In the broader terms, we've created the economic development committee of Cabinet, and Economic Development Board to look at economic development opportunities, and we're excited about that. And part of that is to—how do we attract investment and make sure that Manitoba businesses have the capital that they need.

So we've enhanced our tax—small business venture tax credit program, we've made that permanent to assist Manitoba businesses. And I can say that, over the course of the last few months in meeting with Manitoba businesses, they've been quite excited about that particular tax credit, and a number of businesses have indicated their ability to grow because of that fund. And that allows individual Manitobans to invest in small business companies here in Manitoba.

So it's a very—been a very successful program; that's why we've made that tax credit permanent. And we've also made it permanent and the ability for that tax credit to be applicable to the new venture capital fund that we are in the process of establishing. And we have set aside the initial \$50 million for the venture capital fund to leverage additional funding from the sector to provide input and capital for Manitoba businesses. So we're excited about having that particular fund, and fund of funds operational this fall. And that will provide additional opportunities for Manitoba businesses, including Manitoba businesses in northern Manitoba.

Mr. Moses: So the minister referenced the \$1.8 million this year from CEDF. In 2016, that was \$3.1 million. So can the minister explain why there's this drop in funding for fisheries approvals?

In addition, fishers—the fishing industry, as the minister, I'm sure, knows, is a seasonal industry, but yet, the interest accrued on those loans is all year round.

Is the minister interested in looking at the idea of matching that to the seasonal nature of the industry, where if they're only getting their income during one time of year and making payments, but, you know, they're in—accruing interest all year round—is the

minister interested in matching that to the seasonal nature of that industry?

* (11:00)

Mr. Cullen: Well, I think the upside of having CEDF located in northern Manitoba—they do provide those services to the northern business community and they understand the northern business community.

And they do work closely with the individual business there and the individuals in northern Manitoba. And they themselves will set policies around lending, and I—it's not all that different than our Manitoba Agricultural Credit Corporation, who provide loans to Manitoba farmers and the Manitoba farm business.

Again, Manitoba farmers, similar to the fishing industry—a lot of them are on a seasonal basis and quite often only receive their income at one time throughout the year.

So that's the advantage of having experts understanding those respective businesses. And certainly appreciate the good work that the people at CEDF are doing in working with Manitobans in northern Manitoba, because they do understand the issues there.

And again, very same situation at MACC. Those individuals know the agricultural industry, the agriculture sector. That's why we have experts setting policy as it pertains to the agriculture sector, and it seems to have worked out quite well.

So, excited about having the experts with the right expertise dealing with local issues, local communities. And really understanding the implications of those individual businesses—whether they be in northern Manitoba or whether they be in rural—in the farming area of Manitoba.

Mr. Moses: It's become even more evident than it was before, the need to, you know, provide opportunity for women in business.

Throughout the course of the pandemic, with the many struggles that, you know, business owners have had, women in corporate world have had during the course of the pandemic, 'hadding' the extra burden of many child-care issues on top of their responsibilities in—to, you know, run a business, be an entrepreneur, or perhaps, you know, try to climb the corporate ladder, as it were.

And so as a result, you know, we want to make sure that women feel very comfortable in the culture—

in the business culture in the community, make sure that they're welcomed in business circles.

So I bring up the issue—this issue as a result of the comments last week that the minister made. In front of a business forum, I think that many women—many men as well, and any gender of person—might have felt insulted by and, you know, not welcomed by those comments. I won't repeat the comments today, you know, but I know the minister knows what I'm referring to, the specific words.

And I want to know what the minister feels like, and whether he feels like these sorts of comments welcome women into the business world, welcome them into our economy, and what he says to those as the leader, as the Minister of our Economic Development, in—of a leader of our economy in Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson: Just before I acknowledge the minister, it seems to be my microphone is really hot and right on the edge of feedback. Is there a way to turn that down just a little bit so that we're not running that risk? *[interjection]* No. *[interjection]*

I can speak up, yes. I'll speak a little louder, but that, I think, exacerbates that potential. I'll leave that with the tech people. Just a comment or an observation.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, obviously, we're interested in getting Manitoba women into the workforce and becoming business owners as well. So in terms of where we're at now, sort of post-pandemic, the female unemployment rate in Manitoba is 4.8 per cent. And that is right alongside where we were pre-pandemic, so it's certainly encouraging to see Manitoba females getting back engaged in the workforce. This compares to the Canadian average of 5.1 per cent. So we're certainly ahead of the national average there in terms of having females employed.

And, again, second lowest unemployment rate in the country, so we're encouraged about Manitobans getting back to work. And we know there's tremendous opportunities in the workplace here in Manitoba. Business community has told us that they need labour. And they're actively looking for labour, and I would say they're also—been telling us that they're prepared to pay for that labour. So I think this is a really great opportunity for everyone in Manitoba to get to work, including females. Probably no better time in our history than with all these opportunities that exist for us.

I remember meeting recently and going back even several years with the Women's Enterprise Centre.

Certainly excited about the work they're doing in terms of having women involved in the workforce, and I think there's an opportunity for us to work even more closely with them in the coming months to see what kind of opportunities exist there and how we can help facilitate some of those discussions. And there may be some opportunities within our department to make that happen.

Our government has recognized the importance of child care when it comes to having women employed, and that's why we've been working closely with our federal government in terms of the \$10-a-day child care.

* (11:10)

Again, that will be available for Manitobans, especially those on lower incomes. We'll be expanding the child-care subsidy to thousands of other Manitobans. And I think this really provides the network and the opportunity for child care, to allow all Manitoba families to engage in the workforce.

So, as this whole plan unfolds and rolls out over the next while, we're again excited about getting even more Manitobans back into the workforce because there is so many opportunities for people to work here in Manitoba.

Mr. Moses: I've spoken with, you know, many people over the last few days who heard the minister's insulting comments towards women at the business forum last week, and they were, too—felt hurt by it and felt like it was a sign and a signal that the business community isn't really for women, that the minister's clearly using his position, ought to recognize that in his position the words he says is a signal for the priorities and the words of the government and what the greater, larger business community is working towards.

So when the minister makes comments that might insult women or denigrate women, I think it's to show—I think it will undoubtedly have a negative impact on women's likelihood and incentivization to pursue the business industry or become entrepreneurs or make investments in Manitoba.

So what does the minister—what sort of actions are the minister going to take in light of his comments to ensure that women are—feel welcome in our business community? Will the minister take any sensitivity training?

Mr. Cullen: I think I've been very straightforward in terms of my apologies, in terms of my remarks last

week at the Business Council. I extended that to the members of the Business Council, all members of the House, all Manitobans. So—unequivocal apologizing for that. Our government and I go back to my earlier comments. We're trying to do everything we can to allow Manitobans—women and females to become engaged in the business community here in Manitoba. We're more than happy to have the dialogue with Manitobans how that happens. So many opportunities here, but I would say now, more than ever, our government is trying to create the environment to allow all Manitobans to participate in our economy, and just more opportunities than ever before.

You know, I would say last week we had a great opportunity to have a discussion about opportunities in Manitoba with the Business Council. The Business Council is—has similar aspirations as we do. How do we provide investments here in Manitoba? How do we create sustainable employment here in Manitoba? How do we create sustainable growth in Manitoba, and how do we work with the private sector to develop opportunities for Manitobans? And how do we work with our post-secondary partners to make sure that Manitobans are engaged in the workforce?

We are committed to strengthen the economy here. We are investing in the economy. We want to build the future of Manitobans. That's what Manitobans have asked us to do. And we will continue to work with the business community, in fact all Manitobans, to make sure we're providing as many opportunities for Manitobans as possible. Whether that be the Business Council, whether that be the Manitoba chambers, the Winnipeg chambers, other partners that we're working with, whether it be Economic Development Winnipeg, CEDF, rural Manitoba economic development, World Trade Centre, Women's Enterprise Centre, we're certainly prepared to work with all those organizations to make sure there's—those opportunities are provided for Manitobans.

We certainly have set aside, again, \$100 million in this year's budget to provide training and upskilling of services for the Manitoba labour market. And we want to make sure that those Manitobans have those opportunities to move up in the labour market. And we're trying to create, through positive attacks, competitive strategies, that will provide Manitoba businesses the opportunity to grow. When Manitoba businesses grow, that provides opportunities for Manitobans.

The reality is the more productive and enhanced economic activity we have in Manitoba, the more money we have for the social services that Manitobans have come to expect. Such things as our record investment in health care of \$7.2 billion, our record investments in K-to-12 education, this year over \$3 billion, and our investments in post-secondary, and our record investments in families and social services, all of those things that Manitobans have come to expect. And the only way we pay for those social services is to have Manitobans working and have a robust economy.

Mr. Moses: I know that many Manitobans were offended by those comments. Men in business were offended; women in business were offended; and gender-diverse folks in Manitoba were offended by those comments. And it creates an environment in our Manitoba economy where women feel like it's maybe not their place to be involved. When the minister and the person in charge of stimulating our economy is making those comments it feels like it gives a green light for other leaders in our economy to make those types of comments that would offend and denigrate women.

Sensitivity training would go a long way to educate and enlighten the minister about the things that are, perhaps, appropriate and not appropriate to say. And so I'll give the minister another chance to answer the question.

Will the minister agree to take sensitivity training?

Mr. Cullen: Well, in respect of the member's questions, you know, apologies have been expressed to the Business Council, to all Manitobans, and I'll say that our government is committed to working with all Manitobans in terms of the opportunities that exist in Manitoba.

* (11:20)

Just this past year, we invested \$50,000 for two initiatives that support women pursuing non-traditional careers, under the expansion of the Empower program at the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology, to train women in the information and communications technology industries. The program includes a focus on increasing Indigenous women's representation. We have support of the Manitoba Construction Sector Council to promote careers for women in the heavy construction industry in partnership with the River East Transcona School Division.

And just last August, the—our government announced an investment of more than \$600,000 to partner with the Manitoba Construction Sector Council to deliver a skilled trades training initiative for Indigenous women in four northern and remote communities. This particular initiative will provide an opportunity for Indigenous women to acquire valuable skills in a supportive environment and includes ongoing mentorship during training and throughout their careers.

So, certainly, we are making investments for women in the workplace, and we look forward to continuing that particular work.

I will say, you know, as we continue to spur investment here in Manitoba, again, opportunities abound for allowing people to get back to the workplace. Our \$50-million venture capital fund is a really tremendous opportunity for Manitobans in the near future. Some of our tax credit policies that we have now made permanent will create more opportunities for all Manitobans to participate in the economy.

Mr. Moses: I think, you know, taking sensitivity training would not only go to help educate the minister but it would also set a really good example that leaders in our business community who make mistakes can learn and get better.

And by the minister—if the minister showed willingness to take sensitive 'tivity' training, I think it would go a long way to encourage other leaders to do the same and improve on themselves and make the business community in Manitoba a more welcoming place, not just to men but to women and gender-diverse people, ensure that our economy is benefitting from all 'attributes' of all peoples in our—Manitoba.

So, I've asked the minister twice about whether he's willing to take sensitivity training, and he hasn't committed to doing so, so I ask the minister, why not?

Mr. Cullen: Well, I appreciate the line of questioning the member goes down here, and I have offered my apologies to the Business Council, to the Chamber, to the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), to my caucus and, in fact, to all Manitobans. We, as government, are continue—will continue to work with the business sector, will continue to work with all Manitobans to provide opportunities.

Mr. Moses: So, it's clear that multiple times I've asked the minister if he's willing to take 'sensitivity' training in light of his comments, and he hasn't answered me. He also hasn't answered why he's hesitant, why he's refusing to do so.

And so, I want to ask, then, and—if that's the case, if the minister's willing—not willing to really better himself and be an example for the business community, especially for women, in light of his comments, then what is he actually going to do to regain the trust of women in business, gender-'divolks'-verse—gender-'divolks'-diverse people in business, what is he going to do to regain their trust? To regain their respect after his comments? And to ensure that we do have a welcoming and—business environment in Manitoba?

What is the minister going to do if he's not willing to take sensitivity training and not willing to answer why he doesn't want to take that training?

Mr. Cullen: I think we all have the opportunity to learn by our mistakes. I've certainly recognized that. I've admitted that publicly. It was an error in judgment. And apologized unequivocally for those comments.

I've had numerous conversations with the Business Council subsequent to that. I think they are prepared that we will move on because we do have great work that we have to do here in Manitoba, in a time of great opportunity. So, we are committed to doing that.

Mr. Moses: So, in the Estimates book on page 22, in point 9, strength, respect—Strengthen Respect in our Workplaces, there's a new performance measure which is: 9.a, achieve an annual target percentage of department employees who have completed mandatory respectful workplace training; new measure, with a target of 90 per cent.

Will the minister himself take this training?

Mr. Cullen: I will say, our government is working to enhance the respect in workplaces. I know the previous government had some issues there, and we recognize the challenges that the previous government had faced, so we've taken some proactive measures to enhance the respect in workplace.

Further in our Estimates book, we talk about equity and diversity benchmarks, as well. And this department, we'd set a benchmark of having 50 per cent women employed; and as of this February, we had—79 per cent of the employees in Economic Development, Investment and Trade were female.

* (11:30)

Mr. Moses: I will have to ask the minister again, I don't—maybe he didn't understand the question or didn't hear it because he clearly didn't provide a

response to my specific question about an initiative in his own Estimates book, performance measure, that—a new goal to achieve an annual target percentage of department employees who have completed mandatory respectful workplace training.

I would like to know if the minister, in light of his comments—insensitive comments—toward women last week, if he himself is going to be taking this training, which he has a goal of 90 per cent of the department achieving.

Mr. Cullen: I—from going by memory, I believe I did take this course at one point in time, but I'm probably due to take that course again, and I will endeavour to undertake that.

Mr. Moses: So, of course, you know, if you've taken a training before, a refresher is always needed. And I think, in light of the comments, I'm glad to hear that the minister is planning on taking this workplace—respect-in-work training, which I think would go to signal that we need to increase and improve the culture of welcoming women, gender-diverse people into our business community, at all levels of our business community.

And so I'm glad to hear that the minister is planning to take this training, and I look forward to the next opportunity—perhaps in Estimates, next opportunity we have, next year—to follow up, to ensure that this training was done. As a leader in our community, in the business community, in the economic development world in Manitoba, has taken the training to hopefully encourage other people to take similar respectful workplace training in Manitoba. So I'm glad that the minister is going to be now doing that in light of his insensitive comments towards women.

I'll move over to talk a little bit about some of the budget cuts that we've 'seheen'—and while the minister might quibble with word cuts, as he's done in the past, I respect that.

But I will ask the minister, can he provide an explanation why funding for industry programs and partnerships has decreased from \$55.5 million in 2021-22 down to \$42.7 million in 2022-23?

Mr. Cullen: Thanks for the member for raising this important question and it does give me an opportunity to clarify this budget line item.

This budget line item is directly related to COVID-19 assistance. So the member may know the federal government provided one-time funding over

the course of two years for COVID-19 economic recovery efforts.

So this funding was used to successfully support time-limited employment and training initiative for workers' and employers' impacted sectors. So, the \$47 million was over two budget years; the last budget year was—reflected approximately \$16 million of that. So again, we'll say for reference, approximately \$16 million was used from the federal transfer to support businesses in Manitoba.

That federal support is no longer available in this fiscal year, so that is why you are seeing that net reduction of approximately \$16 million on that particular budget line.

Mr. Moses: So, in the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the amount for industry program and partnership was still higher. And so this is a decrease that's obviously not just related to the pandemic because prior to the pandemic, in the budget year before that, the amount was higher.

So, can the minister explain the decrease from even pre-pandemic levels of this budget line?

Mr. Cullen: Certainly recognizing that we've had a change in departments and change in structure of departments, and I'm not sure what documentation the member is referencing. If the member could provide us a copy of the documentation that he's referencing—obviously, that sounds like it's going back pre-pandemic; so, a number of years.

It would take us some time to determine exactly what line item he is referencing. Again, given the fact that we've had different departments, different budget items in terms of supporting business, again, this one item, when we call it financial assistance, we want to make sure we're comparing apples to apples.

So if the member has a certain document that he's referencing for us to do the homework on that and ascertain the answer to his question, it would be very helpful if he would provide that documentation to us.

Mr. Moses: Sure, I can table this now, from the 2020-2021 budget—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The tech has just died on me here. I just—I know the member always wants to stick within the time limits and suddenly our timer has died, so—oh, there we go. We're back. We'll just reset things here.

* (11:40)

Okay, the time has not changed, but the timer is now back in order.

An Honourable Member: So this is tabled from the 2020-2021 annual report where the estimated amount for the industry programs partnership was budgeted at 50—approximately \$56 million, so that was set before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. And so I'm wondering why now we're seeing the cuts from this program.

In addition—

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry, when you pause, they turn the mic off, so I have to recognize you again. If you'd like to continue in your question, you certainly have four-plus minutes on the clock. You're welcome to ask—*[interjection]*—okay, the honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses), go ahead.

Mr. Moses: So, I've asked the minister about why there is that decrease in the number for industry, programs and partnership from the year prior to the pandemic to what we're seeing now.

My also—my additional question is, in the tabled document from the annual report, there seems to be a math error in the estimated line where they estimate at 2020-2021, when it tables out the amounts or salaries, employment, other expenditures, financial assistance, grant assistance and other expenditures recovery, the total amount, if you add those lines individually, is not the total of \$56.381 million. It would amount to a higher amount; it just doesn't add up, literally.

So I would like the minister to clarify, are one of these individual numbers correct or perhaps is that total incorrect?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, that does appear to be an error in the 2021 annual report there, for sure.

In terms of the actual, the \$37 million, that piece is reflective of the federal government support, so hopefully, that helps clarify that particular line.

Mr. Moses: So, clarifying that the minister said that the Grant Assistance line should be updated to account for federal government support? The minister's just saying that that line, it's—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses), to continue the question.

Mr. Moses: Is the minister saying the grant assistant line of \$37 million, approximately, is correct and then the total, and the total—and the—where it says subtotal appropriations, should be higher, about approximately \$75 million?

And then, as a result, as a course of the pandemic, you know, that amount, you know, actual number differed, and then now the budgeted line is \$42.7 million in the current budget.

So I just want to clarify what the error is, whether the subtotal should be higher or whether this Grant Assistance line is incorrect.

* (11:50)

Mr. Cullen: Yes, just trying to work through a process here and timing on how these figures were arrived at. It certainly appears in the report, though, the sub—the total subappropriation of \$56 million is an error. That's the way we see it.

The—and, again, the estimates column is an estimate, and that was based on what the department would have a best guess and what—and the federal transfer would look like for COVID support. So those are the best guess numbers I would say in terms of the estimate line.

I think probably the reality is to focus on the actuals, what numbers were spent. From what we can tell, those numbers that are reported in the actual category are correct.

Hopefully that helps clarify for the member.

Mr. Moses: So, clarifying that that subtotal appropriation should be higher, adding the numbers up, I have seventy-five million, two hundred eight. If I add those up, just the numbers there, right? That means that if that's your estimation in the 2020-2021, which would have been set, you know, before the pandemic, now, we're looking at an estimate on this year's of \$42,692,000. That's a significant cut. That's a cut of \$32.5 million from a budget that was set pre-COVID to one now. That's a massive drop.

And so I'd like the minister to explain what accounts for this massive change in funding for Industry Programs & Partnerships.

Mr. Cullen: So, I think what the member is comparing, if he looks at the current Estimates book, is the \$80 million set aside last year versus the \$67 million this year, representing a \$13-million decrease.

And again, most of that is applicable to the reduction in the government—federal government support programs for COVID, because we no longer—and this year, we'll be receiving—to our knowledge—federal COVID support for programming in Manitoba.

As a result, that's why you'll see the decrease in expense revenue for this broad subappropriation.

Mr. Moses: I want to thank the minister for answering my questions today. I'll provide some time for the member for St. Boniface to ask some questions.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses).

I'm sorry. The honourable member for St. Boniface.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Thank you, I was flattered there for a moment.

Yes, thank you very much, It's nice to have an opportunity to ask some questions.

And I do really just want to focus on the—as much as possible, on the Estimates and just get some background on some of—just some follow-up on some of the proposals that have been discussed.

So, I'll just start with the Small Business Venture Capital Tax Credit. They've got a baseline in targets. The baseline is 12 per cent, then it moves to 25 per cent.

Just—you know, I know that there are challenges for some small businesses accessing—can the minister say, you know, it's a—those seem to be low targets, but also what—explain, if possible, what the challenge has been around about subscribing to that, or what—why do we have a low participation rate, of you know, 12 to 25 per cent in the small business 'venturive' capital tax credit, if there's any accounting or explanation for that?

* (12:00)

Mr. Cullen: I thank the member for the question regarding this important tax credit.

So the targets in the book—I think it's important I explain the targets in the book, first of all. So, when a business approaches us, they will determine a level of funding that they want to be available for the tax credit. And then, once we approve that, then it is up to the company to ascertain and find that investment. So what we were saying, the baseline target for, I guess now, or I guess right now we're at 12 per cent, and we want to enhance that, quite frankly. I mean, that's the whole idea of providing a tax credit is to seek additional investments there.

I can't—I don't know exactly why we're not achieving greater rates right now. That—I haven't heard that from Manitoba businesses. The businesses that I've been hearing from are—they're excited about the tax credit. They're now excited about the enhancements where we've made this a permanent tax credit

to them. And we've also made it applicable to the new venture capital fund as well. So in context, this would be the '21 tax year; 25 Manitoba businesses have raised \$19.1 million through this particular tax credit, so that's where we're at as of 2021. Hopefully now that we've made this signal that this is a permanent tax credit, we'll attract more investments for Manitoba businesses.

Mr. Lamont: Thank you for that. I know there was an Innovation Growth Program, and I just wanted to follow up on that because I had a constituent who had some challenges just because it seemed to be that there were—there was a very high bar. They're actually a local manufacturer; they were all things—they're—they ended up being defined—they ended up being denied funding in part because of the—it was essentially the burden of paperwork, that it was—they were quite surprised in that they—the levels of paperwork or demands that needed to be requested.

So I was just wondering whether there had been many challenges in terms of that or in terms of—or had there been any changes to the Innovation Growth Program just because I know that they were surprised. And I'll see if I can find the specifics of it, but it was called Prairie Velo. They build accessible self-powered vehicles for people with disabilities. It's all built here, but they were having trouble accessing the fund simply because of the very high bar that was placed—they were on that.

So I was just wondering if you had had any feedback or if there—do you—perceived any feedback and challenges around the Innovation Growth Program just in terms of essentially obstacles or just a very high bar being set in order for people to qualify for funding.

Mr. Cullen: Thanks for raising this particular question. This is a relatively new program designed for the small, medium enterprises. It looks like as—I think it's in the past year—then, we had 16 Manitoba companies approved for \$727,000, so there has been some success to date.

Clearly, from a government perspective, we want to balance simplicity with—at the same time, protecting taxpayers. So, again, this being a relatively new program, the department has gone back one on one with the companies that were successful and the companies that were not successful.

So we have recognized there were some challenges, so the process will be streamlined and, in the

very near future, there will be new applications coming forward as well.

So, to the member's point, point taken, and recognize there's some challenges and remedial action will be taken.

Mr. Lamont: And just, I have found it—I found the reference is not in terms of a question, but just for the minister's information, was it—the application required proof of matching project funding, but the applicant, in this case, was providing in-kind contributions which were not treated by the program as matching funding.

And the other—the major challenge was it's—the corporation's funded via share equity, have to have at least \$25,000 in retained earnings. The balance sheet showed \$100 in common shares and five point one thousand dollars in retained earnings. But for a—certainly for a small, I mean, for a small business, that would have been—normally, that would have been reasonable. So that was it, it was just that that was the specific obstacle.

* (12:10)

So I—and I did see that the government is bringing forward a \$50-million program for venture capital, which is excellent.

I was just wondering just—in terms of—I know—I understand that there are a number of different reporting entities, I was just wondering how is any—like because—it's MTA that is—was selected to deliver it. I was just trying—how was MTA selected and why MTA rather than, say, one of the other reporting entities, like one of the—an economic development fund, Economic Development Winnipeg or the Manitoba development corporation—or the rural Manitoba economic deflow—why, why do it through MTA rather than—how was MTA selected and why do it through MTA rather than through one of these other existing organizations?

Mr. Cullen: Thanks for raising this important question. We are excited about the new venture tax—or for the new venture capital fund, for sure. We're in the process of putting the bylaws around the actual fund and the mechanism itself, and that's going to take us a few months to develop.

In the meantime, we need some advice in terms of establishing that structure. And we set up a small group to assist us in making sure we get the structure in the bylaws correct around that particular fund and that corporation, the management corporation, there.

In the meantime, we have the money set aside, and given that the structure—the fund itself hasn't been established, we needed a mechanism to hold the money and then work with us in developing that structure.

And we did look at a number of different options for that for this short period of time. We're quite optimistic we will have the fund functional this fall.

So we—the Manitoba technology 'exhilarator' is an organization that is experienced in working with entrepreneurs and certainly emergency—emerging companies, and they—they're playing in that field, quite frankly, right now. So they're very familiar with the venture capital field, and they're also familiar with the—prior to venture capital, the angel investors.

So they're certainly in that space on a regular basis. They do have expertise over there at the CEO level, for sure, that can help us in terms of making sure we get the actual venture capital component right. So we're just using that organization to, in fact, hold the money for now and then provide advice to make sure that we get the actual venture capital fund correct, with the intent that the money will be hopefully transferred to the new venture capital this fall and be operational.

Mr. Lamont: Thank you for that answer. Yes, just—there's a question on reconciliation and diversity training that on page 16 it says it'll begin to track the number of employees who've completed mandatory diversity and inclusion training.

But the goal is 70 per cent for this department, and in some other departments it's 90, so I'm just wondering why that's—why is it a different than what other departments might be?

Mr. Cullen: Thanks for pointing that out. Clearly, we did have quite a vacancy in the department and we're in the process of hiring a number of staff. So certainly it's our expectation to get as many people through that program as possible.

You know, I expect this target is pretty low. We'll certainly go back and have a look at what other departments are doing, and that's, to me, a target that certainly could be reassessed for another year.

Mr. Lamont: Just a question, I guess, on unemployment, which is always—it's a big issue, but there are two issues around it: one, I think, is that you know our unemployment rate—I think it's been going up a little bit—one is that we see an out-migration of Manitobans, right, so that sometimes your unemployment drops or

your labour force can shrink. But the other is around First Nations employment.

So—and I know this is a challenge but is actually in some ways—so one of the questions is that when we measure unemployment, it—the fed—it is a problem with the federal government that Statistics Canada does not measure unemployment on reserve, right?

So I'm wondering if that's something that—so in a sense, and you have reserves where there can be very high unemployment—I was just wondering whether—I mean, we could talk, that all us—all parties could come together and challenge the federal government to start measuring unemployment on reserve. But is that something that you might consider or, certainly because this is a—it's a sense that if you're measuring it, you're not—we can't pay attention to it. But this is a challenge because it—my concern is that we end up understating. Well, first of all, they're all Manitobans, and second, we end up understating the actual levels of unemployment.

And I know that it's not—again, it's not for the provincial government, or whether that's something you might consider looking at, just in terms of getting a more accurate picture of unemployment and what we have to do to respond to it in Manitoba.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, the member raises a very valid point, especially now where we find ourselves in a labour shortage in, quite frankly, pretty well every sector of the province and every region of the province, including northern Manitoba.

To me, this is a real opportunity to engage Indigenous populations in the labour force and, quite frankly, the member is right. It has been a challenge going forward but we have taken some steps, as a government, to try to assist in that through training and other programs. We have had a number of very serious discussions with our post-secondary schools in terms of how can they help us in this endeavour.

And the member may know I was in this role six years ago and my deputy at the time was Jamie Wilson, and we had this conversation a number of times. And I'm happy to see Jamie is over with Red River College, Red River polytechnic now. So, ideally focus on this particular issue.

So, we're serious about trying to make that happen and work with our post-secondaries to see what we can achieve on that front.

So, thank you for raising that.

* (12:20)

Mr. Lamont: Thank you for that answer, yes, because it is—it—because it's not being measured, it's sort of—there's a real risk that it's being—it ends up being overlooked by everyone, right, by us, but with the federal government as well. So, it's this argument of acknowledging that there's this issue here that needs to be addressed.

And just—I guess, my last question is that, we have a new Economic Development board secretariat office; just how is that different in terms of engagement or structure than the Economic Development office that was in place since 2016?

Mr. Cullen: Thank you for the question.

And to the question about venture capital funds, I have a quick one—two-page brochure here that I think will help the member understand the venture capital—how it will be established. And I'll get that over to him before we leave today.

So, yes, the concept of the new Economic Development board is to make sure that we're attracting investment and that we're trying to make decisions at the speed of business as opposed to the speed of government.

So, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) will chair the actual committee of Cabinet, I'll vice-chair, and there'll be six other ministers there.

Recognizing then—when companies come to either—new to Manitoba or existing companies that want to invest, they're—have to deal with a number of departments. So the concept is to get those departments at the table to try to address those issues. So if we meet on a regular basis, address those issues as quick as we can and then move on.

So the committee will be supported by a secretariat; Michael Swistun has come on to be secretary of that secretariat. And the secretariat will be composed of—it'll be relatively small, concise and, ideally, nimble so that we can respond to these businesses quickly.

We will bring on some of the existing people in economic development from across different departments, and then we'll also be bringing in the private sector to help as well, probably on a contract basis, you know, as needed, with the right skills to assist that particular industry in moving through the system.

So, quite a bit different—you know, we're still going to be working with the department and our external partners, Economic Development Winnipeg, rural economic development corporation, CEDF. We

just have to make sure that everybody understands their role and responsibilities, and then how do we all work together to make sure we're not overlapping and duplicating services.

So the secretariat will be responsible for some of those, I would say, more challenging, more intricate business that—having to deal with the whole of government. So, that's the concept.

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any further questions?

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.

Resolution 10.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$67,099,000 for Economic Development, Investment and Trade, Industry Programs and Partnerships, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$92,010,000 for Economic Development, Investment and Trade, Workforce Training and Employment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,157,000 for Economic Development, Investment and Trade, Economic Development Board Secretariat, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,000,000 for Economic Development, Investment and Trade, Loans and Guarantees Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

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.

At this point we request that all ministerial and opposition staff leave the Chamber in consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Moses: I move, that line item 10.1(a), minister's salary, be reduced to \$33,600.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in—*[interjection]* The honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses) has moved that line item 10.1(a), minister's salary, be reduced to \$33,600.

The motion is in order.

Is there any debate?

Seeing none, is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the amendment pass?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear some noes.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour, say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: I think the Nays have it.

Mr. Moses: On division.

Mr. Chairperson: On division.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 10.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,586,000 for Economic Development, Investment and Trade, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Economic Development, Investment and Trade.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

What is the will of the—oh, the honourable member for St. Vital.

Mr. Moses: Can I canvass the committee to see if it's the will to call it 12:30?

Mr. Chairperson: You can.

Is it the will of the committee to call it 12:30?
[Agreed]

The time being 12:30, committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): The hour being 12:30 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, May 24th, 2022.

Have a great long weekend, everybody.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, May 20, 2022

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