

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

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

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

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, October 3, 2022

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

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

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

Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

**Madam Speaker:** Introduction of bills? Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

### Women's History Month

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women):** Madam Speaker, I'm proud today to stand up and announce that October, of course, is Women's History Month in Canada. It is an annual tradition for us to celebrate the achievements of women throughout our history and recognize the trailblazers who have shaped our country and our way of life.

Here in Manitoba, we recognize the essential role that women in communities across our province have played in shaping our province's past and future.

Manitoba has a proud history of strong, ambitious women, standing up and fighting for change. Right here in this Legislative Assembly, we have seen some historic moments for women with the first Clerk of the executive assembly to be here in our presence today. We have the first elected Indigenous woman in the province's history with the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak here. As well, of course, we have the first woman Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) in our midst as well right here.

So, congratulations to all these women for the groundbreaking roles that they play and for the generations of women behind them that they are inspiring.

I encourage all Manitobans to take a moment this month to think about, learn and celebrate amazing women who have helped shape this province.

In 2020, our government announced a way to celebrate these women with the empower awards. Last year, we had a ceremony at the Fort Gibraltar and recognized two winners, Divya Sharma and Lorie English, for the hard work that they did during the pandemic, especially to support women in our community.

We're pleased to announce earlier this year that we would be opening up these awards once again. This year, the theme is women working towards reconciliation and healing.

Two deserving Manitoba women, one adult and one youth, will be honoured at the 2022 Empower Women Awards on October 20th of 2022. Many women and youth were nominated this year, from a variety of sectors and areas of Manitoba.

The award winners will be selected based on the overall strength of their nomination as well as community involvement and intersectionality of their efforts, along with addressing systemic issues, lasting change and scale of response.

I look forward to learning about each of this year's nominees, which include artists and dancers, community organizers and activists, former and aspiring politicians, and aviation and STEM educators.

I want to thank all of those who are nominated, as well as those who did the nominating, for recognizing the important work of those in our community, and I certainly look forward to seeing members of the Legislative Assembly attend that ceremony to recognize, establish and honour these women.

So, happy Women's History Month.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Further ministerial statements? *[interjection]*

Oh, pardon me, the honourable—sorry—the honourable member for Notre Dame.

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** Madam Speaker, since 1992, October has been celebrated as Women's History Month, making this year its 30th anniversary. It is a time to celebrate the remarkable achievements of women throughout history, and to reflect on the changes we still need to make to achieve gender equality today.

We must also use this time to remember that we still have much more to do. Every achievement a woman has made has been done in spite of the barriers that we continue to face. The gender pay gap in Canada persists, and is even more pronounced for racialized and Indigenous women as well as newcomers and women with disabilities.

Women are still overrepresented in low-wage jobs and in low-paid care-sector jobs. Even though this is crucial work, these jobs are undervalued because of their gendered associations. Many racialized and newcomer women work in severely underpaid care sectors, including home care, long-term care and as direct support professionals. Despite the critical importance of this work, particularly as we face a health-care staffing crisis, many are forced to work with no benefits or full-time status.

Supporting these women workers needs to be central to our Health human resource strategy for our province as we continue to navigate this pandemic and as we prepare for Manitoba's aging population. This work is critical to care.

This Women's History Month, let's uplift the achievements of all women, and continue to fight for justice and equity for women workers.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

**Ms. Lamoureux:** Here in Canada, we recognize Women's History Month in October, and I always appreciate using this opportunity to talk a bit about milestones we have accomplished as women and concerns that are very real and applicable to us to this day.

This year, however, I would like to use this as an opportunity to highlight a few women in this House.

Madam Speaker, I want to start with the Minister of Municipal Relations (Ms. Clarke). In the spring, the minister went out of her way and dedicated time to sit down with myself and a member from the NDP to talk about ways us, as MLAs, could better work together. This initiative she took really inspired me and demonstrated the importance of working together.

The second member I would like to recognize is the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin). Madam Speaker, this member has always been kind in her approach and I believe that, because of this, when she talks, people listen. This member motivates me to remain focused.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, I want to recognize our Clerk, Patricia Chaychuk. Patricia does an incredible job at maintaining records of parliamentary proceedings and ensuring orders of the day are followed. There is a lot more to the job, but what I really admire about her is her professionalism. No matter the topic or proceeding, I believe her professionalism speaks to the respect she has for our institution.

\* (13:40)

Madam Speaker, my hope is that by highlighting women on both sides of the House, as sitting MLAs and our Clerk, who we all know really runs this House, we remind ourselves of the impact that women in all parties, partisan or non-partisan, have in our workplace and I think we need more of it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Further ministerial statements?

The honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

### Islamic History Month

**Hon. Andrew Smith (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage):** I rise today to recognize and celebrate Islamic History Month, which our province observes annually in the month of October.

Manitoba became the first Canadian province to proclaim an Islamic History Month, and through many contributions to our cultural, social, scientific and economic spheres, Muslim communities have played an important role in our continually evolving provincial and national identities.

For over 150 years, Muslims have called Canada home. The first census, conducted in 1871, reported 13 Muslims among the population of Canada. By the time the nation's first mosque was built in 1938, there were close to 700 Muslims in our country. It is truly a Canadian act, as the mosque was founded and built by a 'colotion' of people from different faiths.

Following changes to the national immigration policies in the 1960s, Canada's Muslim community grew, and today it is one of the country's most diverse groups, representing many distinct cultures, ethnicities, languages, practices and traditions.

Locally, this diversity was demonstrated recently at Winnipeg's Eid celebration in May. This event attracted over 10,000 members of the Muslim community to gather, pray and give charity in congregation with each other

Whether you are in a small town or a big city, the impact of Manitoba's Muslim community is evident through their contributions to volunteerism in the arts, creative industries, sports, business, medicine, education, the trades, politics and, of course, public service. This 'dedigation' to community building exemplifies one of the core values that unites so many of us Manitobans.

However, we cannot, Madam Speaker, overlook the fact that many Muslims, locally and abroad, have endured many struggles. And despite instances of hurtful acts, Manitobans have chosen to move forward in unity to continue to enhance life in our province based on our commitment to 'faciltilate'-facilitate respect, understanding and celebration of diversity. When people of all backgrounds are welcomed, our collective perspective expands, creating a province that is richer and more fulfilling for all Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, I'd encourage all Manitobans to take advantage of the activities and events taking place throughout the month to better understand the

contributions of Muslims to our province, and I ask those present to join me in celebrating the start of Islamic History Month 2022.

Thank you.

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** It is my honour to rise today to speak to Islamic heritage month. Under our previous government, Manitoba became the first province in Canada to proclaim such a month to recognize and celebrate the history and heritage of Manitoba Muslims.

Diversity is our strength. We are fortunate to share cultural traditions with our neighbours.

This month we are celebrating and recognizing the importance of Islamic history and heritage. Manitobans and Canadians have an opportunity this month to learn more about the history of Islam in Canada and recognize many achievements of Muslim Canadians in the arts, sports, academics, sciences, literature and their communities.

It is also a time to acknowledge the ongoing challenges and barriers that Muslim Canadians face. This month is an opportunity to recognize and address continuing racism and hate that we must fight against.

Together, we must combat all forms of discrimination, Islamophobia and hate-fuelled violence directed at Muslim communities. This month is a time to continue working towards a compassionate, inclusive and safer Canada for everyone.

As we celebrate Islamic heritage month this month, I encourage all Manitobans to take the time to participate in local cultural events and learn more about the resiliency and strength of Muslim Canadians in Manitoba and around the world.

I want to wish a happy Islamic heritage month to all.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

**Mr. Gerrard:** In Manitoba, Madam Speaker, we have an ever-growing Islamic community. It includes many born in Canada and many who immigrated from various countries around the world.

We are fortunate here to have leaders in the Islamic community, including Albert El Tassi and

Shahina Siddiqui, who have worked very hard to build bridges with other communities in our province.

Because of this work, on many occasions, political and faith leaders in Manitoba have stood strong against discrimination directed against those in the Islamic community.

Some years ago, I attended a talk in Winnipeg by Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish, a Palestinian doctor, born and raised in the Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza. He worked as a doctor in both Israel and Gaza before coming to Canada. As a humanitarian, he sees the need for improved health and education for women as the way forward.

On January 16, 2009, his three daughters and his niece were killed in the fighting in Gaza. In spite of the loss of his daughters and, indeed, in response to it, he wrote a book titled *I Shall Not Hate*, dedicated to finding a way for us all to live together in peace.

The Islamic community has demonstrated that it has both strength and compassion. In the last year, I've worked closely with many in the local Islamic community to help refugees who've escaped from Afghanistan or are trying to escape and to come to Manitoba, including many who want to join their relatives here. The stories I hear are compelling and heartbreaking, and it's heartwarming that Manitobans are listening and helping.

Last Saturday evening, the Nigerian Association of Manitoba banquet featured both Christian and Islamic prayers before dinner, an acknowledgement of the two major faiths of people from Nigeria.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Merci. Miigwech.

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### Daniel Alexander Stokes

**Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Municipal Relations):** Life as we know it can change in a day or even a moment.

Too often we neglect to say the things we wish later that we had or would spend a bit of time more with someone we—really needed that time or a gesture of kindness and friendship could've changed someone's day or even their life. We need to live without regrets; it would make our world a better place for everyone.

On July 24th, 2022, the life of David [*phonetic*]-Daniel Alexander Stokes, my special assistant, ended

very quickly, at the young age of 24 years. His family was devastated by his sudden death, as were we, his political family and friends. He was a healthy and a vibrant young man with so much energy and so many friends in his life. His future was full of opportunities, and he was an inspiration to all who knew him.

His service of remembrance was attended by an overwhelming number of family, friends and colleagues. Even his special pet, Murphy, attended with his family. I had so much respect for this young man who had such a pride and confidence and could share his personal feelings with all of us. He fulfilled the requirements of his government position with skill and diplomacy.

Days after his service, his parents, Angie and Rich, and his siblings, Adam and Lauren, came to our office to pick up his personal belongings, receive some special gifts from his colleagues and share a time of remembrance with our staff and work friends.

What we expected to be a tearful and sombre event turned into many funny stories from everyone, including his family, about Daniel and his structured life. He had been a shining star in all our lives; we had so many amazing memories. The meeting ended with a family photo of all of us, many hugs and our hearts feeling a sense of appreciation for his short life and his time with all of us.

Many people live long and productive years while some are only given a short time to fulfill God's plan for them. At Daniel's service, the priest spoke of his strong and unwavering commitment to his faith. That was the young man as we knew him.

Daniel is missed but he lives in our hearts and he walks the halls of this Legislature, keeping an eye on all of us.

So today I encourage all of you, speak the words, do the deeds, be respectful to all others and live your life with purpose and conviction. Tomorrow is not promised.

I ask you all to show your support for Daniel's family, his mom and dad, Rich and Angie, his brother Adam and his uncle, Patrol Sergeant Ward Gordon, who are with us today.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

\* (13:50)

### International Walk to School Month

**Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley):** Madam Speaker, October is International Walk to School Month and

October 5th is Walk to School Day. During this month, children and their families are encouraged to walk to school instead of driving. And in Manitoba, activities are organized by the Green Action Centre as part of their Walktober campaign.

I want to welcome staff from the Green Action Centre that are here today.

Walktober focuses on creating healthy routines of active transportation within the community and is an opportunity for students to explore their neighbourhood and build confidence by safely walking or biking to school. They provide workshops and activity kits for classrooms, including activities that can be adapted to rural areas. For many years, Green Action Centre has promoted the model of a walking school bus in neighbourhoods where that is feasible.

There are many benefits to walking. Time spent outdoors in the fresh air means a more energized start to the day for students. This helps improve students' concentration and the added physical activity contributes to better health. Active school travel reduces car trips, which reduces our carbon footprint. It also reduces traffic congestion around schools that is directly linked to poor air quality from the concentration of greenhouse gas emissions around the entrance to schools.

Studies show that diesel school buses contribute to the development of asthma in children and can harm brain and lung development. Walk to school month is an excellent time to bring attention to the harms of fossil-fuelled forms of travel, explore solutions such as transitioning to electric school buses and reduce barriers to using active travel in urban areas.

Manitoba students are not alone: International Walk to School Day takes place in 40 countries around the world. And while walking to school may have been the norm for many of us in the past, today families must be more intentional about joyful movement, taking the time to breathe in the outdoors and to appreciate and protect the environment we are trying to preserve for our children.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Makenna Stratton**

**Hon. Andrew Smith (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to tell a story of a courageous youth and her family who live in my constituency.

Makenna Stratton has always been a loving, caring and energetic child with many, many friends.

September of 2021, she was so happy to be starting grade 7 at Christ The King School with her peers.

On October 20th, her mother Monique brought her to the Children's Hospital and were then told something no parent ever wants to hear: that Makenna had cancer, acute myeloid leukemia, or AML.

This form of leukemia is high risk, aggressive blood and bone marrow cancer that requires extremely aggressive treatment. She was admitted that day and set up on a clinical trial, with chemotherapy to begin on October 22nd.

Before therapy was to start, she gracefully opted to have her long hair shaved off and donated to make wigs for others undergoing chemotherapy. It was at this point that the reality of the journey with childhood cancer began for Makenna and her family.

Her rigorous treatment plan was five cycles of adult-strength chemotherapy, just over 100 doses, and countless blood and platelet transfusions, all of which took six and a half months to complete. She spent 203 days on CK5, the pediatric cancer ward at HSC Children's Hospital, and 13 days at PICU, fighting for her life against a 'neuropenic' infection.

While Makenna was enduring the battle, she had overwhelming support from her family and extended network of friends and volunteers from many organizations. One such group in particular, the Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Support Group of Manitoba and their director, Naomi Fehr, raised \$27,000 in 24 hours after reading a post from Monique about her daughter's situation in January of this year. The money was raised in order to feed all the families on the pediatric cancer ward through to the end of February.

After so many difficult months of fighting cancer, I am happy to say that on May 10th, Mighty Makenna, as she's become known for her courage and bravery, was discharged from CK5, and she rang her remission bell that very day.

Please join me in recognizing Makenna and her family: Monique, Geoff and Tyler Stratton, who are here with us today.

#### **All Abilities Soccer Program**

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** Madam Speaker, today I recognize the Bonivital Soccer Club for launching a new initiative called the All Abilities Soccer Program, starting with a pilot project this October 29th and 30th.

Every child deserves a chance to build lasting friendships, make memories and feel like they belong. The All Abilities Soccer Program, created by dedicated coach Jason Moist, who is in the gallery with us today, along with club executive director Steven Gzebb, will look to provide children and youth, ages nine to 16, with intellectual or physical disabilities, an opportunity to learn and play soccer. The fully inclusive program is designed and adapted for children and youth with any ability.

The All Abilities Soccer Program strives for an inclusive environment where all children and youth are given their opportunity to shine. Whether a child uses a wheelchair, walker, lives with an intellectual, communication or developmental disability, the club's goal is to provide support to all and welcome all to the field.

The emphasis of this program is on development and meaningful participation, rather than competition. The All Abilities Soccer Program will benefit children by helping them develop a sense of belonging to community and club, learn the value of being part of a team, improve self-esteem, as well as improve fitness and social skills.

Families will receive a fun and meaningful experience for all. Games and activities will be adapted to ensure every child's participation. The program is run in a safe and healthy environment, and participants' parents will have the opportunity to network with other families for support and information sharing.

For details on All Abilities Soccer Program, please visit [bonivitalsoccer.com](http://bonivitalsoccer.com).

I invite all members to join me in celebrating the work of the Bonivital Soccer Club, coach Jason Moist, executive director Steven Gzebb, and all staff and volunteers at the club.

Thank you.

#### **Norma Wood & Joe Wiwchar**

**Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance):** Madam Speaker, today I recognize Norma Wood, the head leader of the Morden Achievers 4-H Club. Norma has been a part of Morden Achievers 4-H since it started 40 years ago. Norma embodies the key values of 4-H: head, heart, hands and health.

Former 4-H leader Cathy Sandercock said you cannot think about 4-H without one person's name coming to mind, and that's Norma. As a leader, her

kitchen table was a safe place for children of every faith, background and education level.

She shared sewing skills and a zest for knowledge with four generations of youth in the community. She led the club; she co-ordinated communication competitions, achievement nights, ditch cleaning, fundraisers, and even decorated the 4-H parade float every year in Corn and Apple with volunteers. She's been recognized as the longest serving 4-H leader in the province.

Thank you, Norma, for sharing your knowledge and investing in children all these 40 years.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Morden resident Joe Wiwchar. Joe has managed the Manitoba Baseball Hall of Fame and museum since it—the day it opened in 1999, at Access Event Centre in Morden, collecting artifacts, celebrating outstanding athletes, coaches and officials and, of course, running the annual induction ceremony.

He's considered a cornerstone of the Manitoba baseball community. He's been an amazing representative of baseball, working with countless youth and as a baseball coach continuously since 1953. Joe has worked with provincial, western, and national teams. He's been a player, a coach, an umpire, a mentor and an administrator.

One of the quotes Joe loves to live by is: I feel that the greatest reward for doing is the opportunity to do more.

Madam Speaker, we want to wish Joe all the best as he slides into retirement and thank him for the countless hours that he has given to baseball in Manitoba.

#### **Introduction of Guests**

**Madam Speaker:** I would now like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Tina Beaudry-Mellor, who is the former Saskatchewan Party minister of advanced education and the status of women and innovation, who is the guest of the honourable Minister of Families (Ms. Squires).

\* (14:00)

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



## ORAL QUESTIONS

### St. Boniface Hospital Foundation Donations for ER Remodel

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Madam Speaker, for years Brian Pallister and the Premier cut our health-care system. They forced those on the front lines and patients to undergo tremendous adversity and difficult situations. And instead of investing in health care, the Premier forced our hospitals to ask for private money to fund essential health-care services.

I'll table a letter from the St. Boniface Hospital Foundation which hit doorsteps in Winnipeg recently. It asks for donations to help fund the construction of the emergency room at St. Boniface Hospital, asking Manitobans to chip in private dollars to pay for the emergency room at St. B, which the government should rightly be footing the bill for.

Why is the Premier forcing our hospitals to ask for donations for essential health-care services?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** Thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question.

In fact, we've been out listening to Manitobans, Madam Speaker. We've been taking action when it comes to health care on their behalf and we've been getting things done.

The Leader of the Opposition mentions the St. Boniface ER expansion, and I'm proud to announce, as I did months ago, along with the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon), at St. Boniface, Madam Speaker, \$141-million investment into the emergency room at St. Boniface Hospital.

Madam Speaker, we will continue to take action on behalf of Manitobans.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, instead of funding new surgery spaces at the Concordia Hospital, the Premier said that the Concordia hospital foundation would have to ask for donations.

That's wrong. We should be investing in public health care. We should be investing in essential services like operating rooms in which to deliver surgeries.

Now today, again, we learn that foundations are fundraising for another essential project. This time it's the emergency room at the St. Boniface Hospital.

This project shouldn't depend on private donations from Manitobans. This is the Health budget. This is the clearest definition that we could be talking about: building an emergency room. We should be investing in our hospitals instead of cutting them.

Will the Premier stop forcing hospitals to ask for donations for projects they should be paying for, such as the St. B ER?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, once again, the Leader of the Opposition is misleading and doesn't—won't stick to the facts, Madam Speaker.

So, the facts are that we are investing more than \$1 billion more than the NDP ever did in our health-care system in the province of Manitoba because we are listening to Manitobans, we're taking action and we're getting things done; \$141 million more for the emergency room for St. Boniface Hospital.

It is nothing new in the province of Manitoba. It's been taking place for decades, where philanthropy is live and well in Manitoba, where Manitobans want to contribute to our health-care system, Madam Speaker, and we will continue to rely on them and work closely with them to ensure that Manitobans get the health care they need when they need it.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** I just wanted to acknowledge that the Premier confirmed that she's going to rely on private donations to fund essential health-care services.

It's much like on the first day of this session when she said she was going to increase the amount of contracting out. First with Concordia Hospital, and now with St. Boniface Hospital, we see this government—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Kinew:** —relying on private money to pay for essential services that should be paid for by the government.

It's a fundamental Canadian value that you should have universal access to health care through a public system. And yet we're just not getting that sort of investment from this government. The Premier needs to reverse course.

Will she stop forcing St. Boniface Hospital Foundation to ask for donations for their emergency room and instead pay for it out of the public resources?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Surely, the Leader of the Opposition is not saying that we should cancel the foundations throughout our province, Madam Speaker. These community contributions have been the backbone of our province for decades.

I'll rely—I'll remind the member opposite, during the dark days of the previous NDP government, community contributions took place even back then. But I'll remind him again—\$141 million to the emergency room at St. Boniface Hospital.

We will continue to make investments to these institutions in the province of Manitoba, Madam Speaker. Question is, what's his plan, or does he have one?

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

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

#### **Winnipeg Health Region Number of Surgeries Performed**

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Madam Speaker, our plan on this side of the House is simple: universal public access to health care for Manitobans.

We know that one area where this government has failed Manitobans is when it comes to getting timely access to surgeries. Too many Manitobans are waiting, and new data from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority proves just how dire this situation actually is.

The Stefanson government performed 440 fewer surgeries in the entire Winnipeg health region last year than the year prior. I'll table the proof of this. It's clear that there is a failure when it comes to the provision of surgeries. It's why so many Manitobans are speaking out against this government on health care.

Will the Premier tell this House why her government performed fewer surgeries last year than when Brian Pallister was the premier?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** Well, Madam Speaker, first of all, I want to thank those who are taking time out of their busy schedules to work and help us out on the diagnostic and surgical task force. They are working day in and day out to ensure that Manitobans can get the surgical and diagnostic procedures they need when they need them.

We have invested more than \$110 million in the surgical and diagnostic areas within our province and

we will continue to make those investments. We are partnering out there in the community to ensure that we expand the number of surgical procedures that can take place to ensure that more Manitobans get access to those surgical procedures, not less.

If the NDP were in charge, they wouldn't allow that at all. That's thousands of surgical procedures that they wouldn't allow at all. They would say no to that. I can tell you, we will stand for Manitobans and get them the health care they need when they need it, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, the problem is that Manitobans are not getting the health care they need with this government.

Again, I'll table another set of documents here, further proof of this government's failure to deliver surgeries. If we zoom in at the Health Sciences Centre, we see that there were many more surgeries last year than the year prior, and there were thousands fewer surgeries that year than in 2019.

The record of this government is clear. Their actions have only made the surgical backlog worse—500 fewer surgeries in our province at the HSC. That's because—that means seniors are waiting for hip, knee and other important procedures. That's wrong.

Will the Premier explain to the House why the PC government is falling further behind when it comes to surgeries?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Madam Speaker, the document that the Leader of the Opposition just tabled before this House obviously indicated some years that we were going through a worldwide pandemic—a worldwide pandemic. That's when things were shut down. It was a very, very challenging time. And there weren't as many surgical and diagnostic procedures taking place at that time.

Now, I mean, the Leader of the Opposition doesn't like the truth. He doesn't like the facts. But the facts are that we are investing more than \$110 million more to ensure that Manitobans get the surgical and diagnostic procedures that they need when they need them, Madam Speaker. And we are—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** —looking to expand that capacity beyond just our hospitals here. We're making to—we're

making sure that Manitobans get those procedures when they need it.

Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has already said he wouldn't do that. We will make sure that Manitobans get the surgical and diagnostic procedures they need when they need it.

\* (14:10)

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, when we dive into the Premier's time as Health Minister, we see that Manitoba's health-care system collapsed. It was an unprecedented situation anywhere in North America. Now, when we look at the proof, the government that—the documents that this government publishes with respect to surgeries, we see that there are a hundred fewer surgeries being performed in the province. I'll table the document for the Premier's perusal.

We see that the Stefanson government's record is clear. They are doing even a worse job than the Pallister government at providing surgeries to Manitoba. No one in Manitoba thought that Brian Pallister did a good job of managing the health-care system, and yet, apparently, things are even worse now.

Will the Premier finally abandon the cuts to health care which have caused so many Manitobans hardship these past many years?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition continues to put false information on the record within this House. The facts of the matter are that we are investing more than \$1 billion more than they ever did in—during their time when they were in office.

But I will say, Madam Speaker, we will not let our ideology get in the way of making sure that Manitobans get the surgeries and diagnostic procedures that they need when they need them. Even Gary Doer got that, back in the day; former NDP Premier Gary Doer contracted out for some services.

I shudder to think what will happen if this member, this Leader of the Opposition, ever becomes the leader and the premier of this province, because I tell you, that means that thousands upon thousands of surgeries and diagnostic procedures will be cancelled. That's not what Manitobans want.

### Private Agency Nursing Government Use

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Madam Speaker, I'd like to table new information we received through freedom of information. It shows the use of private agency nurses is accelerating under the PC government. In the first half of 2022, Southern Health spent \$3.4 million. They are now on pace to have the highest use of agency nurses ever.

What is the minister doing to address this overreliance—[interjection]—it's an overreliance. Despite the fact that they want to heckle—[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Asagwara:** —and talk me down, Madam Speaker; it is an overreliance on private agencies.

What is the minister doing to address this?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I thank the member for Union Station for the question because, Madam Speaker, it gives me an opportunity to remind Manitobans that last year, when the Red Cross nurses came to Manitoba to assist us during the COVID pandemic, members opposite stood in this Chamber and said, send them home. But our government took the steps necessary during a challenging time to increase seats at the college of nursing: 259 seats. And then we went further and added 30 additional seats at the Red River College.

Madam Speaker, \$4.3 million for 37 additional nurse training seats at University College of the North, in the North—

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

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

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, last week the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) praised all the contracting out her government has done of health services with the private sector. The result of that approach is that there are over 2,400 vacant nurse positions in the public system, and tens of millions of dollars are being spent on private agencies. Meanwhile, our hospitals can't keep up with the waits that we've never seen before.

As we've shown today, in the southern region, \$3.4 million was spent in just the first six months of 2022.

Will the minister explain why her government's approach means more and more for-profit private agencies?

**Ms. Gordon:** Madam Speaker, I want to remind Manitobans that it was under the dark days of the NDP that individuals who wanted to come to Manitoba, internationally educated nurses, could not get licensure here. They said, no. On July 26th, our government said yes.

We are adding more nurses to the system; 115 nurses graduated—[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Gordon:** —last October. And more, Madam Speaker, will be added to the system, because the college of nursing has added a third intake.

We will continue to work with organizations like the college of nursing to add more nurses to the system—something they were not willing to do.

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

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has said it very clearly that she's contracting out health care.

Their approach is actively undermining public health care in Manitoba. There are more than 2,400—that's 2,400—nurse vacancies in the public system. Nurses in the public system are currently being mandated like never before.

Meanwhile, private agencies are provided more money and more flexibility. This needs to change. In the southern region, \$3.4 million was spent in just the first six months of 2022.

Why is the minister increasingly relying on for-profit, private agencies?

**Ms. Gordon:** Madam Speaker, for the internationally educated nurses that are watching today's discussion, I want them to know that our government is here to support them. The dark days of the NDP, they heard no and received no support, but our government is providing \$23,000 of financial assistance for individuals to get 'licent' and to go immediately into our health-care system.

Our new undergraduate nurse employees program saw 63 third- and fourth-year nursing students join the health system, Madam Speaker.

We are taking action. Where they said no, our government said yes.

### Surgical and Wait Times Development of Dashboard

**Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** Russell Audet, a young farmer, has been waiting for over two weeks for a spinal surgery after a tragic ATV accident. Several times, he's been told that his surgery has been scheduled, only to be told hours later that he's been pushed back.

Unfortunately, Russell's situation is not unique. Thousands of Manitobans are waiting for surgeries without any idea of when they're going to be scheduled. That's why the Premier needs to deliver on a surgical wait dashboard.

Will she do so today?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I want to put some facts on the record.

Last week, there were 1,117 non-emergent surgeries completed and 227 emergent surgeries were completed. This is over 101.5 per cent of pre-pandemic levels and I want to thank all the health-care workers at the front line that are working and so committed and passionate to providing care and surgeries to Manitobans during this very, very difficult time.

Last year, our government procured over 13,000 procedures through the RFSA process. We will continue to do the same to ensure Manitobans receive care.

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

**Ms. Fontaine:** The physical pain this young farmer and thousands of other Manitobans waiting for surgeries that—are experiencing is 'unfathomable,' Madam Speaker.

To make matters worse, Manitobans are waiting for surgeries and they don't know when they are going to be able to have their procedure.

The PCs promised to launch a diagnostic and surgical wait dashboard in July. They missed that deadline. Then they promised to launch it in September, and they've missed that deadline as well.

Madam Speaker, Russell and Manitobans deserve to know when his surgery will be scheduled.

When will this government finally launch the dashboard they promised?

**Ms. Gordon:** Under the NDP government, that individual would not receive surgery here in this

province or have the opportunity to receive service outside of the province, Madam Speaker. The—  
[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Gordon:** The dashboard, Madam Speaker, we want to ensure that we get it right. We want to ensure that it's user friendly for all Manitobans. We will get it right.

We will release the dashboard to Manitobans as soon as it's ready, Madam Speaker.

\* (14:20)

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

**Ms. Fontaine:** Madam Speaker, I clearly pointed out that they're not getting it right and, in the process, Manitobans are suffering. And they're suffering in pain.

A surgical wait dashboard would let Manitobans know how long it will take to get the procedures they need. It would provide the data on how many people are waiting for procedures and when those procedures are going to be done in a day.

Madam Speaker, thousands are waiting in pain and they're not knowing that they're going to be able to receive the procedure and when they're going to get it.

When will this government finally deliver on launching a surgical wait dashboard?

**Ms. Gordon:** Under the NDP, the Leader of the Opposition has said they would be suffering in pain for as long as they have to, Madam Speaker.

Wait times for the last five years have been routinely published on the government website, including most surgeries, diagnostics and cancer care services. We want to ensure Manitobans have access to accurate information—user-friendly information. The dashboard will be released, Madam Speaker. It's just the NDP fear mongering again. There's no facts.

We will release the dashboard.

### **Peguis First Nation Permanent Flood Protection**

**Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak):** Peguis First Nation community members are disappointed. They waited all summer to hear from this government if they would commit to helping out and build

permanent flood protection infrastructure. Yet, they've heard nothing.

Five times over the past 16 years, Peguis First Nation has had to deal with flooding. It's time for permanent flood protection infrastructure.

Will the minister make a commitment today?

**Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure):** I want to thank the member for The Pas-Kameesak for that question.

I'm not quite sure where she's getting her information from, Madam Speaker, because myself and my colleague, the honourable member—Minister for Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, both—met with Chief Hudson to talk about Peguis, and we're—actually, we were supposed to have a meeting—  
[interjection]—actually, we were supposed to have a meeting with Patty Hajdu, Minister Patty Hajdu, but when the Queen passed away, the meeting has been postponed.

So I'm not quite sure, Madam Speaker, where she's getting that—her information from. [interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

The honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak, on a supplementary question.

**Ms. Lathlin:** In fact, I got my information directly from Chief Hudson.

Every time Peguis First Nation is flooded, massive damage is done to homes and lives are upended. In fact, 917 lives are still displaced from that community here in Winnipeg, yet no permanent solution has been invested in.

Permanent solutions would save peoples' homes and it would save millions of dollars. Why won't the minister do the common sense thing and invest in permanent flood protection?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** The member should 'auckshy' realize that a lot of times when it comes to the responsibility for—when it comes to flood protection, it's with the Indigenous Services Canada, Madam Speaker. They're the ones that are leaders on when it comes to flooding, and they're the ones that are actually the ones that look at long term. And they have to lead on this project. And we actually have conversations already with the federal government to look at a long-term strategy.

We're looking at short term. Our staff have been out there to Peguis First Nation during the flood and

making sure that they had all the assistance. We even sent them 50 pumps to help out with the First Nation. And we actually have conversations with Chief Hudson right now, and we're doing everything we—possible to make sure that we move forward and have a permanent solution.

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

**Ms. Lathlin:** Peguis First Nation community members were forcibly relocated to their current area in 1907. They were moved from an 'abundant' farming area to a flood zone. And yet, they still don't have permanent flood protection infrastructure. This is wrong, Madam Speaker.

The minister could commit to investing in permanent flood protection and infrastructure. Will he do so today?

Ekosi.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Madam Speaker, the member for the Pas-Kameeak [*phonetic*], she could take a history lesson, because it was the federal government that moved the First Nations to—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** —the location right now.

The thing is, we are working with the federal government to make sure that we do things right—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** —Madam Speaker, and making sure that we do permanent structures when it comes to long-term opportunities, to make sure that we—there's flood mitigation for Peguis First Nation.

We're there to help them, Madam Speaker. What is their plan?

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

With all this noise that was emanating from the floor, I could not hear what was being said. And I'm going to ask for everybody's co-operation.

There's heckling, then there's yelling. And I don't think any of that serves this House, and especially when the Speaker can't hear what is being said so I could rule on something.

So I'm going to ask for everybody's co-operation, please.

### Education System Funding Use of Consulting Firms

**Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona):** This government would rather give money to consultants than spend it in the classroom. First, it was one and a half million on their failed bill 64, then it was a quarter of a million on a curriculum evaluator. Now, through FIPPA, Madam Speaker, we've learned that they're spending a further one and a half million on an education funding review. I'll table the documents.

The minister could have saved this money and listened to what Manitobans want: no more cuts to education.

Will the minister listen to Manitobans and stop making the cuts to education?

**Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** I appreciate the question coming from the member from Transcona where he's at least acknowledging the fact that, yes, we do actually answer FIPPA requests, Madam Speaker.

And it gives me an opportunity, Madam Speaker—I will get into further answering of the member's question in a few seconds, but I do want to say thank you to all of the teachers, the students, the support staff, our custodial staff, our bus maintenance personnel, to make sure that we had started this year off in more of a normal—a normalcy. So thank you. A big shout-out to absolutely everybody involved for kicking off the '22 school year without a hitch.

Thanks, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. Altomare:** While the minister continues to defer and deflect, educators continue to work in their classrooms in a system that's been underfunded since 2016. And that's a fact. It's laid out in the frames, Madam Speaker.

Seven Oaks had to cut 28 staff. Brandon School Division had to cut 11. One and a half million could have been spent on providing children with the supports they need.

While the minister is sitting there deferring, will they stop making these unnecessary hires of these consultants?

**Mr. Ewasko:** It's very interesting that the member, my friend and former colleague within the education

profession, stands up and puts misinformation out on the record, Madam Speaker.

He knows that this year alone, Madam Speaker, we're putting in \$460 million into the '22-23 school year. That includes, Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Ewasko:** —\$51 million of an increase in annual operating budget; \$77 million in additional funding to assist with financial pressures; \$22 million to strengthen student learning and supports; and \$2 million to expand the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative.

Madam Speaker, not going to take any lessons from this member from Transcona or his self-promoting leader as well. We—

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

The honourable member for Transcona, on a final supplementary.

**Mr. Altomare:** I'll just remind the minister that in 2016, the Province used to cover 62 per cent of education costs total. It is now down to 56 per cent, Madam Speaker. That is shameful and that is on the record.

\* (14:30)

Parents and teachers will be the first to tell this government that funding is not keeping up with demands. School divisions are being forced to make cuts while this government is giving millions to consultants, something they regularly do. They gut the Department of Education and then have to hire consultants to do the work that we used to do. That's just wrong, Madam Speaker.

Will the minister stop this giving of millions to consultants and invest in our schools?

**Mr. Ewasko:** Madam Speaker, we know on this side of the House that parents, teachers, staff, they want a government leading them in the way to make sure that they're working on—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Ewasko:** —literacy and 'numeraskies'—numeracy skills and including also Indigenous education and inclusion.

I know math is hard, and I know that the member from Transcona, really, if he starts dipping into the numbers, Madam Speaker, he's going to see that there's \$460 million of new funding going to school

divisions. We're working quite closely with our education partners—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Ewasko:** —all across this great province of ours.

I know that the member from Transcona decided to run in Transcona under the leadership of the member from Fort Rouge because he saw—

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

#### **Disabled EIA Recipients in Long-Term Care Hourly Rate Charges for Escorted Appointments**

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** In June, I met with five constituents with disabilities under the age of 60 who are living in long-term care. They may have MS, strokes, brain injuries or a 'degenerative' disease, and they have to pay for their own upkeep out of EIA, which leaves them with less than \$10 a day, or ten hundred and seventy—\$270 a month in disposable income.

They want to have dignity and independence, but in 2018 this PC government started charging them \$30 an hour and a minimum of three hours to get them to appointments accompanied. One third of their monthly income might go for just one X-ray or test.

Will this government immediately reverse the decision and ensure these people can get to their appointments free of charge as they did before?

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for Accessibility):** Madam Speaker, our government recognizes that people living with disabilities have certainly undergone a very challenging time with the onset of a global pandemic in the last few years.

That is why we've made some historic investments in disability services. That is why we've also raised the wages for people who work in the sector, because we know that there is a massive shortage of skilled work in that sector, so we've enhanced the wages for the direct service workers and have made other investments to ensure that people with disabilities can get the services that they need when they need it most.

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

**Mr. Lamont:** As I mentioned, all these people living in care are paying part of their own way, either from EIA, which has barely changed in 36 years, or from a sliding scale based on household income.

The shared costs can be financially crushing for a spouse and family. So, to relieve their loved ones, they may get a divorce and take EIA instead. It is hard to imagine a policy that is more cruel than one that forces an individual with a disability to break ties with their family because it makes them feel like a burden.

This needs to change. We will work with every MLA to end this immediately.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and minister commit today to ending this inhumane policy?

**Ms. Squires:** Our government recognizes that families were struggling, and that is why we came out with an \$87-million affordability package earlier this month, which included \$50-a-month increase to every EIA recipient's household income. That is the first increase that has occurred since 2004.

And we've also increased other investments. We've created a disability income support program, Madam Speaker, because we want people with—who are having severe and prolonged disabilities not to be on EIA at all, but to be on a separate income support program where they can receive a wage, receive the benefits and the services that they need.

#### **Increase in Crime Community Safety Initiatives**

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** This provincial government has a responsibility in keeping Manitobans safe. Just over the last week, and just in Tyndall Park, people have posted on Facebook how garages have been broken into, cameras and windows have been damaged, personal items have been stolen from yards and hydro meters in Burrows have been ripped off of businesses.

Madam Speaker, we have amazing community patrol groups working with our police services, but there are provincial departments, such as addictions, Housing and Education, just to name a few, that have an impact on our communities.

With crime rising in Manitoba, what specific actions is the Premier or Justice Minister taking or going to take that will contribute to keeping Manitobans safe?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I thank the member opposite for the question. There's no doubt that all of us are concerned whenever we hear instances of crime, Madam Speaker.

When it comes to the provincial government over the course of the last several months, we've made many investments when it comes to community investments, whether it's Bear Clan in Winnipeg, working with the Winnipeg Police Service to try and ensure that we get guns that are used in illegal manners off of the street. We've invested other resources when it comes to child protection, other resources when it comes to helping those who need addictions treatment led by the various ministers in this government.

We've also spoken to the federal government about changes that have to happen with the Criminal Code. And I hope that the member opposite will join us in trying to ensure that those calls for Criminal Code changes are successful from the federal government, Madam Speaker.

#### **Knife-Related Violent Crime Bail Condition Recommendation**

**Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson):** Manitobans have been shocked by random acts of violence, often using knives. Sadly, many of the individuals committing these crimes have previously been involved with our justice system and they're sometimes out on bail.

Can the Minister of Justice please explain how our government has taken steps to address the issue of knife-related violent crime?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I want to thank the member for Radisson for his question and for his advocacy on this issue. I know that it's incredibly frustrating for those who are victims of crime when it comes to knife attacks or other means of violence, Madam Speaker.

That is why we've said to the federal government, currently under the Criminal Code, it's virtually impossible to deny bail for an individual who's committed a crime using a knife. We would like to see changes to the Criminal Code to make it similar to using a gun in a crime and reverse the onus when it comes to bail to make it more difficult for someone who is accused of that kind of a violent crime from getting bail, Madam Speaker.

I know when this provision came out, the Liberals spoke against it; the NDP said nothing. While the Liberals took the wrong position and the NDP took no position, this government will always stand with the victims, and the Progressive Conservatives will work to make a safer Manitoba.



### Agricultural Crown Land Leasing Request to Reverse Changes

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** The new system for awarding Crown lands is not working. I've spoken to hundreds of producers over the last three years. None will defend the system the PC government has put in place. Carson Callum of the beef producers says that the changes do not line up with what they recommended.

Why has the minister not reversed his government's changes to the Crown land system?

**Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Agriculture):** I'd like to thank my critic for the question.

As we know, the Agriculture Crown lands are a very important source of land for young farmers and for the livestock industry. And, obviously, to support a vibrant and sustainable agriculture sector, stakeholders have told us—many consultations have been held—that rent was challenging due to recent climate changes driven by droughts and floods.

To help our ranchers recover from the extreme climate, a temporary reduction is beginning from 2023 to 2025. Madam Speaker, this will return almost \$4 million to ag Crown land users.

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

**Mr. Brar:** The PC government consulted none before changing the Crown land's regulation several years ago.

The right approach would be to restore a system that prioritizes young producers. Matthew Atkinson from beef producers' Crown lands committee says the new system makes it very difficult for the young producers to outbid those more established. It's leaving our younger producers behind.

When will the minister reverse his government's changes to the Crown land system?

**Mr. Johnson:** I'd like to thank my colleague for the question.

\* (14:40)

As I mentioned, the temporary rent reduction authorized by Treasury Board will begin in 2023, Madam Speaker. It will decrease the rent on agricultural Crown lands on a declining basis with rents reduced by 50 per cent this coming year, followed by 33 per cent in 2024 and 15 per cent in 2025, resulting in \$4 million to support the ranchers.

Public engagement is currently on EngageMB. I suggest the member log on and fill it out.

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

### PETITIONS

#### Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys—[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

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

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

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

(4) The JRL and Red River Valley School Division have flourished from a mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding for 54 years.

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

(6) Students that are bused in from the neighbouring municipalities that do not have a public library, such as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleefeld [phonetic], are provided with free access to the public library and its fourth largest collection of French books in rural Manitoba during the school year.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To request the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services to consider granting the auditorium to the JRL by March 'fird'—1st, 2023.

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

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

(4) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to recognize the heritage potential of this important building and its status in the community; and

(5) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to prevent any renovations to the auditorium that would destroy and devalue the architectural integrity of the building.

And this petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you.

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

#### Foot-Care Services

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care

extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

#### Drug Overdose Reporting

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to enact Bill 217, The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act

(Overdose Death Reporting), to require the Province to publish the number of drug overdose deaths, as well as the type of drug, on a government website in a timely fashion.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

### Hearing Aids

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

A hearing aid is a battery-powered electronic device designed to improve an individual's ability to perceive sound. Worn in or behind a person's ear, they make some sounds louder, helping people hear better when it's quiet and when it's noisy.

People who suffer hearing loss, whether due to aging, illness, employment or accident, not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, family or colleagues, they also can experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

Hearing loss can also impact the safety of an individual with hearing loss, as it affects the ability to hear cars coming, safety alarms, call 911, et cetera.

A global commission on the state of the research for dementia care and prevention released an updated consensus report in July 2020, identifying 12 key risk factors for dementia and cognitive decline. The strongest risk factor that was indicated was hearing loss. It was calculated that up to 8 per cent of the total number of dementia cases could potentially be avoided with management of hearing loss.

Hearing aids are therefore essential to the mental health and well-being of Manitobans—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Gerrard:**—especially to those at significant risk of dementia, Alzheimer's, a disorder of the brain affecting cognition in the ever-growing senior population.

Audiologists are health-care professionals who help patients decide which kind of hearing aid will work best for them, based on the type of hearing loss, patient's age and ability to manage small devices, lifestyle and ability to afford.

The cost of hearing aids can be prohibitive to many Manitobans, depending on their income and circumstances. Hearing aids cost on average \$995 to

\$4,000 per ear, and many professionals say the hearing aids only work at their best for five years.

Manitoba residents under the age of 18 who require a hearing aid, as prescribed by an otolaryngologist or audiologist, will receive either an 80 per cent reimbursement from Manitoba Health of a fixed amount for an analog device, up to a maximum of \$500 per ear, or 80 per cent of a fixed amount for a digital or analog programmable device, up to a maximum of \$1,800. However, this reimbursement is not available to Manitobans who need the devices who are over the age of 18, which will result in financial hardship for many young people entering the workforce, students and families. In addition, seniors representing 14.3 per cent of Manitoba's population are not eligible for reimbursement, despite being the group most likely in need of a hearing aid.

\* (14:50)

Most insurance companies only provide a minimal partial cost of a hearing aid, and many Manitobans, especially retired persons, age old pensioners and other low-income earners do not have access to health insurance plans.

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

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

New Brunswick provides coverage for the purchase and maintenance not only—not covered by other agencies or private health insurance plans, as well as assistance for those for whom the purchase would cause financial hardship.

Manitobans over age 18 are only eligible for support for hearing aids if they are receiving Employment and Income Assistance, and the reimbursement only provides a maximum of \$500 an ear.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

(2) To urge the provincial government to provide income-based coverage for hearing aids to all who need them, as hearing has been proven to be essential to Manitobans' cognitive, mental and social health and well-being.

Signed by Hope Stadt, Freda Carlson, Elaine Maier and many, many other Manitobans.

### **Louise Bridge**

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

(6) In 2014, the new City administration did not make use of available federal infrastructure funds.

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

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

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

(10) The provincial budget due in mid-April 2022 is the Province's opportunity to announce its portion of funding for this long overdue vital link to northeast Winnipeg and Transcona.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier to financially assist the City of Winnipeg in her new 2022 provincial budget to build this three-lane bridge in each direction to maintain this vital link between northeast Winnipeg, Transcona and the downtown.

(2) To urge the provincial government to recommend that the City of Winnipeg keep the old bridge fully open to traffic while the new bridge is under construction; and

(3) To urge the provincial government to consider the feasibility of keeping the old bridge open for active transportation in the future.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

### **Provincial Road 224**

**Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Provincial Road No. 224 serves Peguis First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation and surrounding communities. The road is in need of substantial repairs.

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

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

(4) Without repair, Provincial Road 224 will continue to pose a hazard to many Manitobans who use it regularly.

(5) Concerned Manitobans are requesting that Provincial Road 224 be assessed and repaired urgently to improve safety for its users.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure to complete an assessment of Provincial Road 224 and implement

the appropriate repairs using public funds as quickly as possible.

This petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Ekosi.

### **Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library**

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** Madame la Présidente, je désire présenter la pétition suivante à l'Assemblée législative.

À l'Assemblée législative du Manitoba, le contexte de cette pétition est le suivant :

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

(2) L'auditorium a été construit dans les années 1960 par le célèbre architecte manitobain Étienne Gaboury et la B-R-G y est installée depuis 48 ans.

(3) Une photo de l'auditorium intitulée « La bibliothèque régionale » est publiée dans un document de 2008 intitulé « Bâtiments patrimoniaux des MR De Salaberry et Saint-Pierre-Jolys ». Il est indiqué qu'il s'agit d'un bâtiment moderne important qui pourrait atteindre le statut de site patrimonial.

(4) B-R-G et DSVRR ont prospéré grâce à un protocole d'entente mutuellement bénéfique pendant 54 ans.

(5) Leur collection commune compte plus de 50 000 livres et possède la quatrième plus grande collection de littérature de langue française dans les régions rurales du Manitoba.

(6) Les élèves qui sont transportés par autobus des municipalités voisines qui n'ont pas de bibliothèque publique, comme Niverville, Grunthal et Kleefeld, ont accès gratuitement à la bibliothèque publique et à sa quatrième plus grande collection de livres en français dans les régions rurales du Manitoba pendant l'année scolaire.

Nous présentons à l'Assemblée législative du Manitoba la pétition suivante :

(1) demander au ministre du Travail, de la Protection des consommateurs et des Services gouvernementaux d'envisager de concéder l'auditorium à la B-R-G d'ici le 1er mars 2023;

(2) demander au ministre de l'Éducation de reconnaître la valeur que la B-R-G apporte à la population étudiante de l'ÉHS, ainsi qu'aux communautés du Village de Saint-Pierre-Jolys et de la MR De Salaberry;

\* (15:00)

(3) demander au ministre de l'Éducation et au ministre des Affaires francophones de reconnaître qu'un protocole d'entente entre la DSVRR et la B-R-G est mutuellement bénéfique, financièrement et culturellement;

(4) demander au ministre du Sport, de la Culture et du Patrimoine de reconnaître le potentiel patrimonial de cet important bâtiment et son statut au sein de la communauté;

(5) demander au ministre du Sport, de la Culture et du Patrimoine d'empêcher toute rénovation de l'auditorium qui détruirait et dévaloriserait l'intégrité architecturale du bâtiment.

Cette pétition a été signée par Michelle Gendron, Katrina Poirier, Denise Perron et—

### **Translation**

*Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.*

*To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba,*

*The background for this petition is as follows:*

*(1) The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library (JRL) was notified by the Red River Valley School Division (RRVSD) to vacate premises currently located in the auditorium of the École Héritage School by March 31, 2023.*

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

*(3) A photo of the auditorium captioned "The Regional Library" was published in a 2008 document titled "Significant Heritage Buildings of De Salaberry and St. Pierre Jolys". It is described as an important modern building that could attain the status of heritage site.*

*(4) The JRL and the RRVSD have flourished by means of a mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding for 54 years.*

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

(6) During the school year, students who are bused in from neighbouring municipalities that do not have a public library, such as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleefeld, are provided with free access to the public library and its fourth largest collection of French-language literature in rural Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services to consider granting the auditorium to the JRL by March 1, 2023.

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

(3) To urge the Minister of Education and the Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs to recognize that a memorandum of understanding between the RRVSD and the JRL is mutually, financially and culturally beneficial.

(4) To urge the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to recognize the heritage potential of this important building and its status in the community.

(5) To urge the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to prevent any renovations to the auditorium that would destroy or devalue the architectural integrity of the building.

This petition was signed by Michelle Gendron, Katrina Poirier, Denise Perron and—

### English

That's it. Thanks.

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

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

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

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

(3) A photo of the auditorium captioned the regional library is published in a 2008 document titled

heritage buildings in the RM De Salaberry and St. Pierre Jolys. It is marked as an important modern building that could attain the status of a heritage site.

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

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

(6) Students that are bused in from the neighbouring communities that do not have public libraries, such as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleefeld, are provided with free access to the public library and its fourth largest collection of French books in rural Manitoba during the school year.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To request the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services to consider granting the auditorium to the JRL by March 1st, 2023.

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

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

(4) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to recognize the heritage potential of this important building and its status in the community.

(5) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to prevent any renovations to the auditorium that would destroy and devalue the architectural integrity of the building.

And this petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

### Foot-Care Services

**Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson):** Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

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

The population of those aged 55 and up has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

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

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

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

The number of seniors with those—and those with diabetes have only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

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

The implications and inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

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

We petition the 'legislaty' Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this has been signed by Steve Prubal [*phonetic*], Darlene Beardy, Greg Stott and many other Manitobans.

**Madam Speaker:** Further petitions?

Grievances?

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

#### House Business

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** Thank you, Madam Speaker and others.

I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food will meet on Wednesday, October 5th, 2022, and, if necessary, on Thursday, October 6th, 2022, at 6 p.m. to consider Bill 22, The Environment Amendment Act (Pesticide Restrictions).

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food will meet on Wednesday, October 5th, 2022, and, if necessary, on Thursday, October 6th, 2022, at 6 p.m. to consider Bill 22, The Environment Amendment Act (Pesticide Restrictions).

**Mr. Goertzen:** Thank you again, Madam Speaker and others.

I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Wednesday, October 5th, 2022, at 6 p.m. to consider

the following: Bill 13, The Social Services Appeal Board Amendment Act; Bill 14, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment, Highway Traffic Amendment and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act; Bill 24, The Real Property Valuation Board and Related Amendments Act; Bill 208, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act; and Bill 240, The Jewish Heritage Month Act.

\*(15:10)

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Wednesday, October 5th, 2022, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 13, The Social Services Appeal Board Amendment Act; Bill 14, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment, Highway Traffic Amendment and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act; Bill 24, The Real Property Valuation Board and Related Amendments Act; Bill 208, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act; and Bill 240, The Jewish Heritage Month Act.

\* \* \*

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

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
(Concurrent Sections)**

**ROOM 254**

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook):** It looks like we're all here.

Minister, are you ready to continue? Minister, if you can hear us, could you give us a wave, please?

Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. Before we begin, I have a leave request for this section of the Committee of Supply. Is there leave to allow the opposition to sit at the opposite side of the table to allow them to see the screens that are situated in the room?

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

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 Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** I'd like to welcome the minister back to Estimates. I hope that she had a good summer, an enjoyable summer, and I look forward to hearing the feedback regarding the questions I'm going to ask specific to Health.

I'd like to start by asking the minister about the \$50 million that were prioritized for addressing the surgical and diagnostic backlog. Earlier in the Estimates proceedings, the minister advised that the entire \$50 million—for priority procedures worth \$10 million, and for the COVID backlog, \$40 million had been spent—that was what the minister advised the allocation of that spending was.

I'd like to point the minister to page 25 of their annual report. There it shows the total number of surgeries in the WRHA declined on a year-over-year basis between '20 and 2021, and 2021-22.

Can the minister explain the reason for that decline?

\*(15:20)

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I want to welcome the member for Union Station back to the Estimates process. And for all those around the table, I welcome them to today's Estimates for the Ministry of Health.

I am going to seek some clarification from the member. The annual report that they are referring to is for, I believe, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and its Main Operating Room (OR) Surgical Cases on page 25. Please clarify if that is the case.

And the member has also referenced \$50 million for diagnostic and surgical recovery. Those are two separate items. So, the \$50 million for the backlog and to address diagnostics and surgeries is separate from the information that's being reported in this annual report.

So, if I could just seek some clarification from the member regarding the question, please.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**MLA Asagwara:** Yes, the minister is correct, I am referring to the chart on page 25—the table on page 25 that is titled Main Operating Room (OR) Surgical Cases.



I guess the gist of my question is, how did \$50 million get spent on priority surgeries and yet the reported number of surgeries completed in the WRHA has declined? So that's what I'm trying to assess here, if the minister can provide some clarity.

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question. I do want to put some clarification on the record.

So, the amounts that are shown in the annual report for the WRHA, those are dollars that are separate from the \$50 million. The WRHA is using its own baseline operating funding that they receive annually to carry out these surgeries. The \$50 million is separate from what is showing here. The surgeries are not reported as part of this because the \$50 million can include surgeries under our request for supply arrangement, it can include medical remuneration and more and it could be done at facilities that are outside of the WRHA. So, we're doing a bit of mixing apples and oranges here, because it's separate.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**MLA Asagwara:** I'm sure the minister can understand that Manitobans may be concerned that \$50 million was touted by this government as a way to address the surgical and diagnostic backlog, and one would imagine that with those efforts being made by the government that in fact we would see improvements in the number of surgeries being performed and reportedly being performed in the WRHA—that there would be some sort of relationship there in terms of surgeries—Manitobans getting long-awaited surgeries that they desperately need. So I would hope the minister can appreciate that there will be many folks very concerned about why it is that there's a marked decrease in surgeries being performed.

I'm going to ask the minister again to please provide clarity as to why the number of surgeries being performed, completed, in the WRHA has declined year over year over year, to the point of nearly 500 less surgeries performed from 2021—sorry, 2020—'20-21 to 2021-2022.

Thank you.

**Ms. Gordon:** I'm pleased to remind Manitobans that during the pandemic several individuals were re-deployed from their home units and their home health facilities to assist in our intensive-care units for very sick individuals, and so we saw a marked decrease in the number of surgeries that were being done.

Now, this spring, in the Omicron wave, the—we had individuals begin to return to their home locations, but that's just this year, spring of 2022. So, the decreases that the member is referring to are natural decreases that occurred as a result of the pandemic and the slow down in surgeries that everyone is aware of and led to some of the backlog that we're dealing with right now.

And so the \$50 million should—is separate, and it's dollars that have not just provided to WRHA for surgeries, and the report the member is referring to is an annual report solely for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, and in this report, they are using their baseline operating funding to carry out those surgeries.

\* (15:30)

The \$50 million the member refers to for priority procedures and for the backlog is separately reported, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

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

And again, I'm sure the minister can appreciate that Manitobans will wonder how it is that \$50 million can be set aside and invested to address a backlog, and yet we don't see those decisions increasing operating capacity within the public health-care system which the vast majority of Manitobans access and will need to access and should access universally.

I'd like to ask about the number of beds in our hospitals. So, the number of beds has again gone down in Winnipeg hospitals. I'm sure the minister is well aware of this. Another 30 beds were lost this year. That's a total loss of 154 beds since 2017-18.

My question to the minister is, why are we still losing hospital beds?

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the member for Union Station for the question. I do recall that this question was raised in the previous Estimates process and an answer was provided.

I do want to remind the member that we tried to maintain a bed map, Mr. Chair, but it's a fluid thing. Beds change according to the needs of our patient population and is a snapshot in time. So there are individuals that are having outpatient surgeries, so there's less of a need for them to have in-patient care in a bed.

The member may recall, because they worked in the health system back in 2000, the early 2000s, when gamma knife surgeries were being performed and there was less of a need for a person to spend an extended period of time in a hospital bed.

So, Mr. Chair, it's a fluid report, and each time we take a snapshot it's just a snapshot for that particular period of time. But it does change on a regular basis.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

I'd actually like to go back to my question regarding the WRHA report that shows a decrease in the number of surgeries performed year over year and a substantial decrease from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022.

Can the minister just be very clear, because I was—I'm actually—when I reflected on her response, it's a little murky. Can the minister be very clear: is she saying that none of the \$50 million that were allocated for priority surgeries, that none of those dollars would've been spent on surgeries performed in the WRHA?

Can the minister just be very, very clear with that?

**Ms. Gordon:** The member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) is correct; I am not saying that, Mr. Chair.

**MLA Asagwara:** Okay, so can the minister provide clarity: Out of that \$50 million, how much of those funds were allocated to the WRHA to address the surgeries?

The minister just finished saying that they're separate, that the WRHA used their own dollars to perform the surgeries and the \$50 million was separate. Now I'm asking for clarity and the minister's saying she didn't.

So, you know, which one is it? Were—is any of the \$50 million that were allocated for priority procedures, were any of those funds spent in the WRHA to address surgeries? And if yes, how much?

\* (15:40)

**Ms. Gordon:** I do want to place on the record that the—some of the funds from the \$50 million has been used to procure, oh, close to 15,000 procedures, and to date we have spent \$50.136 million; so over the \$50 million that our government earmarked for this purpose.

The dollars flow to different entities: to physicians, to diagnostic services, to surgery. The—I'd point the member to page 64 of our annual report, where there is a breakdown of the \$50 million. It has been audited, and so I encourage the member to take a look at that—that \$50.136 million, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

**MLA Asagwara:** I have to say, it's—I'm—just a little bit strange because the minister started by being very clear that the dollars—the \$50 million—was separate from the WRHA dollars that were responsible for addressing these surgeries, which we know have significantly decreased in surgeries being performed in the authority.

And then the minister seems to pivot and says, no, that's not exactly what she was saying when she said that. And so I suppose I'm just really hoping the minister can be very clear.

I have asked for the minister to explicitly provide for us if those dollars, if any of the \$50 million, were spent—were allocated, rather, for the WRHA to spend on surgeries being performed. It's a pretty straightforward question. I'm hoping the minister can just provide a clear answer so we can move on from this and understand why is it that that \$50 million that, you know, they touted as a way to address the backlog does not—did not have an impact on actually increasing surgical capacity in the public system, which is what Manitobans need. Vast majority of Manitobans are accessing health care and surgeries in the public system.

And so, the minister has kind of reversed course here and stated that my summary of her comments were incorrect, and so I'm asking for clarity.

Of the \$50 million that were allocated for the surgical and diagnostic backlog, how much of that money was used or allocated to the WRHA to address the surgeries being performed within the region where we see such a significant decrease in surgeries being performed?

**Ms. Gordon:** I want to clarify for the member for Union Station that, again, the member began the questioning with a specific line item in the annual report for the WRHA and the question was—started out with why have surgeries decreased?

\* (15:50)

The years that the member referenced were two years that were in the middle of a pandemic—I think possibly the second, third and fourth wave of the

pandemic—so I clarified by answering that there are times when individuals were redeployed from their surgery units to help out in our ICUs during the pandemic. And so, naturally, we saw a slowdown in surgeries, and there were times that non-emergent surgeries were not being carried out.

So, I explained the reason for the decrease in surgeries in—during the pandemic. Now, we are here in Committee of Supply to consider the 2022-2023 budget, Mr. Chair, so I remind the member of that, and it also gives me an opportunity to talk about our government's commitment under Budget 2022: \$110 million to address the surgical and diagnostic backlog for a total of \$160 million.

Mr. Chair, just in terms of updated surgeries, as of September 29th, there were 1,169 non-emergent surgeries completed for the week of September 19th to 25th at Winnipeg sites. This is 46 more surgeries than the number completed during a similar week in 2019, which would be September 23rd to 29th of that year, when 1,123 surgeries were completed.

So, the member can see that the surgeries are starting to increase—have started to increase now that all individuals have been returned to their surgical unit. And it also means that Winnipeg's surgery program was operating at 104.1 per cent of pre-pandemic levels for that week.

All emergent and urgent surgeries, including cardiac and cancer procedures continue, Mr. Chair, 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.

And I want to highlight, as well, the number of emergent surgeries performed for the week, which remain steady; and there were 241 emergent or life-saving surgeries performed September 19th to 25th in Winnipeg, up 14 from the previous week and up 31 from a similar time period in 2019. And there were 259 surgical slates in Winnipeg the week of September 19th to 25th. This is two below pre-COVID norms, but this means slates were being scheduled at 99.2 per cent of pre-pandemic baseline standards in Winnipeg, Mr. Chair.

As a reminder, I also want the member to know that the number of surgeries performed during a slate—it will vary widely depending on the acuity of the patient and the complexity of the procedure. And I'll give you an example: an endoscopy will not take as long to perform as neurosurgery.

So the time allotted for surgical slates in 2022 may vary from those performed pre-pandemic due the demand, resulting in fewer surgeries being performed. And, again, COVID has also resulted in patients waiting longer for procedures than they did in the past, causing them to be sicker, Mr. Chair. This results in longer surgical and recovery times, which impacts the number of surgeries that can be performed during a slate.

About 26 cardiac surgeries were performed the week of September 19th to 25th, which is up seven from the previous week; 24 surgeries were non-urgent, elective in nature, while two were emergent. There were 22 cardiac surgeries performed during a similar period in—

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

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that breakdown of information.

I just—I will move on from this line of questioning because it's unfortunately not producing the information from the minister that I know Manitobans really need to hear at this time, especially as they still don't have access to a dashboard which would inform them, in terms of surgical waits.

You know, ultimately, the whole narrative around the \$50 million being announced repeatedly by this government was that it was going to address the backlog of surgical waits and diagnostic test waits. And we see plainly from the WRHA reporting that, unfortunately, hundreds—hundreds—of surgeries less were performed, and year over year have been performed.

And so, you know, it's disappointing that the minister just won't simply answer my question and provide the clarity that I'm seeking in—on behalf of Manitobans.

And I think, more importantly, it's incredibly disappointing for Manitobans to know that despite the \$50 million being announced time and time again, it hasn't, in fact, resulted in more surgeries being performed.

In fact, we see a tremendous amount less of surgeries being performed in the WRHA. And every single one of those numbers represents a family and a Manitoban who's, you know, suffering and waiting in pain.

So, I'll go back to my question around hospital beds. Certainly, I can appreciate the minister stated in

terms of fluctuations in the health-care system. However, the minister is well aware that bed capacity—available beds in our health-care system, and the lack of available beds, is creating a nightmarish reality in our hospitals. People do not have access to beds; we have a staffing crisis that is contributing to challenges in terms of bed capacity.

So, I suppose my question for the minister is, what is she doing to ensure that we are bolstering bed numbers in our public health-care system and when does she expect us to stop losing beds in our hospitals?

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question. They know from having worked in the health system that beds require staff and—in order for them to be available to Manitobans.

And I just want to put on the record that pre-pandemic, if we look at our ICU beds, the bed base was 72, and post-pandemic, we are at 108, Mr. Chair. And that means at HSC Winnipeg, there's 47 ICU beds; St. Boniface, 36, of which 20 are cardiac; Grace, 13; Brandon, 12. Again, the total is 108 plus two cardiac E1 beds at St. Boniface.

\* (16:00)

But that was only possible, Mr. Chair, because our government undertook a very aggressive training and—comprehensive training program to ensure that a total of 149 nurses in the last year have completed the 12-week critical-care orientation program, and 29 of those individuals graduated in May.

Then, at the end of August, we saw 19 more nurses graduate from that same program, and mid-September 23 individuals had enrolled for the next program class starting on September 12th.

So our government recognizes—and I hope the member for Union Station is aware as well—that beds can be opened when we bring more training, more nurses, more allied help, more doctors into the system, and that is why our government announced \$19.5 million to add 259 nurse training seats, five post-secondary institutions as part of our larger plan to add close to 400 new nursing education seats. And I was pleased to join my colleague from immigration and advanced education where we announced \$30 million to add 28 additional beds to our intensive-care units, Mr. Chair.

So, once again, it requires nurses and that is why we are supporting hundreds of internationally educated nurse applicants to obtain their licensure and

start practising in Manitoba. And each individual is eligible to receive \$23,000 of financial aid, Mr. Chair—first time in the history of the province that that has been available.

Another first, Mr. Chair, is the undergraduate nurse employees program. So, last December, we saw 63 third- and fourth-year nursing students join our health-care teams to support the delivery of health services for Manitobans while gaining valuable paid experience in a clinical setting.

So we are doing our part as a government recruiting, retaining, making available mentorship programs. Establishing a provincial float pool is in the works; incentives to encourage nurses to work more shifts per week. That is how we are able to increase our bed map, and it shows that our efforts are working, Mr. Chair, because, as I mentioned, before the pandemic our ICU bed base was 72, and post-pandemic, with the training that our government has invested in, that number has increased to 108.

So it's very important for Manitobans to know that we are taking the steps necessary to increase our bed base, to increase, not just here in Winnipeg, but across the entire province.

Mr. Chair, last week I was up in Norway House and had an opportunity to tour their health-care centre of excellence, and they shared with me that they would be increasing, when this new site opens, from four dialysis stations to eight.

So, again, increases are being seen across the province, and our government remains committed to working with all stakeholders, Indigenous communities, all our RHAs, to increase our bed base so Manitobans receive the care they need.

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

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response. The minister acknowledged something that we are all very well aware of, and certainly Manitobans are well aware of, that, you know, while we see a loss of another 30 beds this year—a total loss of 154 since 2017 and '18—that we also have seen a mass, almost exodus, of the health-care professionals needed to staff those beds.

And so while I can appreciate the minister listing off announcements that we've heard many times before regarding what this government is doing to try and educate some more nurses, the minister has not provided any clarity as to how that will impact the fact

that we are actively losing beds in our hospital system, which, you know, the lack of beds in our health-care system right now, today, is having a huge negative impact on the health outcomes of Manitobans.

And when we have these committees and we have these conversations, it is so important that we talk about health outcomes, we talk about the real impacts of this government's decision making on Manitoba families. And so I would ask the minister to provide clarity.

She's listed off a lot of initiatives that she's saying her government is undertaking, but when does the minister expect to stop losing hospital beds? We've lost another 30 beds this year. That matters. That affects people.

And so with all of these initiatives in mind, when does this minister expect to stop losing hospital beds? And this information really does matter for Manitoba families who depend on those beds.

*Mr. James Teitsma, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Ms. Gordon:** I do want to put on the record and correct some information that the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) has stated—that individuals are coming into the system and that is why we have seen the college of nursing add a third intake starting next year in May, because the dean of the college of nursing has stated very publicly that for every seat they receive four applications.

\* (16:10)

So, nursing is a very rewarding and fulfilling career. We continue to see individuals coming into the health system.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

With regard to the bed map, or the bed base, this is very fluid, Mr. Chair. It changes every year. Let's go back to 2007-2008: there were 2,488 beds. And today, '21-22, there's 2,534. So this is not a static number.

We also see some facilities are asking for changes to be made to the way their rooms are structured, so there may be multi patients in a room. And we've had locations request that they change—we—they change the configuration so that they can have behavioural beds. And in those situations, they may not want two, or three or four people in the same setting, so they change the bed base, which leads to better health outcomes for Manitobans.

So this is not a static number. We certainly want to provide facilities with the autonomy and the independence to make changes based on the population that they are serving and the severity of the health conditions that they are experiencing.

And we're—we have those conversations all the time. My colleague in the Ministry of Seniors and Long-Term Care will tell you that, while he has carried out consultations across this province for the seniors' strategy, that we're hearing changes—facilities are requesting changes to the way personal-care homes are built. They should be small houses, they're called. So that will look very different in the future. We're not going to see our bed base remaining static.

And with regard—specific regard to the WRHA figures, the explanation note No. 1, for example, states clearly that in 2020-2021, beds included 30 temporary beds which were closed in August 2021. They were never meant to be permanent beds. The WRHA added those beds as a temporary measure based on what was happening in the health system at that time.

And this is the independence and autonomy we want to provide to our facilities and our service delivery organizations to use the operational funding that's provided by our government to make those decisions on the ground, to ensure Manitobans receive the care that they need.

Those decisions are not being made here in the Legislative Building by politicians, they're being made by health system leaders. And we are going to continue to support their efforts to provide Manitobans with the best care that they clinically and medically have determined that they need, and the types of beds that they need to provide those services, and how the beds will be structured and where they will be placed.

And again, Mr. Chair, those are not decisions that are being made on Broadway, those are being made by system leaders at the bedside who determine, for example, like the WRHA has—and the member can read it there, it's note No. 1—that 30 temporary beds, for example, were closed in 2021 by the region. And those are temporary for reasons; I do not have that information handy.

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

**MLA Asagwara:** Can the minister provide clarity around the surgical fund for this year? So, the fund for 2022-2023 has been spent—sorry, rather, how much of

that fund has been spent to date? And how many additional surgeries over the previous year will that support?

\* (16:20)

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the member for the question.

The second quarter results—actually, the second quarter just ended on September 30th, and so the second quarter results are currently not available. That's a major reporting, That won't be available for several weeks Mr. Chair. But the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force, led by Dr. MacDonald and David Matear, they do provide regular reporting.

And I do also want to bring to the member's attention that the '21-22 results are audited and how the funds are spent are audited, and there's been no previous concern. But the second quarter results are not available at this time, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

**MLA Asagwara:** On—thank you, thank the minister for that response.

I might go back to that, but I'd like to ask about a summary on page 31 of the annual report. So, the presentation of summary accounting for Health: can the minister explain for us what the adjustments are on the consolidation line? And, again, that's on page 31.

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

If we look at one specific line, funding to health authorities, under consolidation and other adjustments, the entry there is to avoid duplicating accounting entries. So that amount is actually included in the other reporting entities column, so it's—so that that full amount is reflective of the SDO's actual results. So the—it's backing out the entries that we have made so that we don't duplicate what the service delivery organization—Prairie Mountain, WRHA—the entries that they have included in their accounting.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

And I'm just wondering if she can provide for us what the current vacancy rate in her department is, and can she provide that vacancy rate by division?

Thank you.

\* (16:30)

**Ms. Gordon:** With—in response to the member's question, that granular detail we are not able to provide at that time. So the specificity of the information, we—I will take that under advisement, Mr. Chair.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for taking that under advisement and I look forward to receiving that information and clarity.

Can the minister provide the names of her political staff?

Thank you.

**Ms. Gordon:** I'm pleased to answer that question. It's Matthew LaPage—L-a-P-a-g-e; Vanessa Wiebe—W-i-e-b-e; Tyler Thomas—T-h-o-m-a-s; and Mathew Grivicic—G-r-i-v-i-c-i-c.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**MLA Asagwara:** Thank the minister for her response.

What is the current vacancy rate within Insured Benefits branch—sorry, within the Insured Benefits branch. So, obviously, that's the branch that deals with health cards.

Thank you.

**Ms. Gordon:** I would like to take that question under advisement and provide the member with an answer at a later date.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for offering to take it under advisement, and I look forward to receiving that information as soon as it's available.

Can the minister provide an explanation for what the expenditures in 5(a) Transition are? And that is on page 64. It is listed pretty plainly on page 64, but there's obviously a lack of clarity on my end as to what the expenditures are for the 5(a) Transition. So, if the minister could outline that, I'd appreciate it.

\* (16:40)

**Ms. Gordon:** On page 64, under 5(a) Transition those are budgetary items from the government department that are transitioning to Shared Health. So, for example, Selkirk Mental Health Centre, Cadham Lab is moving into our provincial Shared Health authority. So those are budgetary items that are transitioning.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

So, the number is completely flat. Is the minister saying that it—the reason why the number is totally flat is because it's just simply reflecting the transition of those services or—it just seems a little too perfect that the number is the same, so I just would appreciate a little bit more clarity there.

**Ms. Gordon:** Technically, there is no variance to be reported and the numbers that are here under the 5(a) Transition section has been audited, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

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

Capital construction was underspent by \$161 million in 2021 and '22.

Can the minister provide a list of projects not done in '21-22 and does the minister anticipate a similar underspend in 2022-23?

**Ms. Gordon:** Again, I just want to reiterate that the Estimates that we should be considering is '22-23, but the member continues to take us back in time to a period where our Province was undergoing a lot of difficulties, and that was during the pandemic period.

So, for example, projects in hospitals were delayed; some were not completed because contractors were not allowed in. And the member will—knows much about that because I have received letters from the member on behalf of constituents who were asking about visitation to be able to even get into the hospital to visit family members and friends.

So, during the height of the pandemic that the member continues to go back to, yes, there were projects that were not completed, projects that were not done and that is unfortunate. But the focus of our government in the '22-23 fiscal year is to advance the clinical preventative services projects, of which there is over 30 of those initiatives all across the province of Manitoba to ensure Manitobans receive care closer to home, Mr. Chair.

So that is the focus of our government. That is the focus of the department. That's the focus of Shared Health and all the health regions. And I do want to bring to the member's attention page 47, under explanations, about capital investments, it says: delays in proceeding with various projects as a result of restricted access to health-care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

So right there in the report, Mr. Chair, is the reason for projects not being completed, but I look

forward to—I've done a lot of shovel turning, many announcements across the province. I look forward to ribbon cuttings and the opening of facilities to Manitobans to pour in and receive the care that they need.

So we are focused on great projects such as the St. Boniface Hospital expansion that is well under way. I saw drone photos of the work that is being done, and just amazing. The Portage hospital, Neepawa—there are so many projects.

So, when the member asked what I hoped to see in this year, is that a lot of those projects are above ground and many of those are also completed, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

**MLA Asagwara:** I'm not sure if the minister just didn't hear the second half of my question.

I referenced 2021-2022 to draw attention to the fact that capital construction was underspent by \$161 million, and then subsequent to me highlighting that, I did ask if the minister anticipated a similar underspend for 2022-2023.

\* (16:50)

So I was specific and I did talk about the Estimates book that this minister is referencing. So if she could provide clarity, if she anticipates a similar underspend in 2022-2023, I would greatly appreciate that.

Thank you.

**Ms. Gordon:** Certainly, we continue to see supply chain issues across all our projects, and the health system leaders are carrying out strategic sourcing. In this climate of—it's difficult to predict. And so what will inflation—how will inflation impact on price increases for—as an example. But a lot of efforts are being taken to deliver the projects on time and on budget, but certainly it's difficult for me to say what—you know, we are seeing, even shortages in staffing, staff that are working on projects. But certainly we hope to, as I said earlier, bring in these projects on time and on budget. But, again, it's difficult to predict in this climate of uncertainty, in terms of economics.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for her response. I believe I've actually asked my—the question I'm going to ask, previously, but didn't get clarity around this. So I'd like to dig into this again.

The supplement to Estimates document identifies a series of risks—excuse me—a series of treatment plans

that are proposed. But there's a lack of detail in terms of what the treatment plans actually are.

Can the minister provide a clearer idea of what the treatment plans are, when they might be complete and whether they'll be released to the public?

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

As the member knows, because they were part of a briefing that was held here in my office, we have endeavoured to be as transparent as possible in terms of sharing our treatment planned and—for COVID-19, flu and infectious disease spread, we have shared that, Mr. Chair, in a briefing. And we'll endeavour, whenever possible, to be transparent and share as much information as we can.

However, it has not come to my attention by the Department of Finance that they will be releasing the plans that are listed here, Mr. Chair.

But again, our department has certainly taken steps to have the Leader of the Opposition, the Health critic, come in and—into room—I think it was room 54, with Health leadership—it actually was not in my office, I want to correct the record there—and have them briefed on our COVID-19 bivalent plan, our flu, which includes the high-dose flu vaccine, and how we plan to ensure there isn't a spread of other viruses like Monkeypox and other respiratory viruses. I know that the chief public health officer was part of that discussion, as well as the CEO of Shared Health and our health system.

So, we are going to continue to be transparent, but again, I am not aware of the minister—the Department of Finance making—

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

## ROOM 255

### FINANCE

**Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Finance.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** Question is for the minister.

Since 2019 and the election, Minister Fielding received two mandate letters from Premier Pallister, I think one originally in 2019 in the fall and another one on March 3rd, 2020.

I'm wondering if the minister can confirm whether or not he has received a mandate letter from Premier Stefanson.

\* (15:20)

**Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance):** I thank the member for the question.

Also, I just want to call attention to the fact that I'm joined in the room today by various persons within the Department of Finance, at the Treasury Board Secretariat, in the hydro—or, I should say, in the government Crown Services secretariat.

So, at the table, I have my deputy minister, Richard Groen, with me. I have Ryan Klos, who's the executive financial officer for Finance. And I also have Ann Ulusoy, who's the Treasury Board secretary. And I have Andrea Saj, who's the Provincial Comptroller.

We have other people in the room, and we can identify them as they have opportunity to come to the table.

The member is speaking, of course, to the mandate letter of my predecessor. And I would caution that, of course, my predecessor had responsibilities that are different than the ones that I am responsible for. My predecessor, as the minister of Finance, also had the responsibility for the Public Utilities Board. He was the minister of Labour. I do not hold the responsibility for the minister of Labour; that goes to the minister for consumer protection, labour and government services, and Public Utilities Board is now also his responsibility, and I have the responsibility for Hydro.

There has been no new mandate letter in place of the old one that I've received from Premier Stefanson.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** So, given that there was no new mandate letter that's been put in place, do you feel bound by the previous two mandate letters from the former premier Pallister?

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

I think I might understand the road that he's trying to go down. The question he's posing is: Do I feel bound by instructions from executive government that were issued in 2016? That was when I would have received a mandate letter as the former minister of



Finance. As the member pointed out, my predecessor in this role in 20—approximately 19—received a letter of mandate as well.

I guess what I would say to the member, at a high level, is that the world has changed and so those instructions—very good instructions—instructions that attempted to reflect the economic and fiscal challenges of the time, have to be seen through the context, the lens of that time.

So, as I reflect back here, just at the table, of my—on my own mandate letter, I recall that in 2016, after 16 years of NDP government, my government had come to form government with a strong mandate by the people of Manitoba.

And at that time, the province of Manitoba was suffering from years and years of unachieved budgetary targets—expenditures that were consistently exceeding revenues—and warnings coming successively in years to that former NDP government, saying, you don't have a revenue problem; you've got a spending problem. And those warnings went unheeded and, of course, Manitoba suffered debts, downgrades that followed that, failure to make progress.

We know that after 16 years of NDP government, Manitoba was an uncompetitive landscape in which to make investments, and we saw that more and more of Manitoba was getting behind because it had a very uninspired tax regime: some of the lowest tax brackets in the entire country. It had an array of tax credits that had really never looked very coherent; people didn't always understand what those tax credits were trying to accomplish or who they were trying to benefit.

So, in that context, I did receive instructions from the then-premier to do things like stabilize the finances; to make good investments in the services, in health care and education; to review Manitoba's array of tax credits and look for benefit, and take—and provide advice that is evidence-based and on the basis of what we were trying to accomplish. There were instructions around reducing the regulatory burden that faced organizations and businesses and industry and non-profits and individuals.

And there was challenges—there were challenges that, at that time otherwise that—and we sought to address those challenges.

And then thereafter, in 2019, there were new instructions given. And today the member asks, well, are you bound by those instructions? I think if you had

asked the minister in 2019 if he was bound predominantly by the instructions given in 2016 he would've said no, because the world is changing.

And so today, in 2022, on October the 3rd, if you ask me am I bound by the instructions in that mandate letter, well, I would say that a mandate letter is only one form of providing a minister and a department with guidelines.

I think that guideposts can be helpful. I think that parameters can be helpful. I think that the former premier used to say—I think he said it publicly—that if you aim at nothing, you hit it every time. Which is kind of a funny statement, but it still rings true in that we need to be able to articulate where we're going, and we need to be able to have a plan of how we're going to get there. And we need to measure progress against those stated goals to indicate if we're making progress.

So I think to sum up, I would say to the member that the world has changed. He's talking about a time before COVID-19, he's talking about a very different time economically, and I'd be happy to speak this afternoon about how the world is changing, how the Canadian economic outlook is deteriorating and the challenges ahead, and how our government continues to respond to those challenges.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** So the minister tells us that the current Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has not issued a mandate letter in relation to his ministry. But he says there's other guideposts that they have—or she has put in.

I'm wondering if the minister can explain what guideposts he has been given, and what priorities the current Premier has given this minister; and what he feels is bound—binding him in his ministry in relation to the current Premier's agenda.

**Mr. Friesen:** I thank the member for the question, and I welcome the opportunity to speak exactly as he says about the highlights of Budget 2022, and where this government is focusing its efforts.

As I said, in order to identify challenges, in order to make efforts to address those challenges and in order to be accountable on the journey towards those challenges—and meeting those goals—I'm on page 28 of Budget 2022: Fiscally Responsible Outcomes and Economic Growth Strategy.

There are five key areas that I want to refer the member to.

\* (15:30)

The first is strengthening health care. The member will notice that our government made a principal pledge for \$110 million in new investment to reduce the diagnostic and surgical backlog caused during COVID-19 when surgeries and procedures had to go offline to allow the health-care system to re-orient itself to face the challenge of the global pandemic. But he will also see a \$17-million implementation of year 1 for our five-year action plan for mental health and community wellness.

He also sees, under strengthening health care, a seniors' strategy—\$20 million, and \$32 million in initiatives for the Stevenson review. I was the minister who contracted with Lynn Stevenson to come in and review our system after the challenges of COVID-19 and the impact on our personal-care homes; \$11 million for nursing enrolment increases like we heard about this afternoon in question period by the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon); \$812 million for a rural base—what we call our cornerstone projects—to address the clinical preventative services plan.

And, of course, in this budget, still \$630 million for COVID responses, because we know that the system must continue to respond to that challenge. But besides that, of course, I would welcome the opportunity this afternoon to speak about other parameters making life more affordable.

And, of course, in this budget, very, very significant efforts to help Manitoba families deal with rising prices, the education property tax rebate rising to 37.5 per cent for all homeowners and for farm families. But also another parameter, or another guidepost, building our economy—those investments in the Venture Capital Fund of \$50 million.

Immigration programming investments, focusing on tax competitiveness, as I said, for Manitoba businesses. There's another section of this budget that talks about investing in our communities with reconciliation activities, a \$5-million fund; \$125 million of new funding in schools; the new arts, culture and community sports fund, \$100 million over three years. Those applications are out the door. There are groups across this province who are writing applications and returning them, and this stands in addition to the Building Sustainable Communities fund, which has been a very, very successful fund in this province, but doubled in the fiscal year to account for additional interest in the program.

There's more I could say but, finally, I wanted to point to the part of the Budget 2022 which speaks about protecting our environment: \$6 million

for 12 initiatives under the made-in-Manitoba green and climate plan, \$50 million of accelerated rehabilitation of orphaned and abandoned mine sites, expansion of our Conservation and Climate Fund. There's new funding for forestry programs. And, of course, we have allocated over \$100 million for the Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin outlet channel project for enhancing flood protection.

So perhaps I could just indicate to the member these, Sir, as good reminders to the citizens of Manitoba and to the members of the opposition of where the government is putting its efforts in order to get good benefit for all Manitobans.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I have some questions in relation to the family affordability package.

I—as the minister is well aware, Manitobans who are in the lowest income bracket, those families spend up to 50 per cent of their income on shelter, food and fuel. And, of course, the affordability package also benefits high-income-bracket earners in Manitoba, and their proportion of shelter, food and fuel drops to 30 per cent. And by imposing a flat rate, both high-income families and low-income families get the same amount, even though the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis is very different between the lowest bracket and the highest bracket.

Now, economists would describe and have described this package as regressive, meaning that it's squandering money that basically could be going at a higher rate to lower income bracket and reducing the amount that the lower income bracket is getting as a result of the broad application of the benefit.

So I'm wondering, what was the government thinking, here? Why were they giving a benefit to high-income families that need it less than giving a larger benefit to low-income families that obviously need it more?

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

I know the ground on which he would like to quarrel. I will challenge him today, though, to substantiate comments he's made in respect of economists taking umbrage. So, I really welcome the member to produce the names of these economists to which he refers who are saying that this suite of affordability measures has—somehow has got it wrong.

I want to clear up any misunderstanding the member has about the government's affordability payments. I understand that he's stuck on hard turf right now because we hear the opposition parties

clearly doing—trying to do two things at once: trying to say that these measures are woefully inadequate, and then at the same time, every day in the House, saying they don't go far enough.

And, clearly, that presents a challenge to members of the opposition who are simultaneously arguing that somehow the measures don't do enough, and the measures go too far at the same time. Certainly, we've been puzzled to hear these oscillating statements from members of the opposition.

I want to highlight the fact that our government is taking action with an affordability package—a \$96-million package—that includes, as the member said, payments to Manitoba families with children under 18 years old and family net incomes of less than \$175,000 combined income. The benefit is for \$250 for a single child and \$200 additional for every child thereafter. We know that the average payment for families will arise at somewhere under \$500; it will total \$63 million in benefits, and it will go to families of more—of approximately 282,000 children.

Let the record show that the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) called this squandering money. I really would challenge the member to walk up the driveways of residences in his constituency and remind the people who are struggling with the highest CPI increases in the last 40 years—with the highest BPS rate hikes by the Bank of Canada in 40 years, by 300-basis-point changes in a matter of months—that they have no needs and this is squandering money. I wonder how that conversation would go with his constituents; I could guess.

However, there's more to the package than that. Of course, what the member glossed over is that there is another payment right now going to Manitoba seniors with less than \$40,000 in family income. So it, perhaps, argues exactly the point that the member is making, in that this is a payment that benefits seniors at the low end of the earning spectrum.

\* (15:40)

Why? Because they are disproportionately affected by those increases which I had spoke about; \$16 million for that initiative, more than 52,000 seniors households, and I even have the—oh, I can't reflect on the presence or absence of members at committee, so I won't be able to talk about whether or not the Minister responsible for Seniors is seated here at the table.

Both of these payments are designed as a refundable tax credit; they will not be taxed. But remember,

in addition to these things, also, this is the government that has just recently announced the minimum wage rising, increasing by \$1.55 on October 1st. This just happened two days ago. And then further, it will rise to \$15 per hour by next year.

In addition to this, Rent Assist benefits for families not enrolled in EIA were enhanced from 75 to 80 per cent, a median market rate, and right now, that basic needs amount for EIA—non-Rent Assist EIA individuals is going up for the first time in years in this province. And then in addition to these things, of course, we have also announced support for food banks.

So, while I understand the point that the member is trying to make, he's not able to make it in respect of an affordability package that is very broad based, that sets thresholds and actually provides benefits for those most in need.

What I would like to end by saying, if I understood the time left, is that I take the opposite approach of the member. The measures that we have spoken about today are actually progressive; they are not regressive in that those of more modest income earnings—these benefits are proportionately larger in their households and therefore of—are more—are of more benefit than would be the case for someone at the higher end of the spectrum who still qualifies.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** I think the minister knows full well that the average household income in Manitoba is \$98,000, and that the cut-off threshold for this benefit is almost double that at \$170,000.

A family making \$170,000 in Manitoba is a high tax bracket earner. And what this government has chosen to do is give smaller payments to Manitobans, many to high-income tax bracket earners. And if this payment was more targeted to the average actual household in Manitoba, this government could give more significant relief.

And so I take the minister's comment about talking to constituents and I'm concerned about how out of touch this government is because we have been talking to constituents in Riel, in Radisson, in Rossmere, in Lagimodière, in Fort Richmond. And I'll tell you that when you do talk to a high tax bracket earner, and they've been told that they're receiving this cheque, they go, oh, that's great, we don't need it, we're going to donate it to charity.

Now instead of treating high tax earners as people that need significant help from this province, why not double the benefit for those families who make the

household average of \$98,000? Why are you giving less benefits to the low tax bracket earners than you otherwise should and would do?

**Mr. Friesen:** I want to make a few things clear to the member. Member knows that Bank of Canada increases have happened six times in the last eight months. The member knows that the most recent change was a 75-basis-point change, preceded by a 100-basis-point change, the impact of which has been felt across Manitoba in households.

The member knows that the CPI latest information for the month of August is showing an 8 per cent increase of costs, that is August over August, and that is for that array, that basket of goods: everything from appliances to a basket of groceries and filling up a tank of gas and paying for rent, and all of those costs. And so the government has been responding with some of the most significant measures designed to leave more money in the pockets of Manitobans.

Of course, last year that included our education property tax rebate, at 25 per cent; this year, that payment to Manitoba homeowners is in the neighbourhood of 37.5 per cent to homeowners and farm families, while a 10 per cent benefit still is derived by other categories that pay property taxes. In addition to that, our residential renters' tax credit is a new credit that puts \$525 in the hands of every family. But in addition to those things, this affordability package acts now to address the real impacts that Manitoba families are facing in their finances.

And let's be clear: today, the member has made his stripes very clear. He called it squandering money. We talked about a benefit to families with children—282,000 children—and he said squandering money. We talked about a benefit under \$40,000 for the lowest income earning seniors in the province, and he called it squandering money. We talked about increases to the basic amount in EIA for individuals without children, and he called it squandering money. So I think it's—today it's quite clear that the member will simply criticize these things.

\* (15:50)

But what is that member's own record and his party's record on making life affordable? He knows that the basic personal amount was not increased by the previous government, and it took millions and millions of dollars out of the hands of individuals simply by virtue of the fact that the tax system, in a punitive way, taxed individual income earners far

more quickly in this province than it did in other provinces.

Now, I would say that was a way of making Manitobans squander their money by paying the government too early. As a matter of fact, when we took government, that basic personal amount difference between Saskatchewan and Manitoba was almost double. You could earn almost double in Saskatchewan what you could earn in Manitoba.

We have been taking action. We have been allowing the lowest income earners, who he speaks about today, to keep more of their hard-earned money.

And on page 41 of the budget and budget papers, he will see a helpful chart there that indicates that \$162 million has already been saved by the lowest income earners because of the basic personal amount adjustments. More than 15,700 Manitobans no longer pay income tax at all due to the fact that we've been increasing that basic personal amount.

But on what the member refers to as the tax brackets, remember it was his government that didn't index tax brackets. Manitoba has some of the lowest tax brackets in all of Canada due to simply indexation of those brackets.

That second bracket, now, in Manitoba, has risen from \$67,000, where the NDP artificially held down that bracket amount to siphon the maximum amount of money away from Manitobans who were earning income to almost \$75,000.

So, once again, I say to the member, to his question, do I feel that, you know, a teacher's child who is married to a contractor or a social worker who has a household with an entrepreneur, if—are they experiencing challenges right now raising children? I say absolutely they are, and our government is there to help.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I would certainly encourage the Finance Minister to get out of the sort of government bubble and actually go into Radisson, go into Rossmere, speak to the people in Southdale and Riel and actually talk to these families that are in the high income brackets.

And they will tell you what they tell us: That they view this as a—completely cynical, that nobody asked for their help, if they have—make \$170,000 in family income that it's not going to have a measurable difference to their quality of life.

They see it as a cynical political move of literally buying votes with their own tax dollars prior to a

by-election in Kirkfield Park. And they will give unsolicited advice to the government, which they should heed, that they should lower the threshold of \$170,000 to the actual average in Manitoba of \$98,000 so that those families can actually get the support they need so that they can get through this cost of living crisis.

Now, this minister talks about being evidence based. Well, let's talk about that.

How did you arrive at the \$170,000 threshold? Why did you include the high-income bracket in this cheque? What was that decision based on? What evidence was it based on and what was the thinking process that those people needed help so therefore the people in the lowest tax bracket get less? So, please, can you share that with the committee?

**Mr. Friesen:** Yes, the member and I simply don't agree. This government has been listening, and it has been listening to Manitobans who say that they are facing the challenges of rising prices.

But of course, the previous NDP government for years and years was tone-deaf to the voices of Manitobans who told them that they were the highest taxed jurisdiction west of Quebec, with the lowest thresholds for taxation, the lowest basic personal amount. I always found it interesting that the NDP didn't raise the basic personal amount. But not only that, that they never addressed their rate of taxation for that BPA, which meant that they had a disproportionately high rate of taxation assessed on exactly that component of our population who makes the least money.

So it seems strange today to receive a lecture from the member, who belongs to a party who made so very little progress on behalf of Manitobans in creating affordability for those families. In 16 years of government, they raised 15 taxes. My colleague, the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart), and I were elected into the Legislature just before the NDP went out and said that they would not raise the PST from 7 to 8 per cent. We were also in the Legislature when that budget came in twenty–2014 probably was the budget in which the PST was raised, but 2013 that PST was widened to apply to a whole other, you know, realm of goods and services.

The member talks about principles of economics, but surely he would understand that those PST increases, and punitive taxation regimes, would disproportionately affect those of lower income. Where

the price of those goods accounts for a higher degree of their household after-tax disposable income.

I was just looking at the cost and the CPI tracker that is showing the increases in goods for Manitobans. Food costs, you know, accounting for 16 per cent of the CPI basket. Shelter, in Manitoba, that counts for 25.6 per cent. Household furnishings and equipment at 2 per cent. Clothing and footwear, transportation, health and personal care; all of these are impacts right now, these increases, in Manitoba households.

Now, the member says that he knows best. He knows better than Manitobans. He knows for a fact, he says, that no one over the magical number of \$98,000 is feeling the impact of rising prices. But I think that if that member honestly canvassed Manitobans, he would know that households are experiencing these challenges. They are experiencing the challenge of filling up their cars for 80 per cent more than it cost two years ago. They are experiencing the challenge of paying for butter at \$7 per pound as opposed to \$4 pre-pandemic.

They are facing the challenges of clothing and footwear for their children; 282,000 children are in families who will receive payments under this affordability package; more than 52,000 seniors under the threshold income of \$40,000 will receive these payments. But the member calls this squandering money. It's interesting for me to hear him say so today.

\* (16:00)

We don't think so. We know that Manitobans did not receive that kind of support from the previous government. We know now that Manitobans need it more than any time before, a 40-year high in terms of the inflationary effect and their ability to buy goods with that income that they had previous to inflation.

I heard one bank manager tell me just a few weeks ago that he had clients with a \$100,000 income who just renewed their mortgage, and it went up by \$200 a month. This member would say that that couple is not experiencing economic challenges. We know that that's not the case. We know that this member has no lessons to give to Manitobans on affordability.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** Well, the minister, with all due respect, just rambled on for five minutes and never answered the question. And the reason why he didn't answer the question is he can't.

He can't defend this; this is completely indefensible. He cannot come to this committee and tell this committee why they got \$170,000, basically a

high-income family, why they've been included in this cheque. He knows that so he has to talk about straw man arguments and try to parse words, but he cannot defend his own policy and didn't even try. And I think that's disappointing and very telling to Manitobans.

But it goes further. Families with no children have been excluded from this. Single people have been excluded with this, if they're not seniors. So, many singles who are low income, many families without children are low income, are also feeling the cost-of-living crisis here.

So my question to the minister is: Why is he picking winners and losers? Why is he picking high-income families as opposed to low-income singles and low-income families without children? Why do they not get the benefit of help from this government?

**Mr. Friesen:** On the contrary to the member, I welcome the opportunity to answer the question and correct the record.

The member's argument doesn't stand up. The member's argument seems to be the following: that only some people will get the benefit and so, even though this is a broad-based benefit that will go to hundreds of thousands of Manitoba families that identify as groups with children and with seniors with low income and for people on EIA supports, he says that it doesn't do exactly the right thing in exactly the right way and so it doesn't go far enough and it doesn't meet his test.

The member must have been very angry when he read about Saskatchewan's relief mechanisms, because here are some differences between Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Saskatchewan's mechanism to provide a rebate for their citizens actually didn't deliver any amounts to families with children. So that should make the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) very, very angry. Also, the benefit went to households without an income test. So, there's no income test in Saskatchewan. Make \$200,000, make \$400,000; everyone gets the cheque. So, that must make the member very angry. And he must be, by comparison, quite encouraged to know that in Manitoba there was an income level set, that there was efforts made to ensure that high-wealth homes in Manitoba would not enjoy the benefit.

Now let's understand that in the member's construct, a schoolteacher in a household with a nurse, he calls high wealth. He calls ultra-wealthy. An entrepreneur married to a social worker, he calls ultra

wealth. Two entrepreneurs. A daycare worker residing with a person with a business who might make under that threshold, he calls them ultra-wealthy. We're not going to play those games of wealth redistribution along the narrow lines that the member would like to make them.

Quebec set a threshold for \$100,000 for single earners and \$210,000 for families. So those measures must make the member very angry, because they're far higher than in Manitoba. What we did is construct a program whereby we tried to identify the broadest number of Manitobans who right now we could provide with a benefit that would help them in their households. And as I indicated to him, with these CPI and the evidence that the cost of gasoline and services and goods and food and energy, clothing and footwear, shelter—all on an increase at a rate not seen in the last 30, 40 years—it's why our government is responding.

But also, to punch a few more holes in the member's argument, he says, but there's nothing for individuals, which is not true. Because he seeks to only hone in on this set of affordability measures, and he does not want to, in this case, talk about the education property tax rebate that gives these significant savings back to Manitobans regardless of whether they have children: the Residential Renters Tax Credit, a \$525 benefit regardless of whether there are children in the home or not. But also, the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) could educate this member, and let them know that it was our government that enhanced from 75 per cent to 80 per cent of median market rate the benefit for families not enrolled in EIA.

And even now, this \$50 per adult EIA general assisted increase is the first increase of its kind since 2004. We found out earlier this afternoon in debate when the Minister of Families had to school the opposition parties. So when the member said, but there's nothing for this group or that group, we know that when you look at the benefits that our government has brought, that they are broad-based, that they address real needs, they do so right now, and they still stand above and beyond those very significant measures that our government has taken even before today. Even before Budget 2022, which have already been working for a number of years to make life more affordable.

And as we have opportunity this afternoon, I would love to remind the member of what it has meant to reduce the PST, what it has meant to narrow the

span of the PST, what that indexation effect has been to actually remove the burden of excess taxation from Manitobans, what it has meant for businesses to be able to invest in their businesses who have seen that education and post-secondary tax payroll obligation go down.

We'll continue to make progress for all Manitobans because affordability matters right now.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** So, we've now just witnessed the minister ramble on for 10 minutes, and still not answer either of the questions about how we got to a \$170,000 threshold, what was the evidence used to arrive at that amount.

The reason why he can't answer: it is a political number; it has nothing to do with any evidence-based or economic arguments by this government.

We've now heard for five minutes that he can't answer why he intentionally excluded—intentionally excluded—low-income singles. He intentionally excluded families who are low income. And there is no attempt to justify or to explain why those struggling Manitobans are not worthy of getting a help and a benefit from this government.

\* (16:10)

But the minister talks about the Residential Renters Tax Credit. Many seniors rent. This government eliminated \$175, basically raised their taxes every year, by cutting back on that credit. So they may receive a \$200 cheque from this government, but it's getting clawed back with higher taxes.

So I'm wondering why the minister clawed back renter's credit at a time of an affordability crisis.

**Mr. Friesen:** You know it's an odd afternoon when you have an NDP member of the Legislative Assembly who is lecturing you on tax affordability.

I think Manitobans understand too well the record of the previous government: 15 new taxes in 16 years, a failure to do the basics like index income tax brackets resulting into—in a chasm of almost \$8,000 between Saskatchewan's and Manitoba's basic personal amount. That is the most egregious tax on low-income earners that could possibly be demonstrated.

The—one of the highest marginal tax rates of the lowest tax bracket in all of Canada shows you exactly what you need to understand about how that previous government viewed income earners. They saw them as their piggy bank, if you go back to the piggy bank every single year and demand more money for bigger

government programs that didn't get results that Manitobans needed.

So, I understand that our approach stands in sharp contrast to the record that that member has to defend. However, I do want to refer members of this committee to the thing that the member doesn't want to talk about. So he takes—he criticizes the \$525 credit, this new credit, the Residential Renters Tax Credit that is going to every single renter in the province.

But what he doesn't do is, he doesn't talk about the 45,000 additional Manitoba households that his government said were ineligible to receive that cheque: 45,000 additional Manitobans; Manitobans living in non-EIA Rent Assist, or Manitobans living in social housing.

And before, when they would make the claim, the NDP would say: denied. Those are 45,000 Manitoba households who now receive a \$525 payment where the previous government gave them nothing. So I think it is very important to remember that.

But when the member also talks about, well, what about this particular income category here? Or what about that particular income category there? What did they get? I would remind the member of the other tax rollback guarantee items that we made this year, and followed through on.

That member knows that our government has rolled back vehicle registration fees that were raised by the previous government. And those fees now have been rolled back, resulting in a savings of \$45 million a year to Manitobas—to Manitobans. We know that the MPI rebates in 2020 and 2022 have resulted in an almost \$700 savings to every Manitoban who has registered a vehicle.

But in addition to that, as I indicated to the member, there's a helpful chart that could help him on page 45 of the budget. And what it does is it indicates, in a bar form, the amount of benefit to Manitobans in terms of incomes, that is broken down on an individual earner's level by virtue of the area of tax reduction. It indicates sales tax reduction from 8 per cent to 7 per cent, what the savings has been. It indicates what the indexation of basic personal amount has meant in the brackets, what that's meant. It indicates what the elimination of probate fees, tax on probate fees. It indicates what the reduction on education property taxes is, in the light-blue bar. It indicates what the sales tax exemptions represents, and it indicates what that reduction in vehicle registration fees amounts to.

And those amounts come out to—we made that pledge of saying \$2,020 to Manitoba households in tax rollbacks over the next four years, and we indicated in this budget that we had met that commitment one year earlier than we had even targeted for.

We know that these are the real measures that help Manitobans keep more of their earnings. Low income and medium income. These measures that he takes such exception to are measures that come with thresholds. Thresholds that are lower than Saskatchewan, thresholds that are lower than Quebec. So those other provinces that he will not speak to this afternoon must anger him a great deal, and he must see how progressive our measures are by comparison.

The fact of the matter is, if you want to spend an afternoon to hold up the record of the NDP when it comes to household affordability against our own, we welcome that conversation.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So, the minister has now had twenty minutes to answer a very simple, very straightforward question about how they arrived at this \$170,000 high-income threshold, and he hasn't. He has serenaded this committee with 2015 PC talking points, which are as stale as they are dated. But he cannot explain why high-income families have been included in this benefit, while low-income singles have not; while low-income families without children have not.

But I want to talk about students. Students don't have children; they're often single, and they will not get a benefit from this government. Not only that: since 2018, this government has raised their tuition by 18 per cent. That's a tax on students. They have raised, every year of their government, student tuition, which is a tax on education and a tax on low-income students.

\* (16:20)

So, I'm wondering if the minister can explain why students in Manitoba don't deserve cost-of-living relief as well.

**Mr. Friesen:** I welcome an opportunity to address the member's question.

So, the member's question is: What has this government done for seniors? And it allows me the opportunity to speak—*[interjection]*—sorry, for students. Thanks for the correction. What has this government done for students? And it allows me the opportunity to speak about the many ways in which these changes, the improvement, the modernization of Manitoba's tax environment has benefited students.

I think I would start by talking again about the indexation, which seems like—it seems like a modest measure at first. But we all understand—in personal finances—we all understand, both in respect of investments and also in respect of debt, how indexation can both work toward and against our advantage.

And so indexation, in terms of income brackets, benefits every single student. It allows them to keep more of their money. Remember, the NDP government, by not increasing the basic personal amount, it is those students, let's say an undergrad program, who are taking a lot of those summer jobs to help them pay for their tuition through the year. Those students are often making less than \$20,000 a summer time to pay for their tuition. Imagine how much of that money more that the NDP kept by raising the basic personal amount. You are raising the amount of money that an individual income earner can make before they begin to pay the government.

As I explained earlier this afternoon, \$162 million is the summary of savings already by Manitobans by virtue of the fact of both the basic personal amount increasing and those tax thresholds increasing. And think of students as being an important component of those earners.

Also, though, remember, everything from renters' subsidies—so right now a \$525 subsidy to any student who is renting a residence in order to attend university. That member lives in Winnipeg, but I can assure him that outside of Winnipeg, almost without exception, students who go to university are moving to university, are moving to Winnipeg, moving to Brandon in order to go to university, increasing their cost per year by \$10,000 by minimum. And those students, where they used to open that envelope and see nothing, see a cheque for \$525, which is helping.

Those students who register a vehicle are seeing hundreds and hundreds of dollars of savings by virtue of the fact that this rebate has been sent by MPI. Those students are, of course, you know, if by any chance they have a household, they are seeing that education property tax rebate.

Those students, if they are mature students, if they have children, then even though they are students, they are still realizing the benefit, while they go to school, of that \$250 payment for one child and \$200 for every child thereafter.

That member will know that, in this province, we have many, many mature students who are attending school at the same time as they are raising a family.



So when the member asks where are those students benefitting, they are benefitting across the landscape of our government's action on affordability.

However, to come back to the central premise that the member made, which was somehow that tuition is out of control in Manitoba, I remind him as—of the following from Stats Canada 2022-2023, the most recent data: B.C. undergrad tuition, \$6,200; Alberta undergrad tuition, \$7,200; Saskatchewan undergrad tuition, \$8,800; Manitoba undergrad tuition, \$5,200—the lowest tuition by a country mile in all of western Canada.

And I have, at times past, also reviewed comparative data from other provinces in Canada, and I believe I could go as far as saying that Manitoba may boast the second lowest, if not the lowest tuition in all of Canada. If the member suggests that—even with indexation—that tuition should never rise, let him put those comments on the record.

I know that students want a good quality education and they want certainty over their costs, while they want affordability. We're producing both for Manitobans.

We're proud of these measures that make a real difference in Manitobans' lives right now: households with children, individuals in EIA, seniors under \$40,000 and many other broad benefits for everyone paying taxes in this province.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** I think we should note for the record that the minister's been banging on for about 25 minutes now and has yet to defend his policy.

He has yet to provide a rationale about where they got this \$170,000 threshold, why students were excluded, why singles were excluded, why families—low-income families without children were excluded, and why high-income earners were not. And he has made absolutely no attempt to justify the government's policy.

But there's another side to this. It's not just about rebate cheques. If people have a living wage, then that makes life more affordable as well. Now, we know we're in a cost-of-living crisis in Manitoba. The new living wage in Manitoba is \$18.34 per hour in Winnipeg, \$16.25 in Thompson and \$15.55 in Brandon. And, of course, this government announced the minimum wage going up during the election next year to \$15 an hour.

And my question for the minister is, once we reach the \$15 threshold, are we going back to the

statutory cost-of-living increases on a yearly basis, or is this government prepared to get Manitoba up to the living wage of \$18.34?

\* (16:30)

**Mr. Friesen:** I welcome the question on Manitoba's labour market and minimum wage.

The member knows that Manitoba has one of the lowest unemployment rates in all of the country. I'm citing figures here that show: 3.5 per cent in July of 2022, and that's the general unemployment rate; youth unemployment rate at 4 per cent, less than half the national average; female unemployment rate, 4 per cent, under the national average.

We know that labour markets have been tightening across the country and that labour shortage concerns among the business community and employers have spread. We know that, right now, the workforce is being highly sought after by job creators and that they're paying a premium for labour. We see that going on in our communities. We see the increase of wages. Right now, that is far outstripping any jurisdiction's increases of a minimum wage.

We see competition happening for workforce. There's data in the first quarter report that indicates that, you know, in the areas like accommodation and food, in health care and social services, transportation and warehousing, retail, wholesale, manufacturers that's the—that there's a—there's not enough unemployed persons to fill vacancies. And that causes employers to pay more for an increasingly small pool of available workers. What it means is that in Manitoba, average weekly earnings have gone up. And I'm citing for the member page 14 of that first-quarter report, which is showing that in all sectors, that year-over-year change has gone up 2.8 per cent.

In accommodation and food services, it means average weekly earnings have gone up 8.5 per cent. For instance, in transportation and warehousing, that wage is up 8.5 per cent; in retail trade, 10.4 per cent; and in manufacturing, 9.3 per cent.

And that is to say that in a time of short labour, economists would indicate to you that in terms of referential tools, that the minimum wage becomes a less significant factor than simply the real, dynamic, competitive labour market.

So, as costs go up, wages are also going up. But we would make clear that whereas the NDP previous government did not apply indexation to minimum wage, yes, we feel it is important for minimum wage

to rise each and every year. That is why our government brought in changes in legislation that would require a reflection in minimum wage every year to account for and to address and to respond to the inflationary costs in the system. And that will continue to be the case.

This exceptional surge in inflation, our government has dealt with with a one-time catch-up. And that is why, even now, we've indicated to Manitobans that we have raised the minimum wage one time, and we will raise the minimum wage two times again in order to reach that \$15-per-hour calculation. And then after, as I said, we will revert to that schedule by which indexation will help to ensure that the minimum wage rises each and every year.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** I just wanted to thank the minister. That was the first, like, straight response, actual answering a question this afternoon, and it was greatly appreciated. It was refreshing and invigorating, even. So, hopefully, we can keep this going, and you can answer some more questions.

So, now, for the past six years, Manitoba under this government has been at or near the bottom of the minimum wage tables in Canada. And it's clear that that's official government policy, that this government wants Manitoba to be a low-wage economy. And even now, after the October 1st increase, we are still second lowest in Canada.

And I'm just wondering, again, in the spirit of answering questions, if the minister can confirm that that, in fact, is the official government policy, that the government wants Manitoba to be at the bottom of the minimum wage tables for Canada, and that this government will continue to keep Manitoba at the bottom of the rankings.

\* (16:40)

**Mr. Friesen:** Had the opportunity to see Darcy Oake one time do a fabulous demonstration of his magician's talents, and, of course, Manitobans are proud that he, you know, has Manitoba roots, has lived in this province and he's a magician by training. Actually, I think he got to, like, the finals in the Britain's Got Talent competition a few years back. Phenomenal magician.

And the basis of what he does is sleight of hand. The basis of what he does, as I understand the principle—I'm not a magician myself—but he attempts to draw the attention of the audience away from one thing, so that they focus an inordinate amount of their energy on the thing so he can do something else

outside of where their attention is. And then, a big surprise happens.

A lot of that can describe the NDP's approach to taxes and affordability in jurisdiction because what the NDP would do is raise taxes every year. And, indeed, some of those taxes were extraordinary in years that had inflationary rates that paled into—in comparison of what Manitoba is experiencing now. But what they would concentrate on was single metrics. They would concentrate on single metrics that they thought would help tell a story. The problem is that eventually Manitobans would realize that they were creating a distraction here in order to draw their attention away from the other place. And that other place was exactly on the area of interjurisdictional tax comparisons.

Because the question is: Did Manitoba become a lower cost jurisdiction for income earners under 16 years of the NDP compared to the rest of Canada? And the answer is a resounding no. On personal income tax, no. On provincial sales tax, no. On corporate income tax, no. On other ancillary payments back to Manitobans, no. So the member is trying to have a conversation on one metric. He knows our government's record, that with the changes announced and in the legislation that will be tabled that Manitoba will be very much middle of the pack when it comes to minimum wage.

However, what the member doesn't want you to understand is that we are a lower cost jurisdiction than many other places in Canada. So, clearly, if we want an intelligent conversation on minimum wage, the member should also then be referring to cost of living in jurisdiction and then tethering that discussion to minimum wage. We are proud of the ways in which our government continues to keep Manitoba as a low-cost jurisdiction. Certainly, a home here costs less than in Toronto or Vancouver or Montreal or in Edmonton, and we are proud of that competitive advantage. But clearly, a conversation about minimum wage must also be tied to cost of living and must also be tied to tax competitiveness.

I'm looking at data on minimum wages today showing that Manitoba is very much in the middle of the pack. I see here that New Brunswick has a minimum wage of \$13.75; Saskatchewan has a minimum wage of \$13; Nova Scotia has a minimum wage that is \$13.60, just up today, I believe, and moving up. And of course, Manitoba's minimum wage moving up to \$15 on October the 1st of 2023, one day from this past Saturday.

So I think it is fair to say that our minimum wage is competitive. Now, as to the rest of the conversation, that's what I'm inviting a conversation on this afternoon. The member is complaining about the fact that, he says, I don't want to talk about the things he wants to talk about. I share his disappointment that he doesn't want to talk about that broader conversation on major affordability measures.

Indeed, he doesn't want to talk about the PST reduction, indexation of wages or personal income tax brackets. He doesn't want to talk about the phase-out of the education property tax, MPI rebates, the second least expensive hydro rates in all of North America or a \$96-million affordability package to hundreds of thousands of Manitobans.

And no wonder he doesn't want to talk about it, because it doesn't fit his narrative.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Well, it's rather interesting that the minister is saying the quiet part out loud this afternoon. And I think he's revealing that it is official government policy that they don't believe Manitobans—workers should have a living wage.

They don't believe that if you work full time that you shouldn't live in poverty, and they're quite comfortable with building an economy where working full time means that you live in poverty in Manitoba, and they view it as an advantage. And they don't see the dignity of Manitoba workers; they view them as a cost. And it's somehow an advantage to Manitoba's economy that we are impoverishing our workers.

So I guess the minister is revealing his stripes and appreciates that. I don't think Manitobans share that world view or think that that's the economy you build for the future.

And I want to correct one fact about his stats. Last month, Manitoba lost jobs. We were one of only three provinces that actually lost jobs last month. We are going in the opposite direction than the rest of the country.

Now, turning—have some questions today about political staff that is appointed by the government. They received a pay bump, a special wage adjustment of 1 per cent, and I believe executives got a 2.4 per cent pay bump, and this is for less than 1,000 employees, but all government appointees.

So I'm wondering if the minister can tell us how much that, you know, special pay bump to political staff is going to cost the taxpayers of Manitoba.

\* (16:50)

**Mr. Friesen:** Okay, so the member's previous question was we were not raising wages enough, and now his most recent question is we are raising wages too much. So it's an interesting afternoon again when the member is flip-flopping and oscillating between his questions in this way.

But I would point out some basic principles. The first thing I would want to point out to the member is that he should attend the Committee of Supply when the minister who has the responsibility for Labour and the minister who has the responsibility for the Civil Service Commission is in those proceedings, and ask his colleague—or, he might have the responsibility for that area—and he could ask his colleague for time at the table to ask questions of the minister responsible. So that's the first thing I would point out to him.

He could ask the member, you know, who is the Chair of the public sector compensation committee for that advice, but I think the member understands as well, because his last question was about competitive wages.

And so I think he would understand the basic principle that we're talking about a group of people who are out of scope. We call that term out of scope for the purposes of bargaining, and so they only receive the increase in this way.

However, the member makes a very, very important error. He talked about this being an increase for political staff, but that is a gross generalization. He's talking about civil servants, anyone who is out of scope. He's talking about deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers and executive directors who are out of scope. He's talking about support personnel in this building, if he would walk into any of the buildings and see the people who are operating as ATMs and front-line administration. He's talking about technical officers. He's also talking about independent offices of the Legislature, like Elections Manitoba and the Office of the Auditor General and the Ombudsman's office, and I believe the child advocacy office. All of these areas are outside of that scope.

And so, by attempting to reflect on a very small percentage of those workers, he's painting all with the same brush. The member has just spent the last 15 minutes on his pulpit talking about the importance of wages that keep up, and now he says for Elections Manitoba and the Office of the Auditor General, for senior administrators who were in charge during a global pandemic, that we should not pass along an increase.

We simply disagree on this point. We simply disagree. I would not support the member's notion that now would be the time to dig in. And for the people with whom I've had the honour to work, both as a minister of Health, the minister of Justice and now as the Minister of Finance, who answered the call, who came to the table, who willingly gave up holiday time and vacation time and time with their families, missed countless milestones, punched the clock, spent long hours, got intimately acquainted with virtual channels like Teams and other ways of having meetings, navigated the challenges of running departments that had been taken largely offline and worked from home—the member said that's the place to put your foot down and make sure those people don't receive an appropriate increase.

I say no; I don't agree with the member. But, more than that, I think the member would understand he's just spent a lot of time talking about the importance of competitive wages, and it is important that the province continues to compete. We are losing workforce if we do not keep up with wages.

So, these senior leaders have other opportunities, both in the public sector and the private sector, and if we don't keep up with our obligations, then that differential becomes larger, and then we end up spending an inordinate amount of time trying to get that capacity and expertise back.

So, we believe that, at this point in time, these are appropriate increases. They are modest; they are helping to keep up with rising costs—rising costs that this member himself has talked about at length this afternoon.

So, my small lecture for the member would be it becomes difficult for him to have it both ways: to talk out of one side of his mouth about the importance of wages keeping up and then out the other side of his mouth about the importance of not awarding increases in an appropriate way across a broad sector of the civil service who are out of scope and do not enjoy the same bargaining provisions as other groups have.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** Well, the minister can run, but he can't hide. This very much is in his ministry.

The question—and I'll repeat, because it may have been lost in all the bluster—was: How much did this increase cost the Treasury?

He knows that; he has the people at the table to tell him that, and if he can break out how much of that is going to executives versus the rest of the cohort, and out of that 900, almost 1,000 employees, how many

are executives that are getting the 2.4 per cent bump as opposed to the number getting the 1 per cent bump. So, that's all within his ministry.

And the issue is one of fairness, because I'll ask a supplemental question of the minister: Why hasn't this same special bump been given to the remaining regular Manitoba public employees? How come they don't get this consideration? How come the minister isn't concerned about retention and recruitment with that group of people and only seems to be concerned with Conservative Party members that they end up hiring?

**Mr. Friesen:** The Public Accounts, which were just produced last week on Thursday, on page 116 in schedule 9, reveal that the personnel services expense for the government of Manitoba in 2022 is approximately \$9 billion—9 billion and 43 million dollars—\$9.043 billion. Of that amount, \$14 million accounts for the 1 per cent increase retroactive to 2019, inclusive of approximately 1,000 workers.

Now that's where reality stops for that member because these comments that he's repeated become more troubling. I assure the member there are not 1,000 PC staffers secretly in the bowels of the Legislature on the first floor, or maybe hiding under the Chamber in some of those closets. Instead, that narrative simply falls down.

Now I would remind him that this is all of our technical staff. It is NDP technical staff. It is Liberal technical staff. But that is only one small part of the overall workforce that is represented by these increases. The member is sitting across in this committee room from senior members of the civil service. There's hundreds of individuals in the civil service.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

## CHAMBER

### EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

**Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Executive Council.

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

\* (15:20)

As previously stated, in accordance with sub-rule 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. I think maybe before we do that, we'll allow for some introductions. We'll just let the staff come in, and if either the First Minister or Leader of the Official Opposition wishes to introduce your staff, you may do so now.

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** Just to introduce our staff, I have Mr. Don Leitch, who is the clerk of Executive Council, with us today as well as Mr. Phil Houde, who is the chief of staff.

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Mark Rosner, the Tories' worst nightmare.

**Mr. Chairperson:** I see we're off to a good start.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Kinew:** I just want to begin by asking if there's any other matters under advisement from our last session, whether any of those could be provided.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable First Minister.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** It's my understanding that—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Sorry, I have to say it from my microphone. My mic was not on.

The honourable First Minister.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** It's my understanding that all of that information has been forwarded on to the appropriate individuals who are responsible for disseminating that information.

**Mr. Kinew:** Can the Premier tell this committee if Cabinet will approve a general rate application for Manitoba Hydro this year?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** No.

**Mr. Kinew:** Does the Premier intend to direct Manitoba Hydro to file a general rate application this November given that her predecessor, the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), directed Hydro by order-in-council to file an application last year?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** No, we will not be directing Manitoba Hydro to file a rate application or anything; that's up to them; that's under their purview, and I will leave it at that.

**Mr. Kinew:** Can the Premier tell this House if Manitoba Hydro intends to file a general rate application before November 15th of this year?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Leader of the Opposition will have to ask Manitoba Hydro that.

**Mr. Kinew:** Does the Premier intend to pass Bill 36 past third reading?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Yes, we do.

**Mr. Kinew:** That's a mistake. The PC MLAs are going to hear about the 5 per cent rate increase every time they knock on a door for the next year.

There was a first-quarter update from the Finance Minister last week. Did that update include any forecasts regarding increased hydro rates?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, first off, Bill 36, the Leader of the Opposition is fear mongering Manitobans once again, and I will say that what this bill does—I've said it before, I'll say it again, and I would suggest that the Leader of the Opposition reads the bill again. The bill is before the House now. There's an opportunity to read it again. It does protect ratepayers from inflation and inflationary pressures out there. So it is the lesser of 5 per cent or inflation, which protects Manitobans. Of course, the Manitoba Hydro is up to—it's up to them as to what rate applications that they apply for, but they have to fall under these guidelines.

If the Leader of the Opposition is deciding not to pass Bill 36, then he's leaving it open for Manitoba Hydro to apply for a rate increase higher than 5 per cent and actually at the rate of inflation. We don't believe that that is in the best interests of Manitobans. That's why this bill protects ratepayers while also protecting Manitoba Hydro. It also gives more power to the Public Utilities Board, and so we believe that this is in the best interest of Manitobans.

**Mr. Kinew:** Those higher rate increases have only ever been proposed under the PCs.

Can the Premier confirm whether she or her office or Manitoba Hydro have hired Sandy Riley to advise her government regarding issues related to Manitoba Hydro?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** The Leader of the Opposition is wrong once again. There were, I believe, at least three different occasions back under the previous NDP government where there were increases to Manitoba Hydro ratepayers of 5 per cent. So, the Leader of the Opposition is just plain wrong.

**Mr. Kinew:** Can the Premier confirm whether she or her office or Manitoba Hydro have hired Sandy Riley to advise her government regarding issues related to Manitoba Hydro?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Mr. Riley is providing advice to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) on Manitoba Hydro with no remuneration.

**Mr. Kinew:** So what's the nature of that engagement?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Not sure I understand the question. If the Leader of the Opposition could elaborate on what he's trying to get at here.

**Mr. Kinew:** Is there a contract governing the relationship with Mr. Riley and the government?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** There is no contract and there is no compensation.

**Mr. Kinew:** Yes, so what is the nature of the role, then?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Mr. Riley is providing advice on this matter to the Minister of Finance. There are often people that provide advice who have certain expertise, and so that's what Mr. Riley is doing.

**Mr. Kinew:** And how frequently and under what terms is this advice being provided?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I believe those questions would be best asked under the Minister of Finance; that's under his area.

**Mr. Kinew:** And what is the nature of the advice? Like, what sort of topics are being discussed?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I—again, it's advice to the minister. I would refer him to the Minister of Finance's Estimates, which I believe are going on simultaneous to these today.

**Mr. Kinew:** And who else is providing advice to the government on Manitoba Hydro in a similar sort of arrangement?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Again, I'm not aware of anyone else that's providing advice in a similar arrangement. So, again, that question would be best asked of the Minister of Finance and those Estimates.

**Mr. Kinew:** And so, what's the background of this arrangement? How did this come about?

\* (15:30)

**Mrs. Stefanson:** The Leader of the Opposition will know that Mr. Riley has extensive experience in capital markets and financing.

Certainly, Manitoba Hydro is—we do know has had some challenges in the past with respect to the debt on Manitoba Hydro, and that certainly has nothing to do with our government but the previous

NDP government that came in, and as a result of projects that they put in place, there has been significant cost overruns as a result of that.

And I would say that Mr. Riley and his experience on capital markets and financing is very well suited for an advisory role of this nature.

**Mr. Kinew:** But what is the background? Like, how did this come about? Who reached out to whom, according to what timeline? How did this advisory relationship get struck?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I think he understands what the challenges are and the finances of Manitoba Hydro. He offered to help, and we accepted his advice.

**Mr. Kinew:** Is Mr. Riley being provided with privileged information or Cabinet documents as part of this arrangement?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** No, he is not privy to Cabinet documents and he's signed a letter of confidentiality.

**Mr. Kinew:** Can the First Minister kindly explain what the letter of confidentiality is?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Mr. Riley has signed a standard letter of confidentiality similar to what would be signed in the event that a consultant is brought on board.

**Mr. Kinew:** This agreement sounds like a contract, though perhaps not a contract for remuneration.

Would the First Minister kindly table the letter of confidentiality?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** We don't have it here, but we can get that for the member.

**Mr. Kinew:** Thanks, and look forward to that undertaking or that matter under advisement.

What's the timeline for this arrangement?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Again, this is an advisory role, so it's ongoing. There is no termination date that's specified.

**Mr. Kinew:** Is it tied to any specific undertaking that the government has with Hydro, such as, say, the passage of Bill 36 or, perhaps, publicly announcing that Keeyask is fully operational or maybe repairing the relationship with the four Keeyask First Nations or perhaps removing the injunction that's held against Tataskweyak Cree Nation?

Is there some kind of upcoming milestone that this advice is centred around?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** All I know—I mean, Mr. Riley is providing advice to the minister on issues related to Manitoba Hydro. Again, those questions would be best asked of the minister.

**Mr. Kinew:** And when did he start this advisory role?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I don't have that exact date here today, but we can endeavour to get that for the member.

**Mr. Kinew:** Okay, thank you.

Does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) support the implementation of all the recommendations of the Wall commission?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** So, the Wall review was advice that was provided to government, and obviously we take those, you know, recommendations under consideration. And if the recommendations make sense and we believe are in the best interest of Manitobans, we'll act on those. It doesn't necessarily mean we will act on all, but, again, those are still things that are under review now.

**Mr. Kinew:** What's the timeline for that review of the Wall commission recommendations?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I would just say the review is ongoing, and again, a question that could be asked of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) as well.

\* (15:40)

**Mr. Kinew:** Kind of sounds like the government just sort of forgot about it and moved on.

Will the Premier publicly report on the implementation of the Wall commission's recommendations?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I think any decisions that are made with respect to—from the government's—under the government's purview with respect to Manitoba Hydro, those announcements will be made in due course by the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Kinew:** The government had previously said that they were accepting all the recommendations, and today the Premier said not necessarily would all the recommendations move forward. So, this is a pretty expensive report that the government commissioned by somebody who does not have expertise in hydro-electricity, I would add.

So, it's a pretty expensive thing for the government to back away from. Though, you know, I guess the best interests of Manitobans probably would have been good not to do the Wall report in the first place,

much less pay those millions and then back away from it later because, you know, political calculus changes.

One of the recommendations that jumped out there would be privatizing Centra Gas. So, I wonder if the Premier could speak to that.

Would the Premier support selling off the divisions of Manitoba Hydro that include Centra Gas?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** So, the Leader of the Opposition will know that I came into this role about 11 months ago and there were a number of things that were reviewed. He'll recall that we pulled five bills off the table, one including bill 34, the education bill, and we're reviewing and looking at ways to change those things and to make it better for consumers and for Manitobans and, you know, certainly, in the way of bill 34, to make it better for the education of our children.

When it comes to the recommendations from the rall-Wall review, some of those recommendations helped form Bill 36, which is a positive thing, again, for ratepayers, and it also protects Manitoba Hydro. It gives more power to the Public Utilities Board. We think that those are positive things.

So, again, those are things that came out of the Wall review. They are not all things, as I said earlier. Circumstances change, you know, over time, and I know the Wall review came out—I can't recall the specific date of it, but it's certainly well over a year ago—and, you know, we're continuing, as I mentioned earlier, to have a look at those recommendations to the extent that they make sense, as some did in the way of forming Bill 36 that make sense for ratepayers, as well as, you know, the financial aspect of Manitoba Hydro to the role of the Public Utilities Board. Then, of course, you know, that's where we go.

And, yes, my staff just reminds me I said the education bill was bill 64, sorry, not 34, so I correct the record on that. It was bill 64.

**Mr. Kinew:** The other mistake, in addition to misnumbering the bill, would be stating that Bill 35 of this session is a good thing. It's, in fact, a very bad thing. Five per cent rake height-rake hike on the people of Manitoba at this time will be a problem, you know.

People are struggling right now. They're struggling to pay the bills. The government made a bunch of announcements this summer, but none of them were on making life more affordable. None of them were on health care and improving health care.

So, you know, there's a lot of frantic movement but not a lot of deliberate action, and that's what the folks in Manitoba need: concrete steps to make life more affordable. A 5 per cent rate increase from the hydroelectric utility that the people of Manitoba own is not good. It's bad.

When we look at the process following up from the public presentation of the Wall report, the government committed on June 18th, 2021, to a formal process to implement all recommendations. There was a bunch of, I guess, details around that formal process and what that would look like, but I just wanted to confirm that that formal process announced last year to implement this suite of recommendations from the commission, that that formal process is no longer ongoing.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, I know the Leader of the Opposition, sort of, mentioned that I had misspoken, in terms of the bill number, bill 64, and I know that he just misspoke, not mentioning Bill 36, but mentioned 35. I don't want to get into this kind of a petty debate back and forth, but I just thought I would point out that he, in fact, as well had the wrong bill number. So I will just point that out to him.

When it comes to the recommendations and something that happened in June of 2021, I believe the member is talking about, you know, there is a lot of—that has changed since that period of time. We will continue to, again, have the lens of looking at listening to Manitobans—obviously, you know, taking action on their behalf when it makes sense for those Manitobans.

And we will not hesitate to get things done on behalf of Manitobans. And that is the—what I have brought, I believe, to this role and what our team has been doing on this side of the House, and all of our ministers have been laser-focused on ensuring that they are listening and taking action and getting things done on behalf of Manitobans.

The Leader of the Opposition, again, wanted to go back—he referred to Bill 35, it's actually Bill 36. But again, this is about Bill 36, which is before the House right now. He is absolutely wrong.

First of all, the—Manitoba Hydro decides themselves whether or not they go to Public Utilities Board for an increase, or whatever, to any—anything to do with rates, and the Public Utilities Board makes those decisions. And I've already stated that today.

But what I find disturbing is that we're in a time right now with extreme inflationary pressures out

there. We're looking at inflationary pressures—CPI—of 8 per cent. It's been fluctuating, but it's significantly higher than 5 per cent. And when this bill was put together, it was put together under the auspices of wanting to protect ratepayers from those inflationary pressures.

And that's what this bill does, is it protects ratepayers from those inflationary pressures while also taking into consideration the mass amount of debt that was added to Manitoba Hydro during the days of the previous NDP government; massive cost overruns to Manitoba Hydro, causing significant challenges to Manitoba Hydro itself.

\* (15:50)

And so, we believe that Bill 36—and Manitobans deserve to know this: that Bill 36 protects them from Manitoba Hydro asking for a rate increase of, you know, beyond 5 per cent. It's the lesser of 5 per cent or the consumer price index. Right now, with inflationary pressures, they're significantly higher than 5 per cent.

So, again, the Leader of the Opposition and others across the way, they want to sweep, you know, this under the carpet. Maybe that there's inflationary pressures out there that aren't—nothing that's unique to Manitoba. It's something that's being faced right across our country, around the world. Those are things, most of which are beyond our control.

We don't control inflation. That's way beyond our borders but we are taking action to make life more affordable for Manitobans. And one of those things is Bill 36, which helps make life more affordable for Manitobans. It protects them in the event that there is a request from Manitoba Hydro to go beyond that 5 per cent or the, you know, consumer price index; again, whichever is the lesser there.

So, this is something: it's good for ratepayers; it's good for Manitoba Hydro. And again, the Leader of the Opposition and other members opposite want to put false information on the record about, you know, Cabinet decisions and all this sort of stuff.

The fact of the matter is that this bill gives more power to the Public Utilities Board and the Public Utilities Board sets the rates for Manitoba Hydro.

**Mr. Kinew:** A 5 per cent rate increase on people's Manitoba Hydro bills is not good. Beyond making life more difficult for Manitobans, it will also stoke inflationary pressures; 8 per cent inflation is taking place in Manitoba right now.



When you add another 5 per cent in input costs for those upstream price determinants that use Manitoba Hydro, that's going to increase costs further. So not only will Manitobans be paying another 5 per cent on their hydro bill, not only will those Manitobans get a reminder each month in the form of a hydro bill, that the PC government is bringing in these higher rates, they'll also have to go and buy goods and services that have more expensive hydro costs baked into them.

So this is an argument that, you know, I don't think the PCs are going to win if they continue to insist on Bill 36, which is the much the same as Mr. Pallister's bill 35 the year prior. You know, I think Manitobans are going to be quite upset with the higher costs that are being pushed on them.

Beyond that, we know that this bill significantly weakens the Public Utilities Board. The Public Utilities Board is the only thing that prevented this PC government from implementing an 8 per cent rate hike. The Public Utilities Board said that was unreasonable and sent back a much lower number.

Of course, we know that this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), the last premier, all the Cabinet and, you know, the caucus, cheerlead that 8 per cent rate hike and that was a mistake also. So, we see that the decision making, when it comes to Hydro, with the PCs, is not on the side of Manitobans. I think we can say fairly.

The Public Utilities Board is an important protector of the ratepayers out there, but Bill 36 will reduce its ability to make decisions with the necessary freedom and latitude to protect low rates for Manitobans. It will also make it more difficult for interveners to appear before the Public Utilities Board, and certainly, that gets in the way of free democratic participation in this important public body, but it also reduces the ability of folks, such as, you know, the voice of consumers and the voice of industry from being able to make their case before the Public Utilities Board as to why a 5 per cent rate hike this year or next is a mistake.

So, we've been very consistent and pointed out the flaws of Bill 36 insofar as it also mirrors the mistakes in bill 35. Very proud of the fact we support a free and public Manitoba Hydro and a Public Utilities Board that is free to weigh all of these various factors in the name of protecting Manitobans.

And we've seen time and time again the PCs kind of bring forward these arguments trying to attack the PUB, and they tend to fall flat because, at the end of the day, the argument the PCs are bringing forward is they want to increase rates by 5 per cent. Manitobans are going to get a reminder of that each and every month on their hydro bills.

When we talk about some of the bad decision making the PCs have made with Hydro, you know, the Wall report is one of them, commissioning it in the first place and then spending all that money on it.

But beyond hiring somebody without an expertise in hydroelectricity and paying them millions of dollars to conduct a report that is not going to be used by the government, I would also question some of the public statements that current ministers of the Crown have made on the implementation of those recommendations.

On this January 18th press release in which the government committed to a formal process to respond to the Wall report, just going to quote this line here. It says a public formal response document will be tabled in the House in the fall of 2022.

Do I have it right, then, that we are not to expect this public formal response document this fall of 2022 in the House?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, I think it's important to note for Manitobans that the only individual and the only party that is calling for a 5 per cent rate hike is the Leader of the Opposition and the NDP. Nowhere have I said—or anyone on this side of the House said—that they want a 5 per cent rate increase.

What we want is to protect Manitobans from inflationary pressures out there that are very significant and not unique to Manitoba. They are across the country, they are around the world, these are not things that are decided by and, you know, reflected just solely in Manitoba.

These are a result of things that are going on around the world. Supply chain challenges, the war in Ukraine—the unjust war in Ukraine and the horrific things that have gone on as a result of that. These are all situations that have caused inflationary pressures across our country, around the world.

And here in Manitoba we recognize that, of course, and that's why we put a cap on that in Bill 36. If there was no cap there, then it could be anything. So what we're doing is protecting ratepayers by putting a cap there.

But it seems that the Leader of the Opposition seems to be the only one who's talking about a 5 per cent rate increase. I guess the Leader of the Opposition wants a 5 per cent rate increase and he's just going to approve that himself, not go through the Public Utilities Board; he's just decided that it's going to be a 5 per cent rate increase for Manitobans.

Well, we disagree with that. We want to put a cap on it to protect the ratepayers in our province, and that's exactly what Bill 36 does. The Leader of the Opposition knows it, and he knows that when members opposite vote against this, which they did just the other day, that they are voting against the protection of ratepayers in Manitoba.

\* (16:00)

And to me, that's very unfortunate—to us, on this side of the House, that's very unfortunate. Because we want to do whatever we can to ensure that the absolute maximum is either—is the lesser of 5 per cent or the rate of inflation, or less than 5 per cent—again, that's a cap. And the only person that's talking about a 5 per cent increase, for the record, is the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite. We want to see that less than that.

But, of course, we look at Manitoba Hydro as the one that puts forward their rate applications through the independent Public Utilities Board. They make the decisions based on taking into consideration all different factors. What we've done in Bill 36 is just ensure that there's a cap on that to make sure that we protect ratepayers in the province of Manitoba—the Hydro ratepayers.

So, again, it's unfortunate where the Leader of the Opposition and the NDP want to make life less affordable for Manitobans. And we do know that, in the past, they raised the PST in the past to make life less affordable for Manitobans. They've jacked up taxes—there hasn't been a tax out there—I think it was 13 or 14 years in a row that they increased taxes when they were in power, making life less affordable for Manitobans. So we know exactly what would happen if the NDP were to get back in—into power in this province. They would make life less affordable, because that's their track record. That's what they do. And so they're doing that with Manitoba Hydro now. They're doing that with everything.

In fact, they don't even really have a plan on affordability. We've been out with a plan, a very good plan, to help those in need in Manitoba who are

suffering as a result of inflationary pressures out there. We have been making life more affordable for Manitobans.

I think what's unfortunate—and I know the Leader of the Opposition wants to laugh in his seat, and others across the way—it's not a laughing matter. It's a very serious issue. Manitobans are having trouble making ends meet, and we are making sure that we're bringing forth policies that will make life more affordable for them.

Like the minimum wage increase, which we have gone forward with. Like back to school support for families with net annual income of under \$175,000 and kids under 18 years old as they get back to school, \$250 for the first child, \$200 for each child thereafter, Mr. Deputy Speaker—Mr. Chair. I can go on and on about how we are making life more affordable for Manitobans, and I will continue to do so, because we will protect Manitobans while the NDP just want to increase—

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable First Minister's time has expired.

**Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook):** In regards to the First Nations agreements with Keeyask generating station, does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) believe the current agreement between different First Nations and the—and Manitoba Hydro with respect to the Keeyask generating station is fair?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I thank the member for the question.

It's certainly my understanding that Manitoba Hydro and Keeyask Cree nations are meaningful engaged on this specific matter that the member brought up. Manitoba Hydro has committed, as I understand, to undertake further review of the Keeyask Cree nations' request, with both parties working together to gain a better understanding of the interests and priorities of each party and to examine potential options moving forward.

So, as a government, we'll continue to follow this issue closely and look forward to hearing the outcomes as further discussions unfold.

**Mr. Bushie:** Just wondering if the First Minister can say if it's Hydro's intention into—to remove the injunction against the Tataskweyak Cree Nation.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I've never talked about injunctions at all. I—what I talked about is meaningful engagement that is taking place, as I understand, between Manitoba Hydro and Keeyask Cree nations, and as we

look forward to what transpires as a result of those deliberations.

**Mr. Kinew:** Yes, there's an injunction in place between—or from Hydro towards the chief and the community of TCN. Government has the power under The Crown Corporations Governance and Accountability Act to direct Hydro to ditch the injunction. So will the government do so?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Again, once again, I mean, the Leader of the Opposition, on one hand is telling us not to get involved in Manitoba Hydro, not to interfere in Manitoba Hydro, and now they're telling us that we should be interfering. You know, the Leader of the Opposition can't have it both ways, okay? These are issues that are being dealt with with Manitoba Hydro, and that's where they remain. But, again, the Leader of the Opposition can't have it both ways.

**Mr. Kinew:** Seems to be selective involvement on the part of the PCs. Manitoba Hydro tells us that they require a directive under the CCGA to get rid of this injunction. Will the PCs issue a directive like that?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Speaking of being selected, Mr. Chair—selective on whether or not we should be interfering. One day they're saying we should be interfering in Manitoba Hydro, then they're saying we shouldn't be interfering in Manitoba. You know, which is it? Again, speaking of being selective, the member opposite is obviously being selective. We believe that we're not going to interfere in Manitoba Hydro. Again, with those deliberations that are taking place between Manitoba Hydro and the Keeyask Cree nations, we want to ensure that there is meaningful engagement there. As we understand, there is, and we look forward to the outcomes of that.

**Mr. Kinew:** So the press release from June 18th, 2021, in which the government committed to a formal process to implement the recommendations of the Wall report, which includes—the recommendations include privatizing subsidiaries of Manitoba Hydro, for the record—the government committed to a public, formal response document being tabled in the House in the fall of 2022. Is that public formal response document going to be tabled in the House this fall of 2022?

\* (16:10)

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, I already mentioned to the Leader of the Opposition that, again, there—the Wall report acts as a—as some recommendations and advice to the government. And we'll continue to review the report and, again, where things make sense, to move

forward in the best interests of Manitobans. We'll take action, as we have, with respect to Bill 36 and to—and we'll continue to ensure that we're listening to Manitobans, we're taking action on their behalf and we're getting things done.

But, certainly, when it comes to this review, it—again, it's advice to government and we'll continue to look at it as advice and implement things moving forward where they make sense and they're in the best interests of Manitobans. It's common sense.

**Mr. Kinew:** The same June 18th, 2021, press release says that the minister provided a directive to Manitoba Hydro under The Crown Corporations Governance and Accountability Act to implement the 51 recommendations outlined in the Wall report. This directive has not been rescinded.

Does the government plan to rescind this directive, or are they going to continue with the implementation of all the Wall report recommendations?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Again, the Wall report acts as a—advice to our government and, again, I appreciate Mr. Wall's work and effort that he put into putting this report together. And I think, again, there are some very good things in there that have—that has—that have put in place—that help form Bill 36 for us, and I think those are positive things with respect to, you know, for ratepayers of Manitoba Hydro. And we'll continue to look at the document as advice to government and take action where it makes sense.

**Mr. Kinew:** So, there's a directive from this government to Hydro to implement the Wall report recommendations. What's going to happen with that directive? Is that going to be left in place to implement all the recommendations, or are you going to rescind it?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Yes, again, I would defer that over to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) and his Estimates to answer that. I'm not sure where they're at with the recommendations.

**Mr. Kinew:** Just want to point out to the First Minister, so this directive has not been rescinded and it says that yes, the 51 recommendations from the report should have an action plan for each: engagement, evaluation process, reporting mechanism, implementation, activities, et cetera.

So, does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) plan to leave this directive on the books or is this going to be rescinded?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I mean, again, I—I'll defer that over to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen).

But I will note that one of the things that the Leader of the Opposition is refusing to admit here is that report was, you know—it really outlines some of the tragic decisions that were made back in the previous—during the time of the previous NDP government.

And, you know—so I would just suggest that, you know, obviously we—moving forward, we want to ensure that we are protecting ratepayers; we are protecting Manitobans, particularly in these inflationary times. We've had those discussions. Part of the Wall report had to do with helping inform Bill 36 the way it is today. Those are positive things to help protect ratepayers.

Again, the report was written many—like, over a year ago and completed over a year ago. There has been significant changes in terms of inflationary pressures and other things since then.

I know the Department of Finance is looking at this and will look at those recommendations and will indicate where they're at in terms of the, you know, where they're at with those recommendations. So those are questions, again, that I think are better asked of the Minister of Finance with his staff.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** Yes, I wanted to ask some questions. This goes back a little to the beginning of the year, but I'll start with some questions about the occupation protest of the Legislature.

There was a letter that I wrote on February 9th. It was clear to us that there were some real issues with safety and security. There had been a number of threats and so on that had been made. The protest itself had set up outside the Legislature, called themselves an occupation protest. They said that, you know, counter-protesters would be asked to leave, and they said their plan was to peacefully protest and occupy the area.

Now one of the big concerns for us was—which really surprised me, and I asked for some clarification and I hope I can get it today—at one point the City of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Police Service tweeted that the Charter of Rights protects every citizen's rights to peacefully gather. This supersedes the traffic act and city bylaws—and I believe also that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) said that the provincial government doesn't have jurisdiction in civic protests.

\* (16:20)

And I checked with a couple of lawyers just to see whether that's the—actually the case, and it's not. That there—it's established precedent under *R v. Lecompte*, you know, section 2(c) guarantees the right to peaceful assembly; it does not protect riots and gatherings that seriously disturb the peace.

And another ruling said that the right for freedom of assembly, along with freedom of expression, does not include the right to physically impede or blockade lawful activities.

And, in fact, a police superintendent from Winnipeg actually posted—or made a reference to the—kind of, the guide—the documents that are used, and they make it absolutely clear that it is actually a criminal offense under the Criminal Code to block a highway.

So, I'm just trying to understand how it is that we reached a point when—that people on the one hand were saying that the Charter of Rights supersedes people's right to protest, when trucks are not human beings, and that this was clearly a situation where, you know, traffic was being blocked, there were hazards at borders and hazards at—because there was a slow roll on a highway where an individual—a senior couple were delayed in getting to an ER.

So, I'm just trying to figure out who—where did—the legal advice come from. Who gave that legal advice saying that the Charter of Rights is superseded by the Highway Traffic Act to the Premier?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** You know, I—that was, you know, some time ago now, and you know, we were receiving updates on what was happening, not just, you know, here in Manitoba, but across the country.

And so, if the member has some information to share with us in the Chamber with respect to this alleged advice that we apparently received, I'd be happy to accept that.

**An Honourable Member:** Yes, I mean, it's just—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Oh, hang on a second.

The honourable member for St. Boniface.

**Mr. Lamont:** Yes, it's just that, you know, there were—the other thing—and I'll resend the letter if I need to. The other thing about it was just, you know, there had been a number of warnings in the lead up to it.

One of the major organizers of the protest, who's now been charged, is an individual named Pat King, who was known to be making violent threats against the Prime Minister and others on social media. At one

point, he was—he'd made a video from—which is available still, online—saying that somebody was going to make the Prime Minister catch a bullet. And he was a very outspoken individual who was working with—so—and, even before the convoy was allowed to set up outside the Legislature, there'd been a member of the—an NDP MLA had had somebody walk into their office. I was receiving threats online.

So, I'm just trying to understand, where did the—where was the decision made to close off—or, who was responsible for making the decision to allow this occupation to set up and block the front entrance of the Legislature. Because at—prior to that, we've had here—in security, we've had—the building's been closed down more and more, we've been—and we've been closing off part of it due to construction, but also due to security concerns, sort of getting in and out of the property. So, the one—there's only one place for members as well as for emergency vehicles to get in, it was completely blocked.

So I'm just—was there any involvement on the part of the Legislature or legislative security in making that decision to allow these protesters to completely 'brock'—block the—and occupy the front of the Legislature and block the front entrance?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I thank the member for the question. I think, you know, I'd appreciate having a look at the letter that the member is referring to, and I'd be happy to take that back to and refer that over to the Department of Justice to get a response to that, specifically to those details.

**Mr. Lamont:** I know we've been talking a lot about Brad Wall and his—in the context of Manitoba Hydro, but I understand he was also working with some of the individuals from the convoy. He was recommending that Pat King be removed or be distanced from the front.

But were there any—ever any—did any discussions—did Mr. Wall ever have any discussions with anybody from the government, from the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) office or anyone else who was involved in the convoy or handling the convoy?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** To the best of my knowledge, we've had no discussions with the former premier, Wall, with respect to a convoy.

**Mr. Lamont:** Now, just a couple of questions relating more to, sort of, decisions around—because of this—around the same month, in around January that there was a point when it was—we were sort of in the middle of a—the wave in January, and there was an—sort of, an

announcement that we were going in a different direction in terms of the pandemic.

And I'm just wondering, it wasn't—it was sort of suggested we weren't necessarily going completely with public health, but I'm just wondering what—and as the Premier said at the time, look, you have your policy makers, you have—ultimately, the decisions may rest with the Premier or the Health Minister. But what were the—I'm just trying to understand, what was the policy basis for making those decisions and saying, well, we're going to take—we're going to go in a different direction when it comes to the pandemic.

In part, I'm trying to understand it because there were—actually, you know, in a couple—I think I understand that both in Ontario and Quebec, they'd hired McKinsey as consultants to discuss, you know, pandemic. Where there any consultants who were—like McKinsey or others—who were involved in making those recommendations about how to emerge from the pandemic? Or were there papers?

I mean, I'm just trying to get an understanding of what the shift was because there were, you know, debates back and forth, both in terms of public health policy but also in terms of economic recovery at the time. And I'm just trying to get an understanding of what the research was that was the basis of that decision.

\* (16:30)

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I'm just—sorry, I'm just trying to wrap my brain on this. We're back to January, and I just don't recall a time where Dr. Roussin and I, you know, were not out publicly on the same page when it came to the recommendations. So, you know, I'm—I don't recall that discussion at all. We were always sort of on the same page.

**Mr. Lamont:** Yes, it's just it—sometimes it wasn't always clear what the basis of those decisions were. There'd be an announcement, but there wasn't necessarily—there was, you know, say, a research paper or it wasn't always clear what the evidence might be. But I'll move on from that.

And I just have a couple—one—two quick questions.

So one relates to the Public Accounts. So page—annual report in Public Accounts, page 39. It mentions that, overall, Manitoba experienced a decline in federal transfers as a share of total revenue between 2012-13 to 2015-16. However, transfers to Manitoba, including those for targeted program delivery have

steadily increased, and it's above the 15-year average of 28.4 per cent.

The ratio indicates the Province is relying less on its own source revenues to fund core programs and services, demonstrating Manitoba's gradually increasing vulnerability based on changes in federal transfer support.

And I do have a—so one of the things that I wanted to ask—I also wrote a letter recently about the—on the issue of health equity, that I know that you and other premiers have spoken about the need to raise the overall level of the Canada Health Transfer. But one of the things that we're interested in, wondering whether you'd be interested in as well, is whether the Canada Health Transfer could be restored to having an equity aspect to its formula because in 2014, nine out of 10 provinces lost health—faced health-care cuts where Alberta faced all the increases, and that if we were to return to a formula, Manitoba and nine out of 10 provinces would improve the situation, and it's also the same—is also true for the Canadian social transfer.

So, after that long preamble, I mean, I guess the two things are—I know that there are concerns about Manitoba's future fiscal capacity, that our—based on our own source revenue, but I'm also concerned about the fact that in the long run we're not getting the federal funding we could be getting if it were based on an equitable formula.

So I'm just wondering whether there was any interest or openness to accepting the possibility of Manitoba endorsing an equity in health care in federal funding formulas because that would actually—the result would be a net—even if there were no net increases in spending, nine out of 10 provinces would be better off. So I'm just wondering if that's something that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) might consider.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** So I thank the member for the question. I think if we go back in history some 60-some-odd years ago when an agreement was entered into between the federal government and the provinces, it was a 50-50 split at that time, and we do know ever since that time until today it's now the federal contribution of 22 per cent.

And so, you know, we obviously see and, you know, I—I've only—I've been in this role for 11 months now, but this has been a significant issue ever since I—and well before I got to the council of federation table.

So these are discussions that have been taking place for the last number of years, and really every province is on side to ensure that we get back to—I

mean, we wanted to take it from 22 to 35 per cent. I mean, not necessarily back to the 50 per cent, which I think will be difficult to do, but certainly that is something that the council of federation—a position the council of federation has taken right across the country.

I will say that, you know, since I've been in this role, I've found that, you know, by taking, you know, listening to Manitobans, taking more of a collaborative approach to things, we've been able to get things done, and that includes working with the federal government as well as, you know, the City of Winnipeg and municipalities on a number of different areas. And, you know, I want to continue along that line of taking that collaborative approach.

And I've had, you know, several meetings—I mean, a few meetings with the Prime Minister himself about this, with Minister LeBlanc about this and others, and we'll continue to have those discussions as to what that might look like.

I think we need to—I think there's a willingness on all parts to advance this, the understanding that health care has become such an important issue right across this country, and the funding of health care has become such an important issue that I think that there's a willingness on, I think, all parts to want to move forward. It's just a question of, you know, what does that look like? And I think those discussions will hopefully take place if we can get to, you know, a table to have those deliberations with the federal government, you know, to see what that would look like.

But for right now, that's the stance of the council of federation. I am taking over as—and have just taken over as the chair of that body. I—you know that I like to take a collaborative approach to things. I'd like to find a way that we might be able to move forward, and I'll certainly work with my counterparts across the country as well as the federal government to see, you know, how we can move that forward, because obviously what we all want to do and achieve is better health-care outcomes for all Canadians.

\* (16:40)

So, I thank the member for that question.

**Mr. Kinew:** Could the Premier tell the House whether the government has signed a deal with the federal government to access monies to build the channels project for Lake St. Martin and Lake Manitoba?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** The Leader of the Opposition will know that for many years now we have been putting

this in our budget, hoping that the federal government will come forward and move forward on it, and to date, I believe it's still held up in the environmental process stages with the federal government.

So, that's where that stands, but we are certainly wanting to move forward with that project. I know the minister has met with surrounding First Nation communities and there is a willingness to want to work together and move forward on this; and I want to thank him for his work on this.

And we look forward to moving forward as soon as the federal government gives the go ahead.

**Mr. Kinew:** According to documents obtained through the freedom of information process, the Manitoba government has not signed an agreement with the federal government to access monies from the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund, initialized as DMAF, which is meant to fund the channels project.

So, how come that hasn't happened yet? Why hasn't this taken place?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I think those are, you know, details getting into the departments of infrastructure and transportation, and those questions would be best asked at—in those Estimates during that process.

**Mr. Kinew:** It's a very important project for people across Manitoba, including in the Interlake and on the west side of Lake Manitoba.

Many folks in the region compare the high water levels this year to previous years, which were followed up by large-scale flood events and they feel a lot of urgency in order to get this project done.

So, as the leader of the government, why has—I would have to pose a question to the First Minister—why hasn't her government signed on to this Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund, which would provide resources to the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin outlet channels project?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I think, regardless of where the funding comes from, we need to wait for that process to take place—the environmental process to take place by the federal government. So, nothing can move forward until that takes place.

**Mr. Kinew:** We're just looking at this document, which is confidential to the minister of Central Services but obtained through freedom of information. It's a different department than the one the First Minister cited.

But, again there's a draft agreement referred to here for the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund. This note says that negotiations have been ongoing and this occurs concurrently to the various approval processes. So, there's nothing really in the way of the approvals cited by the First Minister which would preclude this financing piece from being arranged.

And so, on behalf of the good folks in the Interlake and on the west side of Lake Manitoba, who would want to see this channels project built, why hasn't this Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund been executed—or, the agreement for it been executed by this government?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** It's just due process that ongoing discussions will continue to take place between officials, but there's no funding arrangement or anything that the federal government will agree to until they go through the environmental process.

**Mr. Kinew:** Does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) have a timeline for when this agreement with the federal government will be entered into—an agreement to cost-share the channels project?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Again, I mean, it's hard to say from our standpoint because that rests in the hands of the federal government when that environmental process takes place. So we don't know or have any control over that process. So we are in the hands of the federal government and we will await that process to take place and hope to move forward as quickly as we can.

**Mr. Kinew:** So what has prevented the province from signing an agreement with the feds to fund the channels project?

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable leader of—*[interjection]*—the honourable First Minister.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

So the federal government won't sign on to an agreement, again, until they go through their environmental process. So that process needs to take place before an agreement can be signed.

**Mr. Kinew:** So we learned over the summer that there's been a number of delays caused by the provincial government in applying for licences or in carrying out consultation. And I take it, then, that these delays created by the provincial government are what is standing in the way of moving ahead with the cost-sharing agreement.

Is that accurate?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** What the Leader of the Opposition has outlined is not our understanding at all. Our understanding is that the process is in the hands of the federal government. This is going through the environmental process. Until that process takes place, an agreement cannot be signed.

**Mr. Kinew:** So if we go ask the federal government, they will say that they're not willing to execute the agreement until that other approvals process takes place. Is that correct?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I've just been advised that we have agreed to it—[interjection]—yes, but it can't be signed by, again, the federal government until that process takes place—the environmental process takes place. So we have already agreed to it. Again, it's in their hands.

**Mr. Kinew:** So what are the terms of this Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund agreement that the Province has agreed to?

\* (16:50)

**Mrs. Stefanson:** So it's my 'understanding'—understanding that the agreement has been signed by the Department of 'lamour'—Labour—sorry—Consumer Protection and Government Services. So, again, any questions around the details of what's in that document would be best referred to the Estimates within that department.

**Mr. Kinew:** Okay, so the—like, numbers in this note say that the estimated cost of the project was \$540 million, of which the MAF, aka Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund's contribution would be \$247.5 million. So we heard previously that the estimated cost of the project has gone up. So I was wondering by how much has the contribution from the DMAF agreement increased in response.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Again, I would just refer those questions to the departmental Estimates of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services. They will have the details on that.

**Mr. Kinew:** Is there a timeline when construction will start on the channels project?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, again, it goes back to we're waiting on the federal government to go through the environmental process. So that will be dependent on the timing of the federal government and that process taking place.

**Mr. Kinew:** But certainly the government isn't just sitting in a dark room completely unaware of when the approval process is going to be concluded. So what is

the timeline? What's the estimated timeline by which the approvals will be obtained and construction can begin?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, again, if the Leader of the Opposition has a crystal ball and can decide, you know, and can see in that crystal ball when that will happen I would love to see that, but the fact of the matter is that crystal ball does not exist. There are processes that take place. There is an environmental process that needs to take place at the federal level. That's under the purview of the federal government, so it has nothing to do with us. We have no say on the timing of that whatsoever. Again, that falls under the federal government in that environmental process.

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, the Province is the applicant, so they do have something to do with the process, and, presumably, like, if you ask there's going to be some indication of the timeline. So has the Province asked for an estimate of when the approval may be obtained?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, again, I indicated to the Leader of the Opposition earlier that the Department of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services has signed off on that. So—but again, it's waiting on the federal government to go through the environmental process that is out of our hands. We have done everything we can do on our side of it.

I think, also, consultations have been taking place. I know the minister has been out there having discussions with First Nations in the surrounding areas in the interim as well, but, again, this falls in the hands of the federal government under their environmental review process.

**Mr. Kinew:** Has the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) taken any steps to try and expedite the process, raising it with the Prime Minister, making any calls? What sort of efforts have been made there?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** There have been ongoing discussions about this for years now, and I know, you know, even more recently there continue to be discussions between officials and ministers and they keep on top of these issues. Our Intergovernmental Affairs was involved in that too. You know, we keep on top of it.

But again, we have no say over the timing. That falls entirely under the purview of the environmental process that is under the federal government.

**Mr. Kinew:** You know, this is an important project for many people across Manitoba, folks who live upstream, folks who live in the Interlake, folks who



live on the west side of Lake Manitoba. You know, there's impacted communities who are all along both sides of Lake Manitoba, downstream on the other side of the Fairford Dam, at Lake Pineimuta and Lake St. Martin. You have First Nations communities in the area, you have ranchers and other property owners, many of whom are raising the alarm, and they see high water levels this year that call to mind, in their opinion, previous high water events.

And the question, when we speak to these folks, that they ask over and over again is, well, what's taking so long and why can't the government move things along more quickly?

And, again, you know, I would put my plug in here that this project is important enough and urgent enough, giving the flooding situation in Manitoba and the high water levels we're seeing and have seen this year, that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) should get personally involved and directly involved.

And, you know, to quote discussions with officials, end quote, being the level of engagement up to date is probably not what the moment calls for. It calls for a more substantive intervention to expedite the approvals process.

Certainly, we've seen a lack of engagement from the PC government to speed along the work that they need to do to get this channels project constructed. We've heard many examples of—whether it's on the environmental side or engaging with communities or engaging with property owners, that there doesn't seem to be co-ordination or a commitment to seeing this project through in a timely manner.

You got folks there who recall 2011, 2014 and other years, and they wonder whether their ranch, whether their community, is going to be able to bounce back from another high water event.

Now, we would all hope that such a high water event doesn't come to pass, but again, you know, that's something that we need to prepare for. Channels project is an important piece of flood mitigation which could help us in this instance to protect those folks who live in the area, who live downstream. It would help assuage concerns from people who live upstream as well.

And so, the government, I think, ought to ask what they can do to expedite the federal approval process. The government ought to ask for a timeline for what that federal approval process is going to be. The government ought to show a higher level of engagement with this topic than they have shown to the public to date.

Up to now, we've seen the government continue to cause unnecessary delays. And as we lose out on another window to begin construction of this important project, you know, people grow increasingly frustrated.

And, you know, the attempt to point the finger at the federal government, you know, is a tried and true strategy or talking point, but having engaged in some of those conversations with folks who live in the area, whose cattle operations or whose homes are threatened by high water, you know, they don't really pass muster. You know, folks—

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

Call in the Speaker.

#### IN SESSION

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield):** The hour being 5 o'clock, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Monday, October 3, 2022**

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