

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

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

Vol. LXXVII No. 52 - 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 10, 2023

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 10, 2023

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 242—The Police and Peace Officers' Memorial Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): I move, seconded by the member from Dauphin, that Bill 242, The Police and Peace Officers' Memorial Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Isleifson: I just want to start—[interjection] I think it's important that in our province, as in every other province in Canada, we recognize the sacrifices that protection officers and police officers do in the line of duty every day and we recognize—at the end of September of every year, we take the opportunity to recognize those who have sacrificed their lives in this fashion.

We want to align, and this bill helps us align, with the federal government with moving it from the last day in September to the last Sunday in September so that it is predictable every year.

Madam Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed? [*Agreed*]

Bill 233—The Chartered Professionals in Human Resources Act

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): I move, seconded by the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer), that Bill 233, The Chartered Professionals in Human Resources Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Martin: This bill is very straightforward. It is a change to the designation of a 'chartle'—chartered professionals, allowing them to have that human resources designation.

I look forward to all support in this House.

Madam Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? [*Agreed*]

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs Sixth Report

Mr. Dennis Smook (Chairperson): I wish to present the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your standing committee—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on May 9, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 23) – The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les personnes vulnérables ayant une déficience mentale**

- **Bill (No. 31)** – *The Animal Care Amendment Act (2) / Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur le soin des animaux*
- **Bill (No. 32)** – *An Act respecting Child and Family Services (Indigenous Jurisdiction and Related Amendments) / Loi concernant les services à l'enfant et à la famille (champ de compétence autochtone et modifications connexes)*

Committee Membership

- Mr. BRAR
- MLA FONTAINE
- Hon. Mr. JOHNSON (Interlake-Gimli)
- Mr. SMOOK
- Hon. Ms. SQUIRES
- Mr. WISHART

Your Committee elected Mr. SMOOK as the Chairperson.

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

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- Hon. Mr. GERRARD

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following seven presentations on **Bill (No. 23)** – *The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les personnes vulnérables ayant une déficience mentale*:

Jessica Croy, *People First of Manitoba*
 Tomas Ponzilius, *Private citizen*
 Sharon McIlraith, *Private citizen*
 Twila Richards, *Private citizen*
 Dale Kendel, *Private citizen*
 Debra Roach, *Family Advocacy Network of Manitoba*
 Amy Shawcross, *Community Living Manitoba*

Your Committee heard the following presentation on **Bill (No. 31)** – *The Animal Care Amendment Act (2) / Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur le soin des animaux*:

Brenna Mahoney and Cameron Dahl, *Keystone Agricultural Producers and Manitoba Pork Council*

Your Committee heard the following three presentations on **Bill (No. 32)** – *An Act respecting Child and Family Services (Indigenous Jurisdiction and Related Amendments) / Loi concernant les services à l'enfant et à la famille (champ de compétence autochtone et modifications connexes)*:

Doreen Moellenbeck-Dushniatsky, *Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services*

Trudy Lavallee, *Animikii Ozoson Child and Family Services Inc.*

Sherry Gott, *Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth*

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following written submission on **Bill (No. 23)** – *The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les personnes vulnérables ayant une déficience mentale*:

Suzanne Swanton, *Continuity Care Inc.*

Your Committee received the following written submission on **Bill (No. 31)** – *The Animal Care Amendment Act (2) / Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur le soin des animaux*:

Kaitlyn Mitchell, *Animal Justice*

Your Committee received the following two written submissions on **Bill (No. 32)** – *An Act respecting Child and Family Services (Indigenous Jurisdiction and Related Amendments) / Loi concernant les services à l'enfant et à la famille (champ de compétence autochtone et modifications connexes)*:

Joshua Nepinak, *Private citizen*

Bert Crocker, *Private citizen*

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 23)** – *The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les personnes vulnérables ayant une déficience mentale*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 31)** – *The Animal Care Amendment Act (2) / Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur le soin des animaux*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 32)** – *An Act respecting Child and Family Services (Indigenous Jurisdiction and Related Amendments) / Loi concernant les services à l'enfant et à la famille (champ de compétence autochtone et modifications connexes)*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Smook: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: And I'm going to take this opportunity to introduce the students we have in the gallery, because they won't be up there for very long.

We have seated in the public gallery, from Woodlawn School, 48 grade 3 to 4 students under the direction of Simmy Gandhi, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen).

Oh behalf of all of us here, we welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Summer Activities in Brandon

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): As summer approaches, many Manitobans will be making vacation plans that may include a scenic drive through Riding Mountain National Park or maybe even heading south to International Peace Garden for the day. Some families may venture north for some class-trophy pike fishing at Sickle Lake or maybe even make plans to spend a week or weekend at one of the beaches at one of our many finest provincial parks.

Whatever Manitobans plan to do this summer, I would highly recommend they include a visit to Manitoba's second largest city, Brandon.

Thanks to the hard work and dedication of Executive Director Jenn Watson and her regional co-ordinators, Sara Girard and Pam Reiss, at Brandon First, there are plenty of things to do in Brandon this summer.

To warm us up, on May 27th we will see the hosting of the Apple & Pine Spring Market at the Keystone Centre, followed by the Manitoba Summer Fair at the Keystone from June 7th to the 11th. Also, June 8th to 10th we'll see the Manitoba High School Athletics Association track and field provincials at the Brandon Community Sportsplex; July 19th to 23rd will be the world-pardon me-the World Clydesdale Show at the Keystone Centre; the Salamander Summer Music Festival at Rideau Park takes place from July 9th to the 23rd; and August 9 to 13th, we'll

see Softball Canada's U15 Girl's national championships at Ashley Neufeld Softball Complex. Also, August the 11 to 13th we'll see the Western Canadian Powerlifting Championships at the Healthy Living Centre at Brandon University.

Brandon First is a not-for-profit destination marketing organization that consists of 12 board members, a three-person staff and a membership base of more 40 local business stakeholders. They are committed to working as a cohesive group to promote Brandon, Manitoba, as a host city for events, and have a very impressive success record.

Madam Speaker, with a goal to drive economic development in Brandon through multi-day event tourism and successful event hosting, I can honestly say, once you have attended an event, Brandon Brings You Back.

* (13:40)

Thank you.

Reetu Chahal

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): Today, I would like to recognize truly amazing local athletes.

Reetu Chahal is a Winnipeg athlete who was born with Down syndrome and has never given up on her dreams of being a champion. Reetu has participated in Special Olympics Manitoba since 2000 and has committed to making her mark in sports since she completed her grade 12 certificate from Maples Collegiate in 2009. She has participated in various sports, such as weightlifting, swimming, five-pin bowling, track and field and basketball.

Six Manitobans will represent Team Canada in the world Special Olympic games, and Reetu has been selected to compete in powerlifting in Berlin June-in June. Reetu will travel with Team Canada from June 10th to 27th to participate in the games.

And she has also been selected to participate in five-pin bowling for the February 2024 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games in Calgary, Alberta. She trains three times a week with Sport Manitoba, and, when she is not training, she volunteers three times a week with ImagineAbility program, helping different businesses throughout Winnipeg.

Special Olympics Manitoba has played a monumental role for individuals with intellectual disabilities, providing opportunities to feel proud of their hard work, amazing talents and accomplishments.

Reetu's entire family are proud of her and her—are thanking for the Special Olympics Manitoba and all her coaches, who are working hard to achieve her goals.

I would all—like my colleagues to please join me in—for congratulating Reetu for all her hard work, accomplishments so far, as well as wishing her the best in Berlin next month.

Reetu is joined by her parents, Mewa and Jaswinder Chahal.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ridhwanlai Badmos

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I rise in the House today to recognize Ridhwanlai Badmos, a grade 12 student at Windsor Park Collegiate.

Ridhwanlai has done outstanding work to contribute to his community. He founded the non-profit Wake-Up Mental Health and created a diversity, equity and inclusion council at his school.

Ridhwanlai's contributions have not gone unnoticed. Today, it is my pleasure to share the awards he has received in recognition of his efforts.

Ridhwanlai is one of 36 scholars for the Loran Award, which recognizes students' integrity, courage and grit. He is one of the current finalists of the Terry Fox Humanitarian Award for his volunteering and humanitarian efforts and he is one of 50 finalists for the TD community leadership award.

Ridhwanlai was the successful recipient of the University of British Columbia Beyond Tomorrow award for exceptional Black Canadian scholars. He won the international optimist essay contest and has accepted the University of Toronto's National Book Award. Most recently, he accepted the Mark Dickof Memorial Scholarship for his work in championing mental health and well-being and making a difference in his community.

Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to recognize the efforts and accomplishments of this outstanding student.

Scholarships and awards are impressive achievements, and are often a reflection of an individual's commitment, hard work and dedication to their community.

Sitting in the gallery today is Ridhwanlai, his family members and Ms. Jennifer Stevenson from Windsor Park Collegiate.

Madam Speaker, I ask all members in the Chamber to please join me to congratulate Ridhwanlai and thanking his family and teachers for their uplifting support.

Congratulations.

Steven Bignell

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): Today, I would like to recognize the outstanding success of Steven Bignell—who is watching live right now with his family—a self-taught artist and filmmaker who has made a name for himself in the Canadian film industry.

Born and raised in Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Steven's passion for the arts has driven him to create exceptional artwork and captivating films which have been showcased across Canada and the United States.

After pursuing a short acting career in 2005, Steven founded A Flat Broke Production in 2011, a film company based in his home community of OCN. He started small, creating short segments, before expanding into short films and eventually full-length feature films. His latest film, *The Tomahawk*, which premiered on national film board day, has received critical acclaim.

The Tomahawk tells of a story of a Cree soldier who meets a young, inexperienced German youth soldier in the closing months of World War II. The film depicts the soldier's journey to teach the German youth about his people and culture. Steven spent countless hours writing and rewriting the script as well as creating storyboards. The film was supported by the National Screen Institute, Reel Canada and the Directors Guild of Canada.

Steven's dedication to his craft is evident in his work, and his passion for showcasing—'showcayshing' local talent is admirable. He also—written several more scripts and that he hopes to bring to life in future projects, with the goal of putting Opaskwayak Cree Nation and the town of The Pas on the map for its local talent and crew.

I would like to commend Steven for his hard work and creativity. His success as a filmmaker and artist is truly inspiring, and it is a testament for his dedication and perseverance. Steven's achievements are not only bought recognition to himself but also have shed light on the Indigenous community's talent in the arts.

I would like my colleagues to please join me in congratulating Steve on his success.

Ekosi.

Green Team Program

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye): Today may be the last time I rise in this House to do a private member's statement. I have decided to speak about the importance of youth employment.

I am proud to be part of a government that understands this and is willing to do something about it.

Madam Speaker, I am talking about The Green Team program and our PC government's funding of community projects across our entire province.

I am pleased to say that La Vérendrye will receive \$235,694.30 from the total of \$9.6 million to support The Green Team program this year. Madam Speaker, these funds will be used to support so many projects in our local communities. Not only are these projects important to communities, they are important to our youth.

Over the years, I have seen the importance of our youth finding employment, especially those that this may be their first job. These jobs not only give a financial benefit, they provide life skills.

Madam Speaker, in my previous life before politics, I was a business owner, and every year I employed between four and six high school students. After being employed for a few months, you could see the change in many of them as they gained self-confidence and people skills.

These are just some of the reasons I feel it is important for our youth to find employment, and The Green Team program is doing just that. I want to thank our PC government for providing these job opportunities.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, seeking leave to revert back to tabling of reports to table the Estimates order.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to 'reset' back to tabling—revert back to tabling? *[Agreed]*

Leave has been granted.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Pleased to table the Estimates order, which is permanent and signed by myself and the acting Opposition House Leader, the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie).

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: And at this time, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery, where we have with us today two special guests known to many of us.

* (13:50)

We have Laura Tomaka, director of Council of State Governments, and Ilene Grossman, assistant director of Council of State Governments.

And on behalf of all of us here, we would like to like to welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature, and wish MLC the best in the future.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Health-Care System Governance Structure Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Doctors are speaking out. Of course, we've already heard from Dr. Dan Roberts, and now, other physicians are joining to the chorus of criticisms of the PC health-care cuts.

Now, one physician has said that the governance structure of Shared Health, and I quote here, is completely a mess. End quote. And the diagnostic and surgical task force has added another layer of bureaucracy.

He added, and I quote here, it's an absolute mess. You have to get rid of some layers and you have to fix the governance. Who reports to whom? End quote.

Does the Premier acknowledge that health care under her watch is an absolute mess?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I want to thank all of those that sit on the surgical and diagnostic task force. They are making significant headway at the backlogs that were created as a result of the global pandemic, and we want to thank them for the incredible work that they do day in, day out, to ensure that Manitobans get the surgical and diagnostic procedures that they need.

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

Mr. Kinew: I just want to correct the record and point out that it was PC health-care cuts that helped to create the surgical and diagnostic backlog. Everyone in Manitoba knows that this is one of the only jurisdictions in the world—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —that was cutting ICU beds as we approached the pandemic, one of many reasons doctors are speaking out.

PCs have created a bureaucracy that even they themselves cannot manage.

Here's what front-line doctors are saying, and I quote here: If you need funding for something, do you go to the task force? Do you go to Shared Health? Do you go to your own health region to pay for the task force? Do you go to your own region or go to Shared Health? End quote.

No one knows, least of all this PC Cabinet, and that's why health care has deteriorated so much under their watch.

Does the Premier acknowledge that her government has created such a profound dysfunction in our very important health-care system?

Mrs. Stefanson: Manitobans know, and the Leader of the Opposition should know, that we are making record investments in health care in the province of Manitoba, almost \$8 billion in health care this year alone, a \$668-million increase over last year, a 22 per cent increase since we took office.

That's more, not less—less, Madam Speaker. That's significant improvements in areas like the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, ICU capacity.

In fact, I was just at the Grace Hospital not so long ago making an announcement there with those doctors and nurses and everyone at the Grace Hospital, about an expansion—\$30 million that we are investing in an expansion of the ICU at Grace Hospital.

That is more, not less.

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

Mr. Kinew: For all the announcements the Premier likes to attend, there are fewer health-care services available to Manitobans.

There are fewer emergency rooms. There are fewer CancerCare clinics. And there are even fewer drugs covered by the provincial formulary. Those are the cuts that this PC government made.

And so how is it that Manitobans are paying more and getting less when it comes to health care? It's because of the bureaucratic mess that this Premier and Brian Pallister installed at the heart of our health-care system. The dysfunction of that is one of the chief

causes of burnout at the front lines, and that's why physicians are speaking out.

Why has the Premier created so much bureaucracy in health care at the same time that she's cut front-line health-care services?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition talks about doctors speaking out. I'm going to talk about doctors that are stepping up to help Manitobans, those who are members of our surgical and diagnostic task force.

And I want to thank them for the incredible work that they do. People like Dr. Peter MacDonald, who is the chair of the diagnostic and surgical task force; Dr. Luis Oppenheimer; Dr. David Hochman; Dr. David Matear. There's others: Dr. Chris Christodouda—*doulou [phonetic]*, Madam Speaker; Dr. Ed Buchel.

These are all Manitobans—and there's more, Madam Speaker—these are all Manitoba doctors who have stepped up to help find solutions to the challenges that we face not just here in Manitoba, but these are challenges that are faced right across the country.

These individuals are focused on finding solutions to these challenges, and I want to thank them for taking the time out of their schedule to do what's important to all Manitobans.

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

Education Property Tax Credit Out-of-Province Corporate Rebates

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, earlier this week, the company that owns Superstore raised its dividend. Now, the reason that they did that is because they made a profit of \$426 million in just the first three months of the year. They did that by raising grocery prices on the hard-working people of Manitoba.

At the same time, we uncovered that this government is sending that same company and its billionaire owner a cheque for \$327,000.

If that weren't enough, yesterday the Premier went on to claim that if we didn't send them this additional \$327,000, that somehow this wildly profitable corporation would, quote, go out of business. End quote.

Does the Premier actually believe that Loblaw's will go out of business if we don't send them another \$327,000 cheque?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Why the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite are busy picking fights with businesses in Manitoba, Madam Speaker, we'll continue to support those businesses in Manitoba to ensure that we're creating an environment in Manitoba—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —that's conducive for them to grow their businesses here in Manitoba.

The Leader of the Opposition and members opposite don't seem to understand that if businesses grow in Manitoba, it means more revenues to the government. More revenues to the government is how we pay for better health care, education, justice, social services, Madam Speaker. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: I know members opposite don't like that and they don't understand how to grow our economy. They don't understand that it's a good thing to support businesses in Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

Their only solution is to jack up taxes on the backs of hard-working—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —Manitobans.

We think that's wrong.

Madam Speaker: I'm looking for a quieter day today so that everybody that is watching this can hear what is being said. And I'm going to ask for everybody's co-operation, please.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the average Manitoban hears that first question that I asked and they're outraged that billionaires are getting hundreds of thousands of dollars that should rightfully be going to public schools.

But here's how out of touch the PCs are. They heard that first question and they said, what? [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: Loblaws is raising its dividend?

On that side of the House, they support the billionaires. On this side of the House, we support public schools.

The money for these cheques is being taken from revenue that is 'supposed'—that is supposed to support education in Manitoba.

Will the Premier stop her practice of sending cheques to billionaires and instead invest in local public schools?

Mrs. Stefanson: If the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite truly cared about funding education, Madam Speaker, then they would've voted in favour of our budget that provides more than \$100-million increase to the education budget alone this year. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: That's a 6.1 per cent record increase in investments in our schools right across this province, Madam Speaker. Every single school division got a raise. That's part of that \$100 million.

* (14:00)

And the Leader of the Opposition and every single member opposite voted against that, Madam Speaker. We will take no lessons from the members opposite.

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

Mr. Kinew: Ask any parent or educator in the province, and they'll tell you that the PCs have been underfunding education in this province for years.

They'd also tell you that that \$327,000 that the Stefanson government is sending to the company that owns Superstore, well, that could go a really long way in our local schools.

That could pay for several EAs to help children with exceptional needs. That could pay for extra-curricular programs to help young people flourish. That could help address some of the infrastructure needs that have only grown under the PCs. [*interjection*]

I really wish that PC MLAs would heckle this much at the school cuts rather than when we fight for public education.

Seeing as how the Manitoba NDP is the only team that will stand up for public schools in this province, I will ask once again: Is this Premier going to cancel the cheques for billionaires and instead invest in public education?

Mrs. Stefanson: I always appreciate a question on all the investments that we're making in our education system in Manitoba, and it's time to put some facts on the record, Madam Speaker.

A 23 per cent increase in education funding—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson:—since we came to office, Madam Speaker; over \$100-million increase in investment over last year alone. Every single school division right across this province of ours got an increase to their funding.

And when the Leader of the Opposition claims that he cares about education funding, Madam Speaker, he had the opportunity at that time to vote in favour of increased funding to education. And what did he do? He voted against it.

We will take no lessons from the members opposite.

Education Property Tax Credit Out-of-Province Corporate Rebates

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): On this side—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv:—of the House, we don't think billionaires need government handouts. Yet that's—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv:—exactly what the—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv:—Premier and her entire PC—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

If I can't hear, that means Hansard can't hear, that means our clerks can't hear and that means the public can't hear. So, I'm going to ask for everybody's co-operation please.

And we have some guests from the United States that I think are very interested in our system of government, and I think they're looking to see more civility and respect for democracy on this floor.

Mr. Wasyliv: Okay. Madam Speaker, they gave Galen Weston, the president of Superstore and No Frills, a cheque for over \$327,000. Manitobans know that Galen Weston has been making their lives harder by jacking up grocery prices. Yet this Premier thinks he needs even more money.

Will the Premier simply admit that this is wrong and commit to stop cutting cheques for billionaires?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Finance): Here we go again, the opposition members picking fights with Manitoba businesses.

Clearly, under our government and the direction of the Premier, we've been focusing on creating an atmosphere for economic development, an opportunity for Manitoba business to grow. And when Manitoba businesses grow, more Manitobans are working.

In fact, Madam Speaker, we had one of the fastest growing economies at 3.6 per cent last year. We've got more Manitobans working than ever before. And as a result of that, we've been able to make historic investment in public education—\$100 million plus a 6.1 per cent increase in this year's budget alone.
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Wasyliv: This Premier made a choice. She chose to stand with out-of-province billionaires.

On this side of the House, we also made a choice. We will always stand with Manitobans.

Yesterday, the Premier claimed that without her government's \$327,000 cheque, No Frills and Superstore could go out of business. It's clear the Premier's not living in reality. No Frills and Superstore made \$418 million in profits in the first quarter this year by hiking Manitobans' grocery costs. They don't need government handouts.

Maybe this Premier doesn't remember, because she forgot the \$31 million to disclose in her own property sales.

Will this Premier do the right thing and stop cutting cheques for billionaires?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, through our education property rebates, we're giving historic money back to Manitobans—their hard-earned income tax money.

What—under the NDP—and this would be the member for Fort Garry—should pay attention was that when he was over at the Winnipeg School Division—we know their plan. Under his watch at the Winnipeg School Division, local property taxes went up almost 37 per cent.

We know what the NDP's mandate is. They're the tax-and-spend NDP. That will never change.

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

Mr. Wasyliw: I hate to break it to this government, but Galen Weston is not a Manitoban.

Now, Manitobans are struggling with their grocery bills, and this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) is—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —cutting cheques for billionaires. That includes the \$327,000 to Galen Weston, the same person who's making groceries more expensive for Manitobans. That's \$327,000 that should be invested in our schools.

On this side of the House, we know that's wrong.

Will the Premier do the right thing and stop giving cheques to billionaires?

Mr. Cullen: Well, this particular company employs 6,000 Manitobans. We are going to support 6,000 Manitoban workers here in Manitoba.

Now, we know the NDP have got a record of taxing and spending. The member from Fort Garry—37 per cent increase on the back of Manitoba taxpayers.

Now we've got the Leader of the Opposition saying, well, some commercial properties should pay, maybe some shouldn't. What kind of rules is he making up? Is he making policy on the fly? Is he going to pick and choose winners and losers? What is his agenda, besides taxing them?

Agency Nursing Costs Public-Private Services

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, when it comes to health care, the PCs just can't do anything right. They refuse to listen to front-line health-care workers, they let vacancy rates reach dangerous levels and they continue to cut health-care services that Manitobans rely on.

Yet, one thing they seem to have no problem doing is sending millions of dollars to private, for-profit providers instead of investing in our public health-care system.

New documents from August 2022 to March of 2023 show the PCs spent \$5.24 million on agency nurses in the Southern Health region alone. I'll table those documents now.

Can the Premier explain why she's sending millions of dollars to private, for-profit agencies, instead of investing in nurses in our public health-care system?

* (14:10)

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I'd like to start by saying happy nurses week to all the nurses here in Manitoba. Thank you for your dedication and your commitment to providing care to Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, I was pleased to announce yesterday that 55 nurses have been hired into the Manitoba government's provincial nursing pool since its inception late last year. These nurses have worked approximately 900 shifts in the first three months of this year, in Northern Health Region, Interlake and Prairie Mountain. And two thirds of those nurses have returned to the public system from agency nursing.

Welcome back and happy nurses week.

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

MLA Asagwara: Instead of investing in our public health-care system, the PCs are still spending even more money—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —on private, for-profit companies.

In only seven months, they spent \$5.24 million on agency nurses in the southern region alone. That's millions of dollars that could've been invested in filling vacancies in our public health-care system, vacancies that the PCs helped create through their health-care cuts.

The PCs should put the care and the outcomes of Manitobans first, not the bottom line of private, for-profit companies.

Can the Premier tell this House why she's spending millions of dollars for private companies instead of investing in nurses in our public health-care system?

Ms. Gordon: The health human resource action plan is showing significant improvements in the health system. Nearly 900 new hires, Madam Speaker; 259 of those new hires are nurses.

And through the incentives that these nurses shared with myself when I went right to the front line to speak with them, we invested \$200 million into incentives, and I can report that 11,600 weekend super-premiums have been paid; 8,747 wellness bonuses, Madam Speaker; 11,562 licensure reimbursements.

We are investing in the health system. We are investing in nurses. Again, happy nurses week.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, while the PCs continue to spend and send millions of dollars to private, for-profit companies, they also continue to cut our health-care system. Dozens of beds have been closed, vacancy rates have reached dangerous levels, and nurses are being mandated to work overtime just to ensure our system doesn't fall apart.

On this side of the House, we think that's wrong, Madam Speaker. The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) should invest in strengthening our public health-care system instead of spending millions upon millions of dollars on private, for-profit agency companies.

Will she make that commitment today?

Ms. Gordon: May is a very exciting month for the University of Manitoba college of nursing: 120 students are making history this month as they enter the inaugural summer intake into the nursing program.

This was made possible through an agreement with our government and the University of Manitoba, and I'm thrilled to be celebrating this milestone with all of you. Enjoy your summer program, and I wish you all the very best in the profession you have chosen and as you enter careers in the health system.

Allied Health Professionals Collective Bargaining Negotiations

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, everyone in Manitoba knows that the PC government does not respect collective bargaining, and everyone knows that the PCs have made a mess of our—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Naylor: —provincial health-care system.

Last month, allied health-care workers voted 99 per cent in favour of a strike mandate, and it's easy to see why. Front-line workers like rural paramedics, pharmacy techs, MRI techs, radiation therapists and 190 other allied health professionals have had their wages frozen by this PC government for five years.

We're in a cost of living crisis and the health-care workers who take care of us deserve so much better.

Will the Premier give allied health workers a fair deal today?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): You know, it seems kind of ironic to me that on this side of the House, the Progressive Conservative caucus has to explain the collecting—collective bargaining process to the members of the NDP. You would think that they would be more familiar with it.

As the member should know, the Government of Manitoba is not the employer here; Shared Health is. And certainly our hope is that Shared Health and the MAHCP and the other unions gather together at the bargaining table, that they work faithfully and diligently on negotiations, that they are able to come to a good collective agreement.

That's what everybody wants.

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

Ms. Naylor: Madam Speaker, 99 per cent of allied health-care workers voted in favour of a strike. If that doesn't scream failure on behalf of this government, I don't know what does.

Thousands of front-line health-care professionals feel disrespected by this government. This is an unprecedented mandate, and it's a clear sign that they've had enough of this government's incompetence.

Ultimately, this PC government is responsible. Ultimately, it would be excellent if the Minister of Labour could speak to a labour question and take some responsibility.

When will the Premier stop disrespecting allied health-care workers and negotiate a fair deal?

Mr. Teitsma: I suppose I shouldn't be surprised that the NDP don't know what a good team looks like, but this is what a good team looks like.

Now, I'm disappointed. I continue to be disappointed, though not particularly surprised, that the members opposite continue to try to inflame this situation. It's irresponsible for them to do so.

It does harken back to the Selinger days, where they thought that they were at the buffet—I mean the, you know, bargaining table. Sorry, not the buffet table. But that's what it felt like, I think, for the unions of the time.

Active bargaining is continuing. Negotiations are under way, as they should be.

That is what should be happening. I wish the member would, instead of trying to inflame the

situation in this House, support that process and ensure that it can come to a good conclusion.

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

Ms. Naylor: The PCs are always trying to change the channel from their failures in the health-care system, but it's their seven years of cuts that have thrown health care into chaos.

A wage freeze for five years during our cost of living crisis, that's the policy of this PC government.

Allied health-care workers have had enough. They voted 99 per cent in favour of a strike mandate, and they deserve a fair deal.

On this side of the House, we respect allied health-care workers, and we recognize them as our constituents, our neighbours and our care providers.

Why has the PC government failed to give them a fair deal?

Mr. Teitsma: The way to get to a fair deal is by negotiation and potentially through arbitration or other tactics, other techniques. That's exactly what's going on.

Now, what I will say to the members opposite is that I have been out knocking on doors, speaking with many PC supporters. Every once in a while, I do run across an NDP supporter. I do. They appear to be just as dejected, deflated and divided as this NDP caucus.

But one thing that does seem to unite them is they all wish that the Leader of the Opposition would be the member for St. James (Mr. Sala).

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

Highway and Road Safety Debris Clearing and Road Signage

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): In September of last year, motorcyclist Denis L'Heureux was killed in a collision on Highway 311. Denis was celebrating his 45th birthday on a charity ride alongside friends and family when the group hit a large patch of muddy debris left on the road, leading to the tragic accident.

* (14:20)

Denis's family and friends continued to call on the Province to increase highway safety by having better accountability and signage when there's debris left on the road. When we raised this issue last fall, the

minister said that his government is studying a pilot project in Ontario regarding clearing mud and debris from highways.

Can the minister provide an update on the status of this, and how his government will implement lessons learned from this tragic accident?

Hon. Doyle Pivniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): It was a while since the member from Keewatinook even actually had got up and asked me a question, so it's great to have the opportunity to say that this last couple weeks I've actually met with the 'millersicle' group of Manitoba to talk about the safety when it comes to motorcycle riding in rural Manitoba, especially on our highways, especially when it comes to agriculture sector.

We've actually met with them, with Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Johnson), too, to talk about the opportunities that we have to educate the public and work with MPI—and also work with Manitoba Agriculture when it comes to Keystone agriproducers.

We're collaborating, Madam Speaker, and we'll continue the talks and we're also looking at what happens in Ontario.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Municipal Maintenance Contracts

Mr. Bushie: We raised this issue last fall because Denis's death was tragic and his loved ones want to ensure no one else suffers the same fate. We owe it to Denis and others to make sure Manitoba's highways are safe for everyone.

Advocates are calling for highways to be cleared quicker and for better signage, enforcement and accountability to prevent further tragic accidents. The minister also said last fall that his government is looking into maintenance contracts with municipalities.

Can the minister provide an update on what progress has been made on these maintenance contracts?

Mr. Pivniuk: I just wanted to say to the people in the House here that when it came to this weekend, I had the opportunity to put—do a proclamation to safety month for motorcycles in Manitoba. And I had the opportunity to talk to Denis's wife, Lise, who actually, tragically, lost her husband, and we had a great conversation to talk about what we're going to do, what we're—our commitment is as government here.

We are going to look into this matter; we're going to make sure that we collaborate with everybody out there when it comes to education to the public. Because everybody should have looked out for motorcycle drivers, and this is why we're having safety month this month and the proclamation that we did this past weekend.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Debris Clearing and Road Signage

Mr. Bushie: Highway safety is something all Manitobans can get behind. One death on our roads is too many.

Safety advocates are calling for action to be taken; they want to see roads cleared quicker, better signage and stronger enforcement to ensure if someone—to ensure someone is accountable for clearing debris.

Can the minister tell us what concrete steps and what commitment his department will take to improve accountability and ensure that no other family has to grieve this kind of tragic loss?

Mr. Piwniuk: Madam Speaker, you know, it's always safety when it comes to—is, lot of—No. 1 priority when it comes to Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure.

When it comes to safety, especially motorcyclists, like, we're going to be working with RMs, local governments; we're going to be working with First Nation communities. We're going to be working with everybody to make sure that roads are safe.

And I just want to make announcement—I just want to table this—but we actually, now, reduced the speed limit at Brokenhead First Nation to 50 kilometres an hour. It took them 20 years to even look at it; we actually did it, Madam Speaker.

Brandon School Board Meeting Government Position on Book Banning

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): At Monday's meeting of the Brandon school board, a former school trustee made a presentation demanding book banning. There's a video of it online, which went into graphic detail that was frankly disgusting, because of the terrible accusations it levels at educators and librarians.

That includes describing being 2SLGBTQ as an ideology. It's not. It's not catching; you don't get converted to being 2SLGBTQ by reading a book, and you can't be converted away from it. And let's be clear: I'm

a father. I want my children to be safe, and that includes being safe from extremists who want to take away our freedom of choice and freedom to read.

There's been silence from this government so far on these attempts to ban books.

Will the PCs take a stand against this US style of extremism and censorship?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): We understand that this is a presentation that was given at a school board, and school boards are set up and they have elected officials with trustees who are elected by the public. And it is a process that has autonomy to look at these issues as they arise, and parents can raise various concerns.

Our government supports an inclusive and supportive environment for all students to learn. We trust that the trustees also are looking at the best interests of children.

This is a matter that right now is being looked at at Brandon School Division and we will follow closely the outcomes of those discussions.

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

Mr. Lamont: If these folks are worried about what's in a public library, they sure are in for a surprise if they ever find out about the Internet, because let's be clear: in order to protect children from abuse, there's evidence that access to comprehensive, scientifically accurate sex ed material helps reduce the child—the risk of a child being sexually abused.

Does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) agree that book banning and attacks on educators need to be rejected?

Hon. Obby Khan (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): As my colleague said, public libraries are for everyone. They provide equal and equitable access to information and knowledge in accordance with the needs, rights, and freedoms of all residents.

Under the Manitoba libraries act, as my colleague said, library boards are the authority for the governance and procedure for public libraries. They are responsible for the development and implementation of collection policies, including the review and consideration of challenged materials.

I'm not sure how else we can say it to the member opposite, but this is governed under the Manitoba

Public Libraries Act. We are looking into it. We are working along with the boards as well.

Thank you.

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

Management of Health-Care System Staffing and Equipment Planning

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, management and planning with respect to health care, particularly in human resources, are not the government's strong point.

We're seeing shortages of health-care personnel; family physicians, nurses, specialist physicians, like in ophthalmology.

The current desperate shortage of psychologists is causing critical delays in youth care. A PET/CT scanner is sitting idle because advance staffing and other planning was not done. A neuro-ophthalmologist has been hired to come to Winnipeg, but the planning wasn't done to prepare for his arrival and he may now go elsewhere.

Why has the government had such profound dysfunction in its human resource and equipment planning?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I'm pleased to rise in the Chamber today to share again and to congratulate all the individuals that have been working on the health human resource action plan task force that has led to nearly 900 new hires.

Madam Speaker, 73 of those new hires are physicians, 259 are nurses, 82 allied health providers, 438 health-care aides, 32 physician and clinical assistants.

Madam Speaker, we recognize that more work needs to be done, and our government has taken steps to ensure that the health system is staffed through our health human resource action plan and our historic investment of \$200 million.

Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit Program for Low-Income Manitobans

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Madam Speaker, our government has shown a commitment to affordability.

The Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit is providing \$154.6 million in housing benefits to support over 17,000 low-income Manitobans. The Minister of

Families recently announced this as part of the National Housing Strategy.

Can the minister provide further details on this funding and the benefit?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I'd like to thank my colleague for that very important question on housing.

Our government agrees that youth coming out of the child and family services system, as well as those who are experiencing addictions, are at most risk for homelessness or becoming unsheltered or facing housing insecurity.

That is why our government has allocated, in addition to the \$126 million homelessness strategy, we are allocating a \$350-a-month top-up benefit for shelters so that anyone who meets the criteria, either kids coming out of care or those at risk of homelessness, can receive this monthly benefit so that they can achieve housing security in the province of Manitoba.

* (14:30)

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

High-Speed Internet Accessibility Concerns

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, in 2021, this PC government made a promise to 125,000 Manitobans, 350 communities that they'd have them hooked up to high-speed Internet.

I was recently in Tadoule Lake, Lac Brochet and Brochet, and we know that this government has broken that promise, specifically in the North, but throughout other communities as well. Lack of access to high-speed Internet in those communities makes it hard for their children to get ahead in education. It makes it hard for their businesses to succeed.

Can the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) tell us why she's failed to live up to her promise to bring high-speed Internet to those communities?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): Bringing high-speed Internet to rural Manitoba communities, northern Manitoba communities is, was, remains a priority for our government.

That's why I believe we had a debate—was it last week or the week before in this House—where I tried desperately to read the names of every single one of the 409 communities that have already been hooked

up by our government. Yes, there are more to do, but the 409, I just couldn't get through it in the 10 minutes I had available to me.

We are making significant progress on this file. We are hooking up tens of thousands of homes to high-speed Internet under this agreement.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Punjabi Bilingual Programs in Public Schools

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) According to the census 2021, Punjabi is the fourth most spoken language in Canada and there are 33,315 people in Manitoba whose native language is Punjabi.

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

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

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: (4) Manitoba has many good bilingual programs in public schools for children and teens available in other languages, including French, Ukrainian, Ojibwe, Filipino, Cree, Hebrew and Spanish. Punjabi bilingual programs for children and teens as well as Punjabi language instruction at a college and university level could similarly teach and maintain Punjabi language and culture.

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

We therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take steps to implement Punjabi bilingual programs in public schools similar to existing bilingual programs and

take steps to implement Punjabi language instruction in other levels of education in Manitoba.

This petition, Madam Speaker, is signed by many Manitobans.

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

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Until recently, diagnostic tests, including those for blood and fluid samples, were available and accessible in most medical clinics.

(2) Dynacare blood test labs have consolidated their blood and fluid testing services by closing 25 of its labs.

(3) Provincial government has cut diagnostic testing as many—at many clinic sites, and residents now have to travel to different locations to get their testing done, even for a simple blood test or urine sample.

(4) Further, travel challenges for vulnerable and elderly residents of northeast Winnipeg may result in fewer tests being done or delays in testing, with the attendant effects of increased health-care costs and poorer individual patient outcomes.

(5) COVID-19 emergency rules resulted in long outdoor lineups, putting vulnerable residents at further risk of extreme—in extreme weather, be it hot or cold. Moreover, these long lineups have resulted in longer wait times and services and poorer service in general.

(6) Manitoba residents value the convenience and efficiency of the health-care system when they are able to give their samples at the time of the doctor visit.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately demand Dynacare increase their testing capacity so residents can better access these services locally and re-establish blood testing services at medical clinics in the local community.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Drug Overdose Reporting

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

(2) Three hundred and seventy-two Manitobans died from an overdose in 2020, and that's over one a day and an 80 per cent—87 per cent in—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.

The data for drug overdose 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.

And this has been signed by Marcel Catcheway, Rita Maud, Esther Catcheway and many other Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Further petitions?

Brandon University Funding

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

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Since taking office, the provincial government has cut operating funding to post-secondary institutions such as Brandon University, while simultaneously increasing tuition and student fees.

(2) Brandon University is the only university in rural Manitoba and serves as an important hub for Westman.

(3) Brandon University is the largest university outside of Winnipeg with over 2,200 full-time students and just under 1,000 part-time students.

(4) Despite the important role Brandon University plays in Manitoba, the provincial government is continuing to cut the university's funding in Budget 2023-24, as funding yet again fails to keep pace with inflation.

(5) Inadequate funding hurts students and the quality of education they receive as it may force Brandon University to raise tuition, cut programs and services, or both.

(6) Funding cuts also negatively impact Brandon University's faculty who are at risk of having their courses cut or being let go altogether.

(7) The provincial government has refused to explain why Brandon University's 2023-24 operating funding increase falls below inflation, and why it is lower than other universities in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to adequately fund Brandon University so that the institution can avoid making cuts and continue to serve students, faculty, Westman and the province of Manitoba as a whole.

And this petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, could you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

ROOM 254

**CONSUMER PROTECTION AND
GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Consumer Protection and Government Services.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): I do.

It's a real pleasure for me to be here today to discuss Budget 2023, one of the best budgets ever as it pertains, in particular, to the Department of Consumer Protection and Government Services.

I will also note that I, as a minister, this is my first time through this Committee of Supply process, so I hope everyone will be reasonably patient with me and accommodating.

And I—but I believe my opposition critic might be in the same boat, and so the two of us rookies together, we're going to get through this together.

I should just say what my department is responsible for. It's like quite a few different things. I've got the modernization of government services, such as procurement, information technology, digital government—that's the management of the government's vertical and underground capital infrastructure through capital planning; project delivery and asset management—building things like schools. It's supporting and protecting the interests of Manitoba consumers, citizens, businesses, landlords and tenants through consumer protection, Residential Tenancies Commission, et cetera.

In all the department has five divisions: capital planning and project delivery; Asset Management; Digital and Technology Solutions; consumer protection and Procurement and Supply Chain.

The capital and project delivery division is responsible for negotiating bilateral capital funding agreements, developing and maintaining a multi-year

capital infrastructure plan, delivery and project management.

The division's goals are to ensure efficient expenditure of capital allocations on approved projects, consistently apply risk management to capital funding and projects, improve asset management for all government assets and provide real estate services to government and oversee real estate and property asset disposal.

The Asset Management division is responsible for the safe and efficient operations of all CPGS owned and operated buildings to support reliable delivery of government services and programs across Manitoba. They also provide insurance and risk and real estate services to government, including overseeing leases and property disposal and acquisition.

The Digital and Technology Solutions—DTS division—is Manitoba's central organization responsible for information and communications technology, and as someone with a background in IT, I especially appreciate having this in my portfolio. That includes cybersecurity as well.

It also includes the business transformation strategy, policy and service delivery for the government of Manitoba, and strategic leadership to continuously improve the Manitoba government's ICT environment through planning and implementing solutions to meet current and future ICT needs.

The Consumer Protection Division administers consumer protection legislation, investigates and facilitates dispute resolution between consumers and businesses and tenants and landlords.

The division also provides oversight over public utilities and designated organizations related to improving rates, overseeing land titles and personal property registries and issuing a variety of foundational certificates, including births, marriages, name changes and deaths through Vital Statistics.

The Procurement and Supply Chain Division—PSC—sets the strategic direction, policies and processes for procurement and supply chain related functions across government. PSC also provides strategic procurement services and co-ordinates procurement across Manitoba government departments, agencies and the broader public sector.

The division includes two special operating agencies, or SOAs: the Materials Distribution Agency, MDA, provides mail and materials distribution services to the public sector, and the Vehicle and

Equipment Management Agency, or VEMA, which provides competitive, comprehensive fleet and equipment management services to public sector organizations in Manitoba, including provincial department, agencies and Crown corporations.

The central capital program areas seek to ensure predictability of the government's commitment to annual strategic infrastructure investments and expediting capital project planning and delivery through innovative project delivery approaches, including design, build and P3s.

* (14:50)

The department is also working with federal and municipal partners to deliver funding for worthy infrastructure projects, with the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, or ICIP, as well as future bi- or trilateral programs.

The department provides strategic leadership to continuously improve the Manitoba government's ICT environment through planning and implementing solutions to meet current and future ICT needs. And as part of its mandate, the department will continue to—its best efforts to—or its efforts to best utilize taxpayer dollars and work with stakeholders to expand Manitoba's procurement strategy across the public sector.

Consumer Protection supports and protects the interests of Manitoba consumers, citizens, business people, landlords and tenants, and we also increase value for Manitoba by investing and maximizing the value of owned assets, including working closely with the Legislative Assembly to restore the Legislative Building, grounds around the Legislature and Government House, and if I may say, I'd love to see some air conditioning in this particular room sometime soon. I will do my best to get that done.

And also we obtain best value for Manitoba by modernizing procurement policies, standardizing procurement, planning purchases across government and sourcing products and services through a category management approach.

That should be a quick summary of what happens in my department. It is quite an—a lengthy list, as—I believe I was addressing a French crowd the other day and described my title and various—my full title, my complete title and all its various accoutrements and said it was a sacrée 'bouche-ful' [*quite a mouthful*].

And so concludes my remarks.

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

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

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): Good afternoon to you and the minister and all the members and the staff from Consumer Protection and Government Services. Really looking forward to the answers from the minister regarding P3s, Vital Stats, Residential Tenancies Branch, rural broadband and right to appear, and many more questions.

And, yes, thank you very much.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 8.1(a) contained in resolution 8.1.

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

Mr. Teitsma: It gives me great pleasure to introduce some members of my team. Immediately to my left we have Joseph or Joe Dunford, who is the Deputy Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services, recently arrived on these shores from out east. Across from him is Kathryn Durkin-Chudd, the assistant deputy minister of Consumer Protection. And next to the deputy is Ann Leibfried, the acting assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer.

And then against the wall is the most famous member of my entourage. You all know her, although you may not know what she looks like, for her signature appears in every elevator in all of Winnipeg, Cheryl Lashek, the acting assistant deputy minister, capital projects, planning and delivery.

Mr. Chairperson: According to our rule 78(16), during the consideration of 'departmental' Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put separately on all resolutions once the official critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Sandhu: Can the minister undertake to give a list of all technical appointments in her—in his department, including names and titles?

Mr. Teitsma: Sorry, all—just a clarification, all technical—[*interjection*] Appointments. All right.

I thank the member for the question. The one technical officer that I neglected to actually introduce, as I—my line of sight went straight through my assistant deputy minister, and so, pardon my neglect for that in the first response.

I have with me Kyle Reenders, who is chief of staff, otherwise known as a special assistant, and he is, in fact, one of the technical officers in Consumer Protection and Government Services. The other is perhaps a familiar name as well: Robert Gabor, who is the chairperson of the Public Utilities Board.

Mr. Sandhu: Can the minister undertake to give an organizational chart that lists all employees and program areas?

Mr. Teitsma: All right. I thank the member for the question. I do have in front of me the organizational chart as of May the 1st at least. Many of the individuals have already been introduced and the divisions I spoke to in the—in my opening statement.

But reporting directly to me under the organizational chart would be the Residential Tenancies Commission, the Automobile Injury Compensation Appeal Commission and the Public Utilities Board.

* (15:00)

My deputy minister, Joe Dunford, who you've met; and reporting to him from central Finance is acting assistant deputy minister Ms. Leibfried. And then going across the divisions within the department, we have Consumer Protection and underneath that is Entrepreneurship Manitoba and the Public Guardian and Trustee. We have the procurement supply chain, under with—underneath which is the Materials Distribution Agency and VEMA.

We have digital and technical solutions, underneath which is MERLIN, or the Manitoba Education, Research and Learning Information Networks. We also have Asset Management, which is led ably by Susanne Parent. And I should've mentioned, DTS is led by Hong Chung.

And then we have capital project and planning and delivery, which is led by Steven Spry; and then we have Corporate Administration and Planning—that position is currently vacant, but also included with that is strategic initiatives with assistant deputy minister Young.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Minister, for that.

And also, I see equity and diversity is the main important thing that I have seen in this budget document.

And can he please provide me the list of diversity in your—recently, that you have given, the list with women, Indigenous people, visible minority and persons with disabilities, please?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member. I would refer him to page 36 of the Supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure, where we describe the various equity groups that are tracked: women, Indigenous people, visible minorities and persons with disability, along with their benchmarks and then the actual percentage of total employees, at least as of December 31st, 2022, across Consumer Protection and Government Services.

But I should have a caveat in there that that would—at this time, these numbers would include the department of Labour, or the division of Labour at that time, because when these documents were prepared Labour was still joined together with Consumer Protection and Government Services.

I hope that's enough specificity; as you can see, there's some areas where we'd like to see an increase. Visible minorities is actually almost double the target, so good news there.

Mr. Sandhu: Can the minister probably break those down into executive, management and individual contributors, please?

Mr. Teitsma: In the interests of brevity, I think the shortest answer would be no, I cannot provide that particular of a breakdown. We don't track it that way.

I should also note that in terms of the stats that are there, it's a voluntary self-identification, so it's not necessarily tracked on every single individual employee.

Mr. Sandhu: As the minister said, this is voluntary. And can the minister, maybe, take—undertake to provide later on what those numbers are, whenever they are being provided to the minister and the department?

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, appreciate the question from the member.

Just in speaking with my team here, we'll certainly attempt to get that information. If it's available, we'll provide it to the member. If not, we will let him know that it's not and why.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and the minister.

Can the minister give a list of all current vacancies in the department?

Mr. Teitsma: Thank you for that question.

Certainly, we don't track it on an individual position basis, but I can give you a divisional roll-up.

So, within Corporate Administration and Planning, there are eight vacancies, which is 44 per cent; within capital programs, there is 171.7 vacancies. That's about 30 per cent; within DTS—Digital Technology Solutions—there is 69 vacancies, about 32 per cent; within Procurement and Supply Chain, there is 16 and a half vacancies, or about 20 per cent; within Public Safety Communications Services, there are no vacancies, zero per cent; within Consumer Protection, there is 24.7 vacancies, or about 15 per cent.

And I will mention that there are no vacancies in the Office of the Registrar-General, the Public Guardian and Trustee or Entrepreneurship Manitoba. And that was as of May the 1st.

We continue to hire.

Thank you.

Mr. Sandhu: So, can the minister also provide the vacancies in Vital Stats, what percentage of the vacancies there are?

* (15:10)

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member and, yes, happy to drill down in that particular division. As he knows, it's receiving considerable attention from myself as the minister and also from him as the critic. And so, happy to report some progress being made there as well.

There is an active hiring process under way, and so we actually have a staff member starting next week and one the week thereafter. After those two people have started work, there will be five vacancies on 42 total approved FTEs, so that would be an 11.9 per cent vacancy rate.

But what I will mention in addition to that is that, in addition to those full-time staff that we have working, we also have some temporary staff that have been allocated as well as—so, there's three of those—as well as 13 full-time STEP students that have also been brought to bear onto—into division.

So, that actually brings us to 51 people working full-time at Vital Statistics, so I guess that would put my vacancy rate somewhere around minus 20 because we actually have more people working in the division than the budget allows.

Mr. Sandhu: On this Estimates book, on page 8, it states that the number of employees will only increase by six. Why is the department not planning on filling those vacancies this year?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member.

I hope I'm understanding his line of questioning properly here, but as he's indicated, the budget for '23-24 does have six more staff in it in Consumer Protection and Government Services than it did in '22 and '23. Of course, there are vacancies, as we've already seen, within that. Efforts are being undertaken to fill those vacancies.

And I think, you know, what I just reported from Vital Statistics certainly indicates that the commitment is there to get those vacancies filled, and I think you can see that reflected in some of the increases in expenditure that are expected as part of this year's budget.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair and the minister, and I will like to move on to P3 schools now.

In 2018, the PC government looked into construction—constructing P3 schools, yet abandoned the idea after finding it would cost taxpayers more. The study found that for the same cost as building four schools using pre-three models, the Province could build five schools using traditional methods.

Yet now, the minister has announced they are going to build schools using the P3 model, despite no evidence that it will be cheaper than the traditional method.

Can the minister explain why is his government planning on building schools through a P3 model, despite knowing that they will cost taxpayers more?

Mr. Teitsma: Certainly happy to talk about our commitment to building schools. As the member knows, we're building far more schools under this government than had previously been built, and that's my priority, as I want to ensure that those schools get built and get built quickly and are high quality.

So, that's why I'm undertaking this approach because this is an approach that will get nine schools built in a matter of just a few years. They're going to be built two years ahead of the original commitment made by my—by our government. We're going to build, not just the 20 schools that we committed to building, but 23 schools. So, three additional schools, two years sooner, and that's more than enough reason for me.

Mr. Sandhu: I guess—thank you, Mr. Chair, for that, and the minister for that explanation, but isn't it—this was not really the answer that I was looking for.

I was just—to know what has changed since 2018? And we knew, through the study that the government has done, that it will cost taxpayers more. And what has changed since then that we are using P3 models, other than maybe, as the minister said, quicker? What other had changed? Like, how is it going to be cheaper for the school division to take over?

Mr. Teitsma: I think I understand a little better what the member might be getting at. And so, he asked what has changed since 2018?

I think, on any other table, such a question would be met with 'incredgility', incredulousness. Now, I'm not sure what the right word is there, but we're going to put that in Hansard and they'll have to spell it. And that's simply because we've gone through a global pandemic. We've gone through incredible disruptions to supply chains. We've seen unprecedented construction inflation, not just on a year-over-year basis, but sometimes, you know, on a month-over-month basis, as tenders are put out and then bids are received. And then, as the construction actually proceeds, there are significant challenges caused by the pandemic and in-disruptive to our supply chain.

So, one of the benefits of a P3 approach is that it insulates government against those disruptions. And so that would be one way in which the market is different today than it was, you know, in 2018.

But, again, and I would challenge the member's assertions, I think, in terms of costs. Certainly P3s have been used as a model to construct schools in many other provinces in Canada and elsewhere. And certainly, P3 has been used as a model in Manitoba to build some of the best roads that we have here in the city of Winnipeg. All those are hopeful and optimistic things there, I think we can take from that.

* (15:20)

Certainly, there's some lessons to be learned from some of these other provincial implementations, and I think the member is well aware of what I might be referring to there. But that's why we are going to ensure that this approach here in Manitoba is going to work well.

It's going to insulate Manitoba taxpayers. It's going to insulate children and parents from the uncertainty associated with our supply chain challenges and our construction inflation. And it's going to ensure that we get quality schools built quickly, which is really what we're after.

Mr. Sandhu: The question still stays the same. Why would any business want to lose money? After they can bid on a contract, or after they can build schools, they will want to make sure they are making money.

What exactly had changed? Like, how is it the private, like, one big company building seven schools going to make a difference than the traditional way of building schools with the local private contractors?

And where you have probably seven different contractors, compared to one big contract through that, they will be subcontracting to the smaller ones. But, again, the contract—the one company that will be bidding on the contract want to make sure they are making money.

So, how is that protection to the taxpayers of Manitobans?

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, lots to dig into there, so we'll see if I can get—if I can remember it all at least, as I get through it here.

What I would say, first of all, is that it's not one company. Typically with P3s, what you have is you have a consortium of companies, often a consortium of local companies, that come together and that make the bid.

What—I would just remind the member, too, like, the goal here is not just to have a quality school built, but a quality school maintained. And so, that—there can be certainty that the costs associated with properly maintaining that school are known up front, and that they're well understood and that they're properly funded—contractually funded.

I can remember when we first came to government in 2016 as the Progressive Conservative government at the time, we were quite mortified to find how much deferred maintenance existed within the—all the schools across this province.

We had significant projects that had not been done: building envelope, roofing, new boilers, accessibility renovations that were left undone, sometimes for more than a decade and were greatly overdue—that doesn't happen in a P3 model. In a P3 model, there's a contractual obligation to properly maintain the asset and to keep it in almost like-new condition. You know, it's essentially like a deluxe warranty on a—extended warranty on a vehicle.

And so, you know, certainly we don't want to fall into the member's mathematical issues where, you know, maybe he pretends that a school built the traditional way costs less because the NDP never

maintained them. I certainly want that—wouldn't want that to be the case here. We have schools that are going to be properly maintained, that are going to be built, you know, by local construction companies, for the most part—that's my expectation—that are going to be high quality right from the get-go and throughout the 30-year period. So that's really what we're after.

Now, why would companies be interested in this kind of a job is the same reason they're interested in any kind of a job, and that is so that they can do some good work and help grow our economy, pay their employees, drive business, drive growth here in this province, ensure that their company can prosper as well.

And that's my expectation, is that that's exactly what will happen. And we've seen that evidence first-hand. I think about the companies that built, you know, the P3 roadways that I've mentioned; you know, the Disraeli overpass, the Chief Peguis Trail, the Moray Street—these are some of the best roads in Winnipeg, and everybody knows it. And everybody knows that if a pothole does appear on one of these roads, it's typically addressed very quickly and in a way that's permanent in the solve.

So those are really what I expect to have happen. And one of the other benefits I just want to make sure the member understands, when you're dealing with the total cost of ownership, when you're looking at the project over a 30-year period, you make better decisions in that first year. Maybe you invest an extra 10 per cent in a particular building component because it extends the life of that component by 50 per cent. That gives an opportunity for the—for money to be made, and that's the kind of—by the company—but that's the kind of savings that just would not happen under a traditional model.

So those are just a few of the reasons, I guess, that we're pursuing this model, but I think Manitobans are happy to have a commitment to build, not just 20 schools, but 23 schools—so three more schools—to have those schools built two years ahead of our original commitment of 2029. Now they'll be built by 2027.

I know that, you know, folks in my community are very excited that Devonshire Park school is going to be part of those extra nine schools. I know the member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lagassé), he's giving me the big thumbs-up here as he looks down the table because he knows that in his community as well there's going to be another new school, a high school, built as part of this bundle of nine schools.

And given that there's nine, I assume there's probably seven other happy MLAs wandering the building. I'm not going to list them all right now, but I'm pretty sure we can agree that building new schools—lots of new schools—is good for Manitoba. It's good for Manitoba students, parents and our province.

Mr. Sandhu: In his response, the minister said it will cost more than the traditional way of building schools.

So the minister is admitting it, that it will cost more, as he just answered in his just previous—my previous question, he answered it.

Mr. Teitsma: Well, I'll have to check the Hansard, but I'm pretty certain I didn't say that. So maybe it was a misunderstanding.

Generally speaking, P3 projects, in the long term, when they're looking at the total cost of ownership, a P3 project will cost less than a traditional build that is properly maintained.

Now, what I would say to that member is I have seen some suspicious mathematics being espoused by people who are opposed to P3s for political reasons that are looking at the actual costs of maintaining a school.

Under the NDP government, the actual costs of maintaining a school were, of course, minimal because they weren't making the investments. And at the end of this—at the end of the process, you ended up with a school that's crumbling, needs a new roof, needs a new boiler, the elevator's broken, the bricks are falling off the walls, and then to say that that building costs less than the P3 school built down the street that has a building that's—or a roof that's going to last another 50 years, that has bricks that will never fall off, that it has an elevator that's going to work without anything other than routine maintenance for another 10 years.

I'm not going to compare those two and say that I should only compare them on the basis of how much money was put into them. I don't doubt that a poorly maintained school that didn't receive the treatments—the investments that it needed would cost less than a properly 'maintuned' school. But I can tell you this: Manitoba students, Manitoba parents do not want to send their kids to that. They want to send their kids to well-maintained, properly built schools, and that's exactly what they're going to get with this government.

* (15:30)

Mr. Sandhu: And maybe the minister's response also telling me that in the last seven years, they haven't really funded the schools properly. Is that correct?

Mr. Teitsma: Oh, Mr. Chairman, I have no idea where the member's going now. And I should, you know, perhaps, pause between responses here a little bit more. But I'll just, you know, at least set the record if not completely straight at least a little straighter than that.

And what I would say is that when we came to government, what did we find? Not just poorly maintained schools but portables. If the previous government focused on anything, it was building portables. I think the Education minister, Nancy Allan at the time, thought that they were great. She thought they were wonderful. And I think, you know, the last I checked, there was over 360 portables in use by the NDP when they were in charge—360—360. That holds 9,000 students in portables.

So, that's not happening anymore under our government. We are building schools. We are building—we've already got 14 of them either completed or under way. We're going to get another nine of them built as part of this schools project. These are significant investments, investments in schools that amount to hundreds of millions of dollars. In fact, over the last five years, \$984 million has been invested in education capital spending. That's five years, \$984 million.

And lest the member think that we're in any way taking our foot off the gas, the projection for the five years after that is more than \$300 million higher. It is \$1.297 billion of investments planned in capital—education capital spending over the next five years. That is \$1,297 million.

So, in total, over a 10-year period, our government will have invested more than \$2.2 billion in education capital infrastructure. That is far beyond anything the previous government ever did, even when you include all the money they wasted on portables.

Mr. Sandhu: I guess probably I'll just move from that because we can go back and forth on this one.

We can even—as I see the minister just walked in, we can go to his quote from 2018. But I'll probably bring that one up later on.

Provinces across Canada just as Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia are moving away from using the P3 model to build schools. Nova Scotia's Auditor General found that P3 schools cost \$52 million more than standard construction. P3 schools in Regina prohibited teachers from opening their windows or decorating their classroom. Alberta cancelled their plan to build schools using P3s in December. They have learned their mistake from P3s.

Can the minister explain why has the government not learned from the mistakes of the other provinces? *[interjection]*

Mr. Teitsma: I'd love Hansard to reflect that at last, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen) has refrained from heckling his own minister and has moved on to the critic, and for that, we can be grateful. I expect he'll be headed back my way soon.

But, nevertheless, the member mentions he doesn't want to go back and forth. I think I agree, I think I want to go forth. And I know that Manitobans do not want to go back, and they don't want to go back to the NDP where they, you know, neglected the needs of students in Manitoba by housing them in portables, making them trundle across frigid parking lots at -35° to go to an overcrowded, undersized washroom and to hope to share a gym if it wasn't closed because the roof was leaking.

That's what going back looks like. Going forth looks like what we see happening in the Waverley West neighbourhood. Bison Run School, I think I just got recently to visit—man, is that thing a piece of beautiful work. It is so, so well put together; it has so many amazing features. Included in it is an extraordinarily high-quality school. It's exactly the sort of school that Manitoba parents want, it's exactly the sort of school that Manitoba students want to go to school in and it's exactly the sort of schools that will be built as part of this Manitoba schools project.

Now, I am remembering that I think the member was referring to some of the other provinces. I think there's been some successes, there's been some issues; certainly, we're a government that actually listens. We're a government that learns. I'm—I've got within my department a procurement division that I think is quite possibly the finest in the entire country, and I expect that they are going to do a phenomenal job on this particular project. They're going to knock it out of the park and they're going to make sure that if there were issues in some of these other provinces, that they've learned from those mistakes, that we ensure that these schools are built properly.

Now, I will just—before the member might even want to go there—I think I've heard him say, well, if there was mistakes in some P3s then, you know, why would you do them at all? I'll just remind the member that every opportunity to tender a government project has possible challenges associated with it. We've seen examples. Just look at Keeyask, where cost overruns were rampant and where, you know, the way in which that project was tendered and the decision-making

processes around it created all kinds of hardships for Manitoba ratepayers and Manitoba taxpayers.

Procurement is a science and an art. It has to be done well, and I'm confident that the team within Consumer Protection and Government Services has the ability to do it well. That's why we're going to proceed.

Thank you.

Mr. Sandhu: Minister, in his answer, said he's—his department is—or he or his department is listening. And I just want to know, because earlier they did a study. They'd listen—they didn't listen to that study, whoever did the study. And now they said they're listening.

Can the minister explain a little bit more, maybe, who he's referring to when he said they are listening?

Mr. Teitsma: I—if I didn't make it clear enough, I guess, in the first response, I can make it a little clearer now.

* (15:40)

Many of these experts work in my department. They are procurement experts. That's why they're in the procurement division in a position of leadership—not just in our province, but I genuinely believe across the country. And I'm incredibly proud of them and of their abilities. They certainly have, you know, demonstrated their ability to deliver projects for Manitobans. And so when they recommend that we deliver these nine schools in this model, then, absolutely, I'm going to listen to their advice.

Now, what I would remind the member of is, you know, some of the other provinces that he might want to talk about and some of the concerns that were raised in some of these projects is that there's various ways that P3 models can be constructed. I want to make sure the member's aware of how these projects can be constructed.

There's a number of acronyms in play. DBFM is the approach that we are taking; that means design, build, finance, maintain. DBFOM is the method that is in use by some of the provinces where there were some issues, and that's an operate-and-maintain model.

We've made it very clear that the schools will be owned publicly and that the schools will be operated by the school division exactly the same way as, you know, a school built down the street under the traditional model.

And so, from a parent's perspective, the schools—these schools are going to be amazing. From the student's perspective, these schools are going to be amazing. From the school division's perspective, these schools are going to be amazing and they're going to be built before the enrolment pressure reaches the breaking point, not after 9,000 students are stuck in 361 portables across our province. That's the way the NDP did it. We're not doing it that way.

And if you take a look at the beautiful schools coming up in the Waverley West division, you take a look at the beautiful schools happening in Winnipeg north, take a look at the schools planned in the Brandon area—all of these schools are addressing enrolment pressures that have not yet reached critical mass. And they're going to be built ready to receive these students. That's what planning—good planning, proper execution can get you.

I know the member might not be familiar with that, he certainly is not going to get that from the NDP Education minister, Nancy Allan. After all, she thought the portables were a wonderful, wonderful solution for the problem facing Manitoba students.

Mr. Sandhu: Minister also has said—like, I'm agree, like, hundred and ten per cent, there's lots of good people in the department that are doing good work on behalf of Manitoba ratepayers.

And—but my question still—go back to 2018. So, what was the reason of doing the study 2018, spending taxpayers' money, when we know we have a great mind sitting in the department?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member, and I 'guets' we're right back to the back-and-forth where he wants to take us back, you know, five years, 10 years, 15 years. We want to move forward.

And moving forward is what we're going to do. Moving forward with this project is going to deliver nine high-quality schools in our province. That's going to happen in relatively short order.

I—you know, under the NDP, I talked to a number of school trustees, and they told me it was routine that, between when a school would have an approval from the NDP provincial government to when they actually could get students in the building, eight years, nine years—took forever.

Part of the mandate given to these highly talented staff—and I do thank the member for acknowledging the amazing technical staff that we have working in

that division. Certainly cannot say enough good things about them, and I'm glad the member agrees.

But, you know, when they make a recommendation based on the project parameters that have been given to them—to build nine schools, not just four or five; to build high-quality schools; to build schools that'll be maintained for decades in a high-quality state, and also to be built in this post-pandemic environment where there's a lot of uncertainty—I trust their expertise, and I think the member should too.

Mr. Sandhu: Even though the minister didn't really answer what had changed or what was—why the study was done in 2018, what I'll—I'd like to move to a different question.

Can the minister provide details on the proposal—proposed deal to build schools using the P3 model? Will the Province own the schools?

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, the Province will own the schools.

Mr. Sandhu: How much it will cost the taxpayers?

Mr. Teitsma: I suppose if the member, you know, woke up one day and found \$600,000 sitting in his bank account and—along with a note from the family to say, please use this \$600,000 to build a house, I would recommend strongly to him that he not share that figure with the people doing the building and tell them exactly how much he has to spend, as much as those contractors—or, sorry, as much as those car salesmen and house salesmen, you know, might want to know exactly how much you have to spend when you show up at their business.

And so, you know, I don't want to suggest that the member's not ready in any way to be in government if he's asking questions like that. That wouldn't necessarily be charitable of me. But I will say that, certainly, we understand in government that it's best to let the tendering process and the competitive process drive the price and not put out figures that might suggest that we're willing to pay more than we would otherwise have to.

Mr. Sandhu: I'm sure the minister and the department have those numbers that—how much it will—going to cost the taxpayers. I'm sure they have studied those numbers.

Is there any studies done to see whereabouts those numbers will be—just the internal part only—they have done any studies on that one, though?

* (15:50)

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, I thank the member. And I'm certain that we will know what the price of the project is after it's been awarded.

But saying it before, is kind of like the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen) was just telling us about his wife's engagement ring. He made the mistake of entering the jewellery shop and saying he could spend up to \$3,000, and out came the recommendation for a \$3,000 engagement ring, which is probably twice what I paid for my wife's engagement ring, I'm ashamed to say. But I told my wife—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order here, guys.

Mr. Teitsma: —she could spend up to \$5,000.

In any case, I think the member—I hope the member can see why it's important to allow the process to drive the price and to not, you know, provide a sense even of what the price range might be, because of the impact that might have on the tendering process. We want to ensure that we're getting good value for taxpayers, and once again, I, you know, I'm not an expert in procurement yet, but I know that people in my department are, and so I trust their advice on that as well.

Mr. Sandhu: So the minister said earlier that they won't be using a single vendor. Is that correct?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member.

Oh, sorry, the honourable minister.

Mr. Teitsma: You know, certainly, it's—the creativity of Manitobans is, I think, boundless, and I expect that will come to bear in this process as well. The door is certainly open, and the expectation, based on what we see happening in other provinces, is that a consortium—well, actually, multiple consortiums—will likely form. And those consortiums will together put together a bid to, you know, a proposal to deliver the nine schools. And that's my expectation of what's going to happen this time, as well.

So, it's not really fair, I think, to talk about a single vendor as if there's one company that's fronting the whole thing. It will be a bid, most likely put together by a consortium of companies, many of those companies I expect to be local right here in Manitoba.

Mr. Sandhu: We know, like, P3 schools in Regina prevented teachers from opening their window or decorating their classroom. Will the teacher be allowed to open the window and decorate their classrooms?

Mr. Teitsma: I should know already if the member has kids in school in Manitoba, but I'm sorry, I don't necessarily know that off the top of my head. But I certainly do. *[interjection]* You have one? One? *[interjection]* Good. I've got the indication there's one student.

So you may have seen from time to time art on display, paper art, often, you know, maybe in the hallways of the school or in the classrooms of the school, or if not there, then certainly on your fridge at home. But what I would say is when art is on display in the classroom and in the school, there is a limit. And that limit's actually part of fire code. I think it's around 20 per cent here in Manitoba. But, certainly, you don't want, you know, a lot of flammable substances on the walls of a school. You want to make sure that you're taking reasonable precautions there.

So I would certainly expect Manitobans to follow fire code when it comes to putting things—coming things—putting things on the walls and ensuring that that's the case. I know that the school that my kids went to, they got a visit from the Fire Commissioner and were told that they had a little bit too much up on the walls and had to take some down. And they got a little too enthusiastic with their artwork, and that does happen from time to time. So we certainly need to make sure that fire code and building codes are followed. And so I just want to preface my response with that.

What I would do is I would also—I would just remind the member that these schools are publicly owned and that they are going to be operated by the school division. So if the design of the school includes, you know, windows that are not openable, I guess you can't open them. But if they are operable windows, so that they can be opened, yes, they will be able to open them.

Mr. Sandhu: So I think the minister already said the school divisions will have the control over the school. Is that correct?

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, I thank the member for the question.

You know, I think I've made it clear that the school divisions will be able to operate these schools the same way they operate other schools. But when it comes to, you know, major maintenance that needs to get done in the school—roof replacements, for example—well, that's the responsibility of the Project Co, as it's called, or the consortium.

And so what I think would be different than the way that, you know, traditional schools are managed

under the NDP is that when the school building needs a new roof, they'll get one—not 10 years later. When they need a new boiler, they'll get one—not 10 years later, but when they need it is when they'll get it. The school will be properly maintained. And that's one of the key benefits of this approach.

Mr. Sandhu: Will all the schools be identical, or they will have a similar design for all the schools?

* (16:00)

Mr. Teitsma: I'm happy to report that the answer to the question is no, but I'll give a little bit more information to the member beyond that.

For starters, you know, they're—if you look closely at the schools that are part of the nine schools project, there's—some are grade 9 through 12 schools with industrial arts sections and the like; some are K to 8; and then I think there's also a K-to-12—a couple of K-to-12s in the list as well. So I would assure the member that certainly those three design profiles will not be identical, nor should they be.

But when you're talking about, for example, I'll use a K-to-8 school—that's what's going to get built, you know, in my neighbourhood as part of the new development north of Costco; that's going to be a K-to-8 school—and I would expect that a lot of the design elements in that school and the way it's built will be similar to the other K-to-8 schools in the bundle.

But there will be an opportunity for school divisions and the parents in those school divisions to kind of indicate some of the priorities that they might have, the local priorities they might have, and some of the, you know, particular aspects of the design that they might want to see reflected. That opportunity will be there.

Of course, it's limited, because we're going to be building, I mean, fundamentally, what do you need? You need classrooms. You need gymnasiums. I don't think there's any reason for one K-to-8 gymnasium to be 10 feet longer than the other K-to-8 gymnasium. I expect they'd all be the same.

And so, yes, I think the answer to the question is no, they are not going to be identical, but largely the same when it comes to the same programming needs: K to 8, K to 12 and 9 through 12.

Mr. Sandhu: So, K to 8, like, the schools they are having be built, they will be similar in design. And grade 9 to 12 will be similar in design. Is that correct?

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, I'd expect that the designs would be similar, but not identical, because the program needs are similar, but not identical.

Mr. Sandhu: When will the contract be signed?

Mr. Teitsma: Happy to inform the member that the tender—or, sorry, that the contract will be signed when the tendering and negotiation processes are complete.

Mr. Sandhu: When that will be done, then?

Mr. Teitsma: Certainly, I wouldn't want to rush that process, but at the same time, we don't want it to drag on.

So we're going to ensure that the process is done well. We want to make sure that all the necessary steps are followed, negotiations done properly and that the team of technical experts within the procurement division are satisfied that they're moving things forward that they're comfortable with.

So, when all that is done, that's when the—when it will be signed. The intent is to have these schools open in 2027.

Mr. Sandhu: I have some more questions about the PC government's use of P3s.

Did he send a request for proposal posted by the department stated that the Government of Manitoba was looking to prequalify suppliers to provide engineering and architectural services to buying groups which consist of Manitoba Health organizations, MBLL, MHRC, Manitoba Hydro, the government as a whole and MPI?

Can the minister explain what project his department is looking to at using P3 model for?

Mr. Teitsma: I've got to tell you that we've been chatting with my folks here on this side and we're not really sure what the member is exactly referring to, so I would ask for two things: I would ask that he repeat the question, and then if he does have a copy of the document he was referring to, and that—the parts that he's quoting, if he could share that with me so I could hand it to my technical staff so they at least know which document in particular we're referring to.

It's a big department. There's lots going on.

Mr. Sandhu: This is related to procurement on page 21. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order.

If you guys have something to discuss, please take it to the back of the room so you wouldn't disturb people at the front.

* (16:10)

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member for the clarity of the page number. I'm looking at the page number, and I remember him saying the words Hydro and MPI and I'm not seeing that on the page. So if he could explain, I guess, which page he's referring to specifically, or which program, or which paragraph.

And—just to make sure I'm actually understanding the question. Because I'm not really seeing what he's talking about and how that would apply to things like Hydro and MPI.

Mr. Sandhu: I guess, probably, I'll get back to the minister on this one, because I'm also looking at that page and I don't see it either. So I'm going to just get—maybe just going to go to Vital Stats from here.

So just earlier, I think my question was what was the—vacancy rate was at the Vital Stats.

Can the minister also provide what was the vacancy rate for the last five years in Vital Stats? Last five years.

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member for that question. Five years' worth of vacancy information I do not have, but I do have the last eight months or so.

And so we have, during that time, had a vacancy rate that went as high as 40 per cent, as the member likely knows, just as I entered the role as minister of this department. Certainly, I think you can see the results of my focus on this department in terms of what happened with the vacancy rate soon after that, as in March the vacancy rate declined from 40 to 32.5. In April, it declined to 19. In May, it's at 11.9.

And on top of that, as I indicated, there's so many temporary and full-time students—step-students on staff that the vacancy rate is actually a negative number, I guess, because there's 20 per cent more staff than there are FTEs approved in the budget, as we have 51 full-time staff and a 42 full-time equivalent budget complement.

So, certainly, we've been heading in the right direction, and I would say have completely turned around the issues that were being caused by, you know, an unacceptably high vacancy rate within that department.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and the minister.

And I was just wondering, like, the minister had the number for the last eight months, but doesn't have

the numbers for, like, say—not five years, two years, three years?

Mr. Teitsma: Thank the member, and, you know, I did provide the eight months of vacancy information.

And I think, as I indicated to him earlier, we're a government that wants to move forward and not, you know, not look too far backwards other than learning from the mistakes of, maybe, previous governments or other governments, sometimes our own, but less often.

What I will say is that I'm incredibly proud of the work of the folks that do work in Vital Statistics and also the co-operation that I've got to witness firsthand.

* (16:20)

We've got—all reporting up to me, I guess, in various ways—I have Vital Statistics reporting to me, but I also have digital and technological services, and they're helping, and then also, of course, the Public Service Commission through a different deputy reporting to me as well. And they've been brought to bear to really ensure that we address the vacancies and the contribution that those vacancies had to the service levels being delivered by Vital Statistics.

The member knows that what's happening at Vital Statistics Branch has my attention and has the attention of my staff and my deputy correspondently. And so that's certainly where our focus is, it's on moving forward. And I'll just remind the member, like, we've essentially gotten this vacancy rate down to 11.9 per cent at this time, effectively at minus 20 when you include the temporary staff and the students that have been brought to bear.

And this is at a time when across Canada in every jurisdiction there have been staffing challenges. There are high vacancy rates affecting not just government but many industries as well where, you know, restaurants have been forced to change their hours and hotels have been shuttering floors and construction businesses are unable to bid on contracts because they just can't find enough workers.

So I think on that backdrop, to look at the accomplishments of my department and—both in CPGS here and in the Public Service Commission—to take a department like Vital Statistics and to take it from having a 40 per cent vacancy rate to essentially a negative 20 per cent vacancy rate in a matter of three months; that's a tremendous accomplishment.

I'm incredibly proud of them. I'm very pleased to see the work that they did bear fruit, and I'm encouraged as I look out on the future that we're going to ensure that Vital Statistics delivers world-class service to all Manitobans, especially with all these staff now helping and being brought to bear.

Mr. Sandhu: This is on the Estimates book—sorry—budget, and page 25. It said VSB partnered with Manitoba Government Inquiry to answer inbound telephone calls.

This has been always the case, or this is something new?

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Teitsma: I'll make it up to the member for taking a few minutes there to answer the question by giving him, you know, maybe three responses to previous questions that we left unanswered earlier today.

But first, I'm going to deal with the question he just asked, which is around the use of the Manitoba Government Inquiry line as a way to help with inbound calls to Vital Statistics.

So, that practice began on November the 15th, 2021, pretty much right in the heart of the pandemic. And it was done as a way to address some of the staffing challenges that had already appeared within Vital Statistics, at that time, that were making it challenging to deliver the services in the way that we want to be delivering them.

* (16:30)

The intent is to—now that we have a full staff complement, certainly, we're bringing them to bear and—in clearing the backlog and improving response times and wait times for birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates, both the registration and the issuance of a certificate. All those are in scope for us.

And, as that is improved, the expectation is that the assistance of MGI for inbound calls will also revert back into Vital Statistics. We do have positions available to do that work, and our hope is that we'll be able to bring that back into Vital Statistics, you know, as we address the backlog.

Now, I did promise a couple extra answers for the member. So, I did find the vacancy rate as of a year and a little bit ago. So, as of March the 25th in 2022—so that is 13 and a half months ago—the vacancy rate within

Vital Statistics was 39.5 per cent. So that's some information that I'm sure the member would be happy to receive.

And then, if we recall back—earlier in the afternoon, when we were talking about equity and diversity benchmarks, and if I had that by, you know, senior management. So, I do have the—my staff been working on getting the executive level breakdown. So, for the executive level breakdown—and that would be deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers, executive directors and directors that provide leadership to contribute to the strategic direction of the organization—there are 34 people in those positions.

And, as you can perhaps guess based on who's sitting beside me at the table here, more than 50 per cent of them are women—specifically, 52.9 per cent are women—2.9 per cent are Indigenous, 5.9 per cent are persons with disabilities and 17.6 per cent are visible minorities. So, I was able to get that information. I hope that's useful to the member.

And look forward to continuing to answer questions for many, many hours more.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you for that information, to the minister.

And so when people call the government inquiry line, how long they are usually on hold before the call is being answered?

Mr. Teitsma: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nice to have you in the Chair.

I thank the member for the question. I don't have the specific number of minutes spent waiting, but what I would counsel Manitobans and this member both, is to say, you know, we're aware that there are processing challenges, that there are—that it's taking longer than we would like to process certificate applications and to process birth registrations.

I think, you know, many Manitobans I speak with, they understand that and so they are patient. Others are eager to try to accelerate the process, and they think that maybe phoning will help accelerate that.

I would just caution them, right, that, like, my expectation is—and I've made that clear to the department—is that these applications are going to be processed in shorter and shorter time frames, that they're going to be processed in such a way that improves our client experience. And that part of that is that if there is an error or concern with a registration—birth registration or with an application for a certificate, that we reach out to them.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

And so, my advice, I think, to Manitobans would be to ensure that they've got a phone number on their application forms and on their registration information that's live and that the staff at Vital Statistics can get a hold of them if they need to to work out any particular details or errors or, you know, issues with questions that they might have about either the birth registration or the certificate application that they've completed.

I think that's where Manitobans are going to get the best service. I think having—encouraging a whole bunch of them to phone Vital Statistics is—in the end of the day, is not necessarily going to be providing any assistance to them or to the department, and maybe—may only end up increasing frustration, so we don't want that to happen.

* (16:40)

Mr. Sandhu: Can the minister provide the turnaround time once the call is received and a person has requested the document or inquiry over—regarding some documents. What is the turnaround time; once they've got the call, send it to Vital Stats, how long does it take the Vital Stats to respond back?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member for the question, and thank him for his patience as we've tried to get that answer from—directly from the staff that work over at Vital Statistics, so—getting it hot off the presses, since I didn't have that information at my fingertips.

Just so you understand the process, when the phone call goes in to MGI—Manitoba Government Inquiry's line—then they log that on a spreadsheet and essentially send that spreadsheet over to Vital Statistics to process. They're currently backlogged as well on returning calls. So it's typically taking about a week, sometimes a little longer than that, before the call is returned.

Unacceptably long, in my opinion; and the hope is to get to the point where we're getting certificates—or, sorry, births registered, certificates issued in a much more timely basis.

Mr. Sandhu: Earlier, actually, I asked the question how long people are on hold when they call the Manitoba government inquiries. One minister can provide those numbers but the other one can't; why is that? Minister for Advanced Education can provide those numbers, but the Minister of—Consumer Protection and Government Services can't.

What's the difference?

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

Yes, I can only speak for what my department here is responsible for, and perhaps the Minister of Advanced Education has a dedicated line or better reporting statistics or maybe she's just better at her job; it's all good.

But I'll just say that I don't have the number for how long they are to wait. But I'll reiterate what I said in the previous response, right, which is that, you know, inbound calls are probably not the most effective way to move things along when it comes to moving forward issues.

What I do encourage individuals to do is maybe reach out to their MLA. I believe the member opposite has probably had some people reach out to him where they have a particular need, you know, for example, related to immigration or to travel or something where a certificate is needed sooner than, perhaps, the ordinary processes are able to deliver.

* (16:50)

And certainly when that happens, when it comes to my office from another MLA—no matter what party stripe—you know, I don't hesitate to give that—pass that along to my team to see if people who are in particular circumstances where the delay is causing undue hardship, that they're able to still get what they need, when they need it.

But for the most part, I'm—I guess my ask of Manitobans is that they be patient as we continue to staff up, which we have done, and then to work on the backlog, which we are doing.

Mr. Sandhu: So, the minister is telling the public to call the MLA so they can get their birth certificate, marriage certificate or death certificate sooner? That's what the minister is saying?

Mr. Teitsma: Well, the member certainly doesn't have a history of twisting my words too often, but this time I think he's guilty.

What I would say is that when there are exceptional needs—if there's a particular need where, as I indicated, immigration or passport or another dependent need, that it just—it causes undue hardship for the person to simply be patient and allow the process to play out, and that's why I encourage them to contact their MLA, because their MLA should be able to interact with that individual and assess, you know, if that need is real, or if it's simply just a matter that they would really like to get it quickly, and—but they don't have any, necessarily, more compelling

reason to request it than most other Manitobans would.

In those exceptional circumstances—and I think, to date, I certainly have not heard of any MLAs that have abused that opportunity; I think most MLAs understand that such escalation should be used judiciously and rarely—and only under those circumstances are we able to move forward in a responsible way.

Clearly, if I got thousands of requests to accelerate the delivery of birth certificates, well, that would only further delay and distract, I think, from the good work that's happening to ensure that our processes are improved, that the birth certificate registrations, applications, marriage certificate registrations and applications and death certificate registrations and applications are happening as efficiently as possible and as accurately as possible, and in time as quickly as possible.

Mr. Sandhu: I'm sure whoever called Manitoba Government Inquiry, they always do it whenever those people need it; they are in some kind of—they need a document to travel or something, they need a new passport, too, for their kids.

And, maybe, I'm kind of—just to ask, like, if the minister can provide us the—they can break down by the type of documents, like, but—numbers. Like, hundreds, thousands; like, death certificate, birth certificate, marriage certificate—if the minister can give us the list by breaking those numbers down.

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, I thank the member.

My department staff are reminding me also that we do have an opportunity to apply for a rush issuance of a certificate. And so, once the event is registered—the birth or the marriage, for example—is registered, and if a rush certificate is applied for, that rush certificate is delivered within about three days of the registration of the event. And, certainly, that—I think the member would agree that three days between a registration and a birth certificate is good turnaround time.

The amount of time that it takes to register the event, though, is, I think, where he and I probably share the concern. Is that, you know, for marriages, for example, that's a nice, quick—you get married one week and your marriage is registered the next week, and there's no backlog in that regard.

But with births, it's not like that. With a birth, you know, the registration should be—the form is being filled out, typically, in the medical—in the health-care

facility, and then that form is passed along to—or, sent in to Vital Statistics. But that's where one of the, you know, key backlogs, or parts of the backlog that we're focused on is, and that's taking, you know, certainly longer than the three days.

Mr. Sandhu: I think my question was: Can the minister provide those documents by the numbers? What is the waiting list? Like, it is thousands of people are waiting, 500 people are waiting, 700 people are waiting in each document type?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member very much for his question.

I appreciate what he's trying to get at. Probably good to set the background, though, first, to understand, you know, how much processing is happening at Vital Statistics on a week-by-week or a year-by-year basis, right.

And so, on a year-by-year basis, it's probably about 125,000 events are occurring, right. So quick math between myself and the member would tell you that that means, you know, on an average week, there's 2,000 to 2,500 events that are having to be processed in that week. That's assuming zero backlog, and—or, assuming, you know, that an application that's made one week is processed within that week.

And so, that's in the thousands already, just because of the volume—

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

ROOM 255

AGRICULTURE

*(14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Agriculture): Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Johnson: As Manitoba's Agriculture Minister, I'm, of course, pleased to discuss our department's 2023 budget and our progress towards sustainable growth in agriculture and agri-processing.

Manitobans, like all Canadians, have dealt with major challenges in the past three years, from the pandemic to the invasion of Ukraine, supply chain issues, inflation and increasing interest rates. The 2023 budget continues investments that create opportunities and foster the sustainable growth of Manitoba producers and agri-producers through innovative, reliable supports and services.

Launched in 2019, the Manitoba Protein Advantage strategy is positioning us as North America's preferred supplier of sustainably produced protein. Manitoba was the first North American jurisdiction to develop a comprehensive protein strategy to advance sustainable animal and plant protein production with the benefits of increased investment and job creation.

We are pleased to see strong progress in the strategy, including \$823 million in new plant and animal protein investments by the private sector, which is about 55 per cent of our goal. We have seen over 900 new jobs created, which is about 59 per cent of our goal.

Manitoba has committed to 1 and a half million dollars over six years to create the strategic research chair in sustainable protein at the University of Manitoba. This role will accelerate innovation to support the protein strategy.

Budget 2023 continues to invest in innovation and product commercialization through capital expenditures of 2 and a half million dollars for equipment renewal and enhancements at the department's Food Development Centre. This will further support the Manitoba food industry and Protein Advantage strategy.

The upgraded equipment will enhance protein extraction capability, expanded starting material options and improve efficiencies. It will also increase the range of functional testing, allowing clients to better understand the resulting protein ingredients and explore possible uses for by-products.

Additionally, the upgrades will enable a demonstration of self-stable formulization for beverage and liquid food applications, providing broader market testing opportunities and easier client co-manufacturing.

Collaborating with Food Development Centre has helped companies explore potential uses for co-products, evaluate revenue opportunities, increase product value and reduce their environmental impact.

Budget 2023 continues progress in the largest tax reduction in the history of our province with the

school tax rebate for farm properties increasing from 37 and a half to 50 per cent. This historic increase will result in \$54.8 million more in the pockets of hard-working farmers in 2023. From '21 to '23, inclusive, \$123 million will be returned to Manitoba farmers.

* (14:50)

This year's school tax rebate, combined with the Farmland School Tax Rebate of \$24 million will see savings to farm owners increase to almost \$79 million for 2023.

On April 1st, 2023, the sustainable agriculture partnership, or S-CAP, was launched. The provincial-federal cost-sharing agreement continues at nearly 20-year joint commitment to agriculture growth.

The Province of Manitoba, along with the federal government, are investing \$221 million in our province's agriculture industry over the next five years—2023 to 2028—with this province contributing 40 per cent. This is a 25 per cent increase of funding from the previous five-year CAP agreement.

Planned S-CAP programming for Manitoba will support sustainable development into the agri-food industry now and into the future. Extensive consultations has taken place with stakeholders to ensure that the programs we develop under S-CAP meet the needs of producers across the province. These programs will serve to advance several of Manitoba's strategies and priorities. These include the Protein Advantage strategy, the water strategy, the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy, the Climate and Green Plan, red tape reduction and Indigenous reconciliation.

Ensuring strong farming communities, the S-CAP framework also includes a suite of business risk management programs, namely AgriInsurance, AgriStability, AgriInvest and AgriRecovery. These programs are critical to ensuring producers have reliable and responsive supports, ensuring Manitoba producers remain competitive in the wake of uncertainty.

We expect total funding in '23-24 for Business Risk Management programming to reach \$140.6 million. Enhancements to the AgriStability program include increasing the compensation rate from 70 to 80 per cent, providing greater support for the deepest losses during bad years, approving the program's simplicity, timeliness, predictability and equity.

In Budget 2023 Manitoba is making the largest ever contribution to AgriInsurance premiums estimated to be \$103.1 million. Manitoba's contribution represents approximately 24 per cent of the total

projected premiums of \$432.4 million on an estimated 9.4 million acres.

AgriInsurance protects producers against crop production shortfalls and quality losses caused by natural perils. This historic contribution to AgriInsurance premiums will provide Manitoba farmers with the confidence to invest in their crops.

For 2023, coverage levels for excess moisture insurance, which provides protection against the inability to seed due to wet conditions have also increased to 75, 100, and 125 dollars per acre.

The contract price option will now be available for the majority of crops where, previously, the CPO was only available for canola and field peas.

The Manitoba Agriculture Services Corporation, or MASC, continues to adapt to industry changes and client expectations. As a policy-based lender, MASC performs regular reviews and revises aggregate loan limits to account for the changing economic environment in the agriculture sector.

Based on increasing farmland values, the direct loan limit will increase by \$500,000 to \$4.75 million as of April 1st, 2023. Using continuous improvement approaches and stakeholder feedback, MASC continues to review lending products annually to help MASC to ensure delivery on this mandate to provide a stable source of credit, particularly for young farmers.

In response to moisture extremes over the past two years, and stakeholder feedback, Manitoba announced a three-year rent reduction for ag Crown lands, forage lease providing ranchers with up to \$4 million in relief.

The forage lease rent reduction in place for the next three years begins with a 50 per cent reduction in 2023, a 33 per cent reduction in '24, and a 15 per cent reduction in '25.

Manitoba has about 1.5 million acres of ag Crown land available for agriculture activities. These lands are important strategic resources supporting the sustainability objectives of Manitoba Protein Advantage strategy.

Recognizing the importance of ag Crown lands the department is dedicating initial resources of approximately \$394,000 to build capacity to support the active and productive management of ACL.

Healthy and well cared for animals are the cornerstone of all livestock and poultry operations. Healthy animals reduce risk and strengthen profitability.

Livestock and poultry accounted for \$2.47 billion in farm cash receipts in 2021, which is about 32 per cent of Manitoba's total; about \$2.4 billion in proceeds of food sales, which is about 39 per cent.

The budget for 2023 builds on previous Animal Health and Welfare commitments, such as \$2.1 million for investment in laboratory information management system to enhance the reporting and surveillance of animal diseases in the province; an increase in the funding to the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, raising the number of Manistoba [*phonetic*] students annually to 20.

Our department leads the way in animal disease surveillance, lowering the risk of disease, managing animal disease and enforcing animal welfare for commercial and companion animals.

We have strengthened veterinary diagnostic services, thus reducing the risk for livestock and poultry producers from large-scale disease outbreaks and economic harm. We've done this by investing \$396,000 to support the operations of a new laboratory information management system and by adding two additional medical technologists to the VDS laboratory, which will allow for sustained higher volumes of animal disease testing and timely results, along with committing capital of \$500,000 towards the renewal of diagnostic lab equipment.

These investments in animal health will continue the department's progress in responding to key recommendations in the 2021 Auditor General report on animal disease preparedness.

The department's budget for 2023 is an increase of 21 per cent from the prior year, or almost \$40 million. This demonstrates continued commitment to producers.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister's time is up. We thank the minister for those comments.

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

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Yes, Mr. Chair, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for the Burrows.

Mr. Brar: If you ate today, thank a farmer. That's what we always say, and I would start with appreciating the stewards of land, of our farmers, producers, for putting table—putting food on our table three times a day.

And still, we have so many challenges to feed the world because we are growing in numbers and we need better sustainable practices, better research, better staffing and better policies to feed the world.

I want to take an opportunity here to thank all the ag researchers, all the Ag staff—departmental staff. I had been working in Manitoba Agriculture for so many years before coming to this building. And I know how hard they work to help our producers produce food in a sustainable manner.

But still our farmers are dealing with so many diverse issues on daily basis. And they need continuous support to keep producing that food for us while taking care of the environment.

As we all know, that cost of production is going up. It's very hard for our producers to balance their expenses and their standard of living. Maintaining standard of living is not easy for them in this situation, and Ag policies play an important role to help them achieve what they want to achieve.

Agriculture production is always a gamble when we take a look at the weather and climate patterns. Challenges after challenges. Labour issues. Even front-line extension services, we need quality extension services to help our producers.

And, as we have seen in Manitoba, there have been staffing issues in the Department of Agriculture especially. And also in general in ag industry, we would need more and better workforces in coming years and we need to work together.

* (15:00)

So this time in Estimates gives us this opportunity to talk about such issues and the possibilities of working together to make what we want to make happen in the service of farmers and to serve the population we are intended to serve.

Diversity and inclusion is another issue that I want to touch base because we need the departments that reflect the diversity in our population. Same way, I've been talking to Crown land leaseholders for so many years; I have been talking to beekeepers; I've been talking to so many livestock producers, and they have shared their concerns and they want to hear about the plans of the minister to address those issues.

So I appreciate this opportunity to work together and talk in detail because we often don't get this much time in our regular settings.

So, looking forward to touch on so many issues that I mentioned and beyond that.

I appreciate the time for this opening statement, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the official opposition critic for his opening comments.

Under Manitoba practice, debate of the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 3.1(a), contained in resolution 3.1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us at the table, and we ask the minister, when he's ready, to introduce his staff in attendance.

Mr. Johnson: I would like to introduce deputy ministers coming here first: Brenda DeSerranno. We have David Hunt, who's the assistant deputy minister. We have Jared Munro, who is MASC chief executive officer. We have Kevin Kroeker, which is executive financial officer. We have my chief of staff, Brant Field. We have Patti Rothenburger, who is assistant deputy minister. And last, but definitely not least, we have assistant deputy minister, Maurice Bouvier. And I think we have MASC chief of—oh, we have more people back there. Manon Pascal is here, as well, and senior project manager, Chipu Lubale.

I think that's enough.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those introductions and welcome you all to this committee.

According to rule 78(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put separately on all resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Brar: I want to say thank you to the departmental staff and wonderful team of Agriculture to join us today, and I welcome you all.

So, my first question would be to the minister: Can the minister undertake to give a list of all technical appointments in his department, including names and titles?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, just before we get into the fulsome list here, I just want to reflect a little bit on the critic's opening comments.

And although he did thank the staff for the hard wick-work, which I do every day, and I will say it again here today, thank you, guys, for everything you do for Agriculture; ministers come and go, but you guys are the cornerstone of Agriculture.

And just the comments of the critic of better staffing: I think we have really, really good staffing, and I'm very proud to work with them, and we've accomplished so many things together as a group.

So I will—this list is—needs to be dated, so I will—give me a second; I will endeavour to get that to you on the next question or so.

Mr. Brar: In response to the minister's comments about my comments about staffing: it was about staffing, not staff. So I didn't say better staff; I said better staffing. I wanted to say we need a better staffing percentage.

I intended to indicate to the vacancy rate in the department because I've been hearing from the producers and other Manitobans that there are still some services that are not up to date, and people have to struggle to access those services.

So, the staff currently working in the department is absolutely great. I agree to that.

I want to ask the minister: Can the minister undertake to give an organizational chart that lists all employees and program areas?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, so I'll get—give you the list of technical officers and OIC appointments. So I'll go through—right here, I introduced already special assistant to the minister, Brant Field. Jack Zinger is executive assistant to the minister, which—he's here in the room as well. Madison Dodds is a community liaison in the Brandon area, or Westman.

And the OIC appointments—so those are technical officers—the OIC appointments is Jack Zinger, executive assistant to the minister, and Brenda DeSerranno, who's the deputy minister and Brant Field, who is the special assistant to the minister.

Can I just clarify if he asked me to table the org chart or if he wants me to continue to go through it. Because I could definitely go through it. I guess I could start.

So there's—yes, I'll just ask the member if he wants me to table it or go through it, because it's pretty extensive. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Brar).

Mr. Brar: Just—thank you, Mr. Chair. Just wanted to confirm that the document that you tabled includes the lists of all employees and program areas.

Mr. Johnson: Yes. I haven't tabled it as of yet, but yes, I'm told it includes all of that. We'll have to endeavour to get copies made, and then I will table it at that point after we have copies made.

Mr. Brar: I thank the minister for that information.

Can the minister give a list of all current vacancies in the department as a number and percentage?

* (15:10)

Mr. Johnson: Okay, so I'll just be clear here. This is on the date ending March 31st, 2023.

So, Corporate Services and Innovation, there's multiple listings under that, so item 3.1(a), there is zero per cent; 3.1(b) is two, which is 18.18 per cent.

Oh, you wanted the total number of positions and vacancies and percentage. Okay, so let me start over.

So, Corporate Services and Innovation, total positions—total FTEs—is 141.5; number of vacant positions is 29.1; vacancy percentage is 20.57.

Under that, there's a subcategory, so I'll break it down for you. So, 3.1(a) is one FTE, zero vacant positions, so therefore zero per cent; oh—3.1(b) is 11 positions, two vacant, so 18.18 per cent; 3.1(c) is 32 positions, seven vacant positions for 21.88 per cent; 3.1(d), total of 25 FTEs, with 3.6 vacant, for a vacancy of 14.4 per cent; 3.1(e) is 40 and a half FTEs, seven and a half vacant positions, for a vacancy of 18.52 per cent; 3.1(f) is 32 positions, nine vacant positions, 28.13 per cent.

So, under Industry Advancement, a total of 141 FTEs, the number of vacant positions is 14.8, and so that leaves 10.5 per cent vacancy rate. So, line item 3.3(a) is 25 FTEs, with 3.4 vacant positions, therefore 13.6 per cent; 3.3(b), 24 total FTEs, six vacant positions, for a total of 25 per cent; 3.3(c) is 31 FTEs, two vacancies, for 6.45 per cent; 3.3(d), 61 FTEs, 3.4 vacant positions, and 5.57 per cent vacancy per cent.

So now, on Agriculture Production and Resilience: 102 FTEs total with 19.8 per cent—nine point—19.8 positions vacant for a 19.41 per cent vacancy rate; 3.4(a) was 38 positions, 9.2 vacant positions, a total of 24.21 per cent; line 3.4(b) is 64 positions, 10.6 vacant positions, therefore 16.56 per cent.

So this is a total, overall, of 384.5 FTEs with 63.7 vacant positions for a 16.57 per cent vacancy rate.

Mr. Brar: I thank the minister for this detailed information. And I see there is still a lot of vacant positions in various subdivisions of the department.

I just wanted the minister to clarify, he said 384-plus positions. Is that the current capacity, or it's 380 currently? Wasn't 384 last year? What's the current capacity, 384-plus or 380?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, if the member was listening at the very beginning, I said this was accurate of March 31st, 2023.

So, there was 384 and a half positions in last fiscal year. So, this fiscal year, as of April 1st—which we don't have the vacancy rates for that yet—but the member is accurate that it's 380.

Those four and a half positions, as part of the re-org when Agriculture split away from mining and all of that, and that went over to NRND at the time. If you recall, they used to be together.

So, those were the last of the positions to move from Agriculture over to NRND, and that was the four and a half discrepancy that the member is asking about.

Mr. Brar: So, as the minister said, a few divisions or offices moved away from the department.

Was there any inclusion after the re-organization of the department?

Mr. Johnson: Inclusion of what?

* (15:20)

Mr. Brar: As the minister said that the department was reorganized and some of the parts of the department are not currently under the department because it went under other ministries, I would say.

Was there any parts that the department has taken over from other departments? That's my question.

Mr. Johnson: No.

Mr. Brar: Thank you so much.

Was there any hiring done in the department? And if it was done, how many employees were hired since the minister has taken over?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, we're hiring all the time. I'm forever signing to hire new people on to the department. So, the answer is yes, we're hiring all the time.

We do also have staff that are retiring, as you well know. I want to thank our previous deputy minister for her 40—she was in her 44th year—for serving with the Manitoba government. And a wealth of knowledge, you know, left with her, and I just want to say that we have a new deputy minister that is amazing as well.

And—but to answer the member's question, yes, we're hiring perpetually all the time.

Mr. Brar: Can the minister share the number of employees hired since he took over the department?

Mr. Johnson: Okay, so the total for—this is for '22-23 inclusive—so, the total adverts that we've put out were 54, and we hired 81. So, the member might ask how we advertised 54 and hired 81. Well, it's because sometimes there's vacancies—numerous vacancies in the same position category. So, I'll just run through the list here of the positions that were advertised.

So, admin assistant to the minister—or ATM, as we know it—is one position; admin officer 1, or AO1, is one position; admin officer 2 was one position; admin officer 3 was two positions advertised; admin secretary 3, or AY3, is one; admin secretary 4, AY4, was one; agrologist 3 was three; agrologist 4, or G4, was five; agrologist 5 was one; biologist 2 was one; biologist 3 was one; business analyst 3 was two; a clerk 3 was one; a clerk 4 was one; economic development consultant, or an IC3, was three; economic development consultant 4, IC4, was four; economic analyst 1, or ER1, was one; environmental officer 2, EO2, was three; executive officer 2 was one; financial officer 5 was one; geologist 3 was one; lab technologist 3 was one; labour was one; medical technologist 2 was one; media specialist 2 was one; planning consultant was two; planning program 2 was three; planning programmer 3 was three; senior manager 2 was five; statistical analysis 1, or an SS1, was one; statistical analysis 2 was one; and a vet, medical officer 4, or a VT 4, was one.

Those were the positions that were advertised this '22-23 year, for a total of 81 hires or appointments out of those 54 advertisements. There's 32 different classifications, where the 54 adverts were published.

*(15:30)

Mr. Brar: I appreciate the details on this.

And I see many of the positions are—that are mentioned or hired are non-technical. I'm worried about the positions. The minister did mention a few of them, but I'm worried about the positions that actually are

front-line positions and help the farmers directly on food production.

When I look at the Estimates book, it says that we have 380 full-time equivalents, and the minister plans to keep it at 380. Would that mean that there is no plan to hire anybody in the next year?

Mr. Johnson: I'll just start a little bit by—in the critic's opening comments, he stated ag industry needs a better workforce. The department has an outstanding workforce, and they are part of the industry. And all positions are valuable in the Department of Agriculture. So, our goal is to have zero vacancies and fill all 380 positions, fill all the vacancies to have a full complement of 380 filled positions.

As the member knows, there's retirement; there's people that move around not just in this building but from department to department. As you're well aware with our deputy minister here, she came over from Treasury Board and is doing an outstanding job here.

And it's important that we allow people's careers to grow. So I'm never upset when somebody leaves Agriculture to better their career and do better things for their choice, their time in life. And it's—you know, that's how people get ahead. And they make those decisions based on where they are with family or where they are emotionally and if they're loving Manitoba.

So, we have more people coming than going to Manitoba, thank goodness, and our goal, as people come to Manitoba, is to encourage them to come and work not only in government but directly in the Department of Agriculture, put their great skills to good use.

Mr. Brar: I appreciate the minister on expanding that.

I didn't mean to say that non-technical positions are not important. I appreciate everybody working in the department. The deputy minister retired, and we hired a wonderful person to fill that position.

But I've seen that so many front-line workers, those actually—the ones that talk to farmers, scout their fields, work on their S-CAP cap and Growing Forward 3 applications, go out to the fields, take soil samples and talk to the producers in person whenever they need them. So, when they retire, the farming community and the industry expects the leadership to fill on those positions as well.

From the minister's response, it sounds like if we have 380 wonderful workers in the department right now—and he himself mentioned that we have up

to 25 per cent, 20 per cent, 21 per cent-plus vacancy rates while having 380 people working in the department.

So, does that mean that the minister is making sure that he maintains that vacancy rate, or vacancy rate plus?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, we're endeavouring to keep a zero per cent vacancy rate. I mean, it's not realistic; people move on and it takes time to fill those positions. But our goal, our heart, our passion is to have a zero per cent vacancy rate in the entire Agriculture Department.

Mr. Brar: I've been talking to so many producers and rural Manitobans, and they're really, really upset about the office closures that did impact their day-to-day lives and the services they need to grow food for all of us.

Because I have been part of this department, and I have seen and provided those services to the people—our producers—who need those services.

They're really upset about having no office. Either no office in their town or having an office and having great workers inside the office, but the minister does not allow people to access those services. They can look at each other—for example, in Beausejour, farmers can go to the building and look at the wonderful employees through the glass and maybe frown at them or smile at them, but they're not allowed to get in and access the services that they want to access.

So, can the minister reflect on how this office closures and cuts to the department helped improve services in Ag extension?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, we obviously have outstanding service delivery model objectives, including, but not limited to: to provide quality, consistent and convenient service using the communication method that the client would prefer; modernizing service delivery to match how clients prefer to do business; improve efficiency as human, physical and financial resources; and improve collaboration between the department and MASC at an organizational and staff level.

I think we all realize—the producers that I visit with, a good majority of them are—have not been into the office in decades. They do stuff online, and that seems to be the way our world is going. As we are seeing right now, we have online participation if we choose right here with our staff.

I would just wonder, when the member is speaking to these producers, if he's reminding them that the NDP has committed to taking \$54.8 million in

property tax rebates to farmers out of their pockets. I'm wondering if he's talking to them about that and how they feel.

I think producers, the ones that I've spoken with, would ask the member to stand up against his leader and state that this isn't the right thing to do. Mr. Chair, \$54.8 million is no chicken feed when you're a farmer, pardon the pun of chicken feed.

But Budget '21 committed to a 10-year phase-out of our school taxes and the introduction of the school tax rebate, which provides 25 per cent rebate to residential and farm properties and 10 per cent rebate to commercial properties. That year, \$27.4 million was given back to farm owners in school tax rebates.

* (15:40)

The rebate increased from 25 to 37 and a half per cent for residential properties in Budget 2022, providing an additional \$40.6 million to farm owners. Budget 2023 increases the rebate again for residential and farm properties from 37 and a half to 50 per cent. This will result in Manitoba farm owners receiving rebates of \$54.8 million in 2023.

The members opposite, they all stood up, voted against it. That was the critic's time that he could stand up with the producers, the producers that are watching here today. The member could've stood up and voted in favour of that tax rebate for the producers of Manitoba.

So, in this year's budget, \$54.8 million: just this year's budget. Now, you combine that with the regular farm school tax rebate of \$24 million; means that farm owners will see the value of their savings increased to almost \$79 million in 2023.

I really hope the member reflects upon his decision to vote against that for you, for the producer, and that he reconsider that next time we complete this business.

Mr. Brar: I appreciate the detailed response from the minister, trying to divert from the topic that I want to bring him to.

But, anyway, talking about standing with the producers, I have and I will always stand with the producers. In the past, it's documented that I stood with the producers. I visited them when they called me, even in the constituency of the minister and the constituency of the MLA Lakeside. Both of these MLAs were missing in attendance when I was standing with 100-plus producers listening to them about how drought has impacted their lives. And,

unfortunately, at the occasion, I didn't even see a regret message sent from either of these wonderful elected officials.

So that saddens me, and that tells me that what the minister expects from other elected representatives, he doesn't follow those rules himself and a few of his colleagues, as well, don't follow those rules and never stand with the farmers. When I talk to the farmers, I listen to them, what they want to tell me; I don't tell them what they should tell me.

So, when we talk about modernization and the minister talks about his leadership in modernizing extension services, let me tell to those listening today that scouting in soybean fields cannot be done online. Yes, information, general information, applications can be done online, but for that we need a good infrastructure. We need high-speed Internet that this government fails to provide to rural Manitobans.

And they just dream of having a world where anybody, any producer can just sit in front of the computer or laptop or their cellphone and access all the great extension services. That does not happen automatically. We need a vehicle for the technology to transfer from these offices and these libraries and institutions to the farmers' fields. Unfortunately, we don't have that vehicle, and this minister is doing nothing to improve that.

In the meantime, they expect that we just made the changes and everything would be all right. Talk about MASC. MASC is in a situation that they are transitioning from an old system to a new system. And the minister is simply dreaming that the new system is already there. It's not. I've talked to so many people. People have retired early because they get stressed and suffocated due to the policies of this government.

And I don't know if the minister knows where is the nearest MASC rep from Arborg, or where is the nearest Crown land farm production extension specialist for—say, from Teulon or Stonewall.

So, they're covering miles of distances, and then the producers have to go in person to access services. They spend more on gas. They have to spend more time to access the same services that were available in their backyard at one time.

So, I would like the minister to respond to this situation. Does the minister think that we have excellent rural connectivity that he thinks we should rely on and kick out all the wonderful people who used to work in the department, or they retire and do nothing after they retire? No hiring, nothing?

So, I would like to hear the minister on this issue—how he thinks that these cuts and 'closures' have made the things better in rural Manitoba for producers.

Mr. Johnson: The member's heard me say it, and I'll say it again: we endeavour to keep a zero per cent vacancy to ensure that everybody has access to service when and where they need it.

But the member spoke that he stands with producers, and I don't think he stands with producers when he stands with the Leader of the Opposition and votes against a \$54.8-million education property tax rebate to the producers.

Now, he spoke of drought when the farmers needed help with drought, and I know the MLA for Lakeside has—had done an amazing job here getting this all set up. And the amount of work that the department went to designing this program that we, for ag recovery drought programming that the member brought up earlier, that meeting that was at Erinview Hall—or, fire hall—that the former minister has—had took—taken that to heart. He was a busy—in—working hard with the hard-working department to ensure that there was a program that was developed to help those producers.

And they—for lack of better words, they nailed it. Outstanding, outstanding, outstanding. There—we have been—as Manitobans, we've been the envy of other producers across Canada—\$155-million commitment towards producers, and I've received personal letters from producers that stated, without this, they wouldn't be farming anymore.

So, this member knows that a \$155-million commitment from Manitoba and the federal government, as well—from both of our departments, from the Department of Agriculture, from the previous minister, from myself, from the hard-working department, is standing with producers.

Mr. Brar: Again, I want the minister to share what's the state of the beef industry in Manitoba.

Are the producers joining the beef industry, or—they're selling their cows—a part of the herd or, in some cases, they are getting out of the business and selling 100 per cent of their cows under his leadership.

So, what he thinks he is planning to do to support those farmers and bring new, young farmers in the industry so that we can continue producing food for Manitobans and people outside Manitoba, as we export a lot of that food.

It's published in the newspapers in this minister's writing, and he is well aware of the fact that people

are getting out of business, especially ranchers and livestock producers, in his riding and beyond.

* (15:50)

So, what does the minister think has impacted those producers leaving the business? They're frustrated. Does the minister know that fact, or he needs more information or data to prove that?

Mr. Johnson: Well, I hope the member would know that there used to be, at a peak, 680,000 head in Manitoba. And by 2016—so that peak was in 2006—by 2016, with the aggressive attacks that the NDP do on producers, like the one exercised by the member for Burrows of voting against a \$54.8-million tax rebate to farmers, that is not standing with farmers.

There was a 210,000-head decline under the NDP in Manitoba. So, I will not take any advice from the member opposite. His colleagues stood by and did nothing while the Manitoba beef industry suffered in the largest decline in provincial history, under the NDP government.

Mr. Brar: I'm talking about working together to serve the farming community, to feed Manitobans and the world. I'm not here to advise the minister; the minister is on the driving seat, and people have expectations. And it's my job to ask the questions that people, who I represent, want me to ask.

Talking about livestock, most of the livestock—many of the livestock producers, they rely on our good resource, Crown lands, to do their business.

Can the minister provide statistics on the number of Crown lands ranchers in Manitoba over the past five years; has this number gone up or down?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I think the member is well aware that our average farm size is growing. And you see it grow; I've seen my neighbour's farm—my relative's farm—grow to a very large size. And then when the time comes, the three boys take that farm over, and then it goes back down into smaller pieces again.

So, the size and the amount of farmers is flexible in Manitoba; we all know there's economies of scale with larger tracts of land, it's easier to fence off. We are encouraging, through our RALP programming, for cross-fencing and rotational grazing, but in general, it is economies of scale that help the local producer succeed.

And so, everybody is competing for land, and that's why the price of land keeps going up. And they're also competing for ag Crown land. As the

member well knows, that's all public information that he can look up.

Mr. Brar: Everybody knows that land is—farmland is consolidating as we go, and from the minister's response, it looks like—that he's sitting back and watching what's happening and explaining to those listening to us today here that, hey, this is happening; that they already know.

The minister is here to show leadership. The minister is the one the people look at for better decisions, better policies, to save our family farms. I'm talking about the small ranchers. If you just leave them at their own, it's obvious that the people with deeper pockets would buy all the land, and they would—the small farmers would get out of business.

What would happen to our rural small towns? What would happen to the corner store? What would happen to the grocery stores?

So, what is the minister doing to save those family farms that are looking at the minister and minister's office to do something to help them so that they can continue doing their business sustainably?

Mr. Johnson: I hope the member isn't suggesting that we buy or start to subsidize smaller farmers to ensure that they can remain independent. I hope the member is well versed with the World Trade Organization and how they view government subsidies on production.

And, you know, moves like that—I hope that's not going to be one of the NDP's policies in this coming election—but moves like that can cause exports to cease out of Canada, Manitoba especially.

So, I really hope the member isn't hoping that we, you know, buy the land and allow smaller producers to farm that land or to, you know, just write them a cheque every year. Because WTO is definitely not favourable to that at all. They would put tariffs on our beef or hogs leaving the province—chicken, turkey, you name it. It would be—it would not turn out well for the farmer if the member's suggesting.

So, we will not make choices that will compromise the small farmer with decisions and case law that's been done by the World Trade Organization. We will not put them at risk.

Mr. Brar: From the minister's comments, it seems like the minister wants to see these small farms get out of business. Because he's just sitting and watching what's happening.

We need diversity in businesses, diversity in every industry. A combination of large farmers and small farmers is the beautiful thing to have. But the minister, as he commented, seems like he doesn't want to see our small farmers sustain or grow there.

They are important to our economy. It's not all about exports. Exports is important for sure because we bring in revenue by sending our grains and our beef outside of Canada and outside of Manitoba. But small farmers do need help, and there are many ways we can help them.

The minister is in the leadership role, and the first thing, which is the easiest thing to do, is to listen to those producers. And when I go back to them and talk to them, this is their first complaint. Being accessible and listening to them and sitting together with them and working on the possible solutions is the right thing to do. Not just saying that that's the trend because—that's what's happening all around the world, so let it go, let what's happening to them happen and continue to happen.

Because small businesses, small farms, are the backbone of our industry. They have to sustain. And it's our duty, because we have been privileged, we have been blessed to be here to make policies and think how we can help them.

But, to me, the minister sounds like he's not ready or willing to support our small farmers and livestock ranchers. At least we can give them the services offered by the department.

* (16:00)

So, I would like to touch on our departmental capacity because it needs a good team and a team of optimum size to serve our Crown land leaseholders. They have so many questions. They have so many issues that need to be addressed.

Can the minister share how many Crown land farm extension specialists are working in the department right now, and what was the number in 2019, and what was the number in 2016?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, the member may suggest that we're not a listening government. There is nothing that is further from the truth.

Listening government isn't just the elected officials. It's the great people that we have in our—in the room here and the great people that they manage and the outstanding job that they do. And that is huge for collecting of information.

And, quite frankly, all farmers are important, large and small. The agriculture and agri-processing sector directly contributed to 7.2 per cent of the provincial GDP and 5.2 per cent of provincial jobs, or 35,405 direct jobs.

Farm cash receipts have risen strongly in recent years, with 2022 continuing the trend and—of—at—a 14.9 per cent increase to \$9.73 billion. It was a—it was firing-in-all-cylinders kind of year with the crops and \$6.7 billion in—\$5.27 billion in 2021, lot of livestock, \$3.03 billion, up from 2.78 in 2021 and program payments also rose to \$634 million from \$418 million in 2021 for crop and livestock. Strong prices and good sale volumes drove the increase.

Now, the member was talking about putting a moratorium on buying and selling farmland, and keeping everything the way it is. I can guarantee you this government, while we're in power, will not put a moratorium on buying and selling farmland. That's a ridiculous idea. I really hope the member walk back—walks back that statement because that's communism, for lack of a better word.

Although the NDP did put a moratorium on hog barns. And we heard from Manitoba Pork here last night that there's—they produce 8 million hogs in the province of Manitoba and 85 per cent of those, roughly, are exported. That is money that's coming into the province from other sources, whether it's other provinces, but predominantly United States and Japan. So, that's money coming into our province that—we reversed that moratorium that the NDP put on hog barns, and look what that has done for the provincial and agriculture economy.

So, for the member to stand there, I wouldn't doubt it, I guess, but I would really hope that they're not talking about a moratorium on buying and selling farmland to keep everybody the size that they are and, you know, not be—allow maybe kids to divide the farm into three. If somebody has three children that want to, you know, as somebody moves on, their kids might want to take it over. Maybe only two want to take it over.

But a moratorium on buying and selling land is just ridiculous and our government will not support that.

Mr. Brar: Minister talks about reversing decisions.

Would the minister consider reversing his government's decision about the Crown lands? Does the minister think that these Crown land changes that the PC government did just before 2019 provincial elections and

disclosed after the provincial elections was a great idea? What is the minister listening from those Crown land leaseholders?

And what's his take on those changes that were not well received, according to my conversations with leaseholders? Does the minister think that that was a great idea to change those regulations? And what's his plan going forward?

Mr. Johnson: Stay tuned.

Mr. Brar: That tells me that whenever anybody asked this PC government before September 10th, 2019, about the Crown lands, this would be the answer: Stay tuned. And the minister still is sticking to the same answer. That means there would be surprises. I don't see any positive future actions that this minister plans in favour of the leaseholders.

Because the leaseholders have been reaching out—trying to reach out to minister's office. They are reaching out to me; they're talking to me. I'm talking to them, taking their phone calls, visiting them. And they are very, very upset about these changes.

And any time I have raised this issue in the Chamber, whenever I asked this minister about his take on these changes and is he planning to reverse these changes to the Crown land lease system, he would start talking about Clover the cow, 4-H clubs, or something else, vet shortage. And when I talk about the vet shortage, then he would be talking about altogether something else.

I want to bring the minister to the topic and ask again: Does he think that the policy decisions should reflect the feedback that the Crown land ranchers have sent clearly to the minister and the world through the survey that is recently conducted by this minister's own government?

Mr. Chair, 85 per cent of the respondents, they support the ability of leaseholders to transfer their lease to someone else, something the PC government eliminated when they changed the rules in 2019.

Does the minister think that this is an important feedback? And what is the minister doing after hearing from those producers under his own survey, conducted by his own government?

Mr. Johnson: I'm hoping the member would recognize that all feedback is important.

But under the NDP and their regressive attacks and the hog moratorium that they've done in the past, quite frankly, I hope that they never get to manage

agriculture in this province again. That was under his so-called team's watch.

But the member also brought up 4-H, and that is a great topic. It is outstanding what that group does and the education that they do and the morals and everything that they teach kids. That's an outstanding program. So, hopefully he's not giving 4-H a slight of the recognition that they deserve. They deserve all the recognition that any of us can muster in this room.

And I know he spoke of vet shortages in his comment here a second ago, and I just want to say—you know, thank my colleagues in Advanced Education and all the work that we've done together to increase the vet seats in the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in our neighbouring province, to increase them from 15 seats to 20.

That's outstanding and I really hope the member realizes that there's an incentive or an attraction for rural members, including simple things that the NDP never did, I might add.

You know, sure, they'd—they may have sponsored the seats back in the day, but they didn't focus it on large animal, which is the Department of Agriculture's focus, on livestock. And those seats was something as simple as having a 1,000 hours on a farm as part of the criteria is very important.

* (16:10)

And so, I just want to say thank you to both departments, Advanced Education and the Department of Agriculture, for working so hard to make this a reality. You know, this—you can't just wave a magic wand and find five seats in Canada, never mind Manitoba, because there aren't any. You can't just wave a magic wand and have these seats appear.

So, that took a lot of hard work, dedication, talking with the college and the dean. And I just want to say thank you to the department for their great work.

Mr. Brar: I am so happy that the minister proved that what I said is correct. Whenever—whenever—I ask this minister a question about Crown lands and Crown land lease regulations, the minister starts talking about 4-H clubs or vet shortages. That's exactly what the minister did in his response a minute back.

I can assure the minister that I would give him an opportunity to talk about our wonderful people at Manitoba 4-H Council. I know they are doing great work.

And I would give this minister an opportunity to talk about vet shortages. I've been talking to dairy farmers, talking to livestock producers, pet owners in Manitoba. Everyone has a concern about vet shortages. We would come to that point.

But let's talk about Crown lands first. My question to the minister is how much revenue these Crown land changes brought about by the PC government has brought to the government.

Mr. Johnson: Well, I apologize if the member rambles so much. He is the one in his question that mentioned 4-H; he was the one that mentioned vet shortages specifically in his question. So, if he's rambling from topic to topic, I really only have, you know, so much time to get to all of these answers.

But, yes, I'm glad he supports 4-H, and I see he's wearing a green tie today, which we all know is 4-H's colours. But a lot of those producers—or, 4-H kids grow up to be producers, and they work—you know, predominantly, a lot of them work on the farm. And this is, believe it or not, their—kind of their pastime, their enjoyment time, to go out and practice in 4-H. It's not specifically just farm kids, so don't get me wrong there. There's a whole mix of kids.

But as those kids grow up, it's important that if they chose—choose to go into being a producer, go into farming, that they have access. So, the member's suggestion that, you know, we put a moratorium on all farmland sales is a little ridiculous, because how are these kids coming out of 4-H going to get into that system and purchase Crown—purchase farmland?

Now, along with farmland, they may want access to Agriculture Crown Lands as well, ag Crown land. And our success that we've had in our auctions have put access to young producers at nearly 40 per cent of the ag Crown land—using this last auction as an example—was won by young farmers.

And along with times that are trying—I know a couple questions ago, the member mentioned that we—that government sits back and does nothing. Well, to help producers, and speaking of ag Crown land, it's—I'm very proud of the hard work that the department did in getting a 50, 35 and 15 per cent—a 33 per cent, sorry. Let me re-say that.

A 50 per cent reduction in 2023; a 33 per cent reduction in 2024; and a 15 per cent reduction in 2025, on forage lease rents. And that's a reduction that's in place for the next three years.

And Manitoba has about 1.5 million acres of ag Crown land available for agriculture activities. These lands are a very important, strategic resource, that supports our producers and the sustainability objectives of the Manitoba Protein Advantage strategy.

And on this side of the House, as government, we recognize the importance of ag Crown lands, and the department is dedicating additional resources of approximately \$394,000 to build capacity to support the active and productive management of ag Crown lands.

Mr. Brar: The minister just mentioned about reduction: 50 per cent, 33 per cent and 15 per cent reduction in lease rates.

So, that means that—minister agrees that raising of lease rates on our Crown land ranchers was wrong. That's why now, the minister has considered helping those producers.

Does the minister think that the Crown land changes decision taken in 2019, before the provincial election and disclosed after the provincial election, was a wrong decision?

Mr. Johnson: I really hope the memory of the member is well enough to remember the drought of 2021.

As I spoke about the programming that we released here earlier that helped producers make it through those extreme circumstances, and then we go from one extreme, from that drought, to excess moisture in the following year. And it goes from one extreme to the other, and I would argue that Interlake-Gimli, my home constituency, was the epicentre of this.

And to respond to that, the land was very stressed from one extreme to the other and this rent reduction allows producers to recover from multiple years of extreme weather.

So, I don't know if the member doesn't remember that, but that was the impetus for the ag Crown land reduction. It was to allow the land to recover, reducing the rent. The—hopefully, the member would know that when you have extreme stress on land, that you—it doesn't just keep growing grass for the animals to eat. The member would know that you have to rest the land and you need to give it a break, and we gave the producers a break.

Mr. Brar: Can the minister confirm that these changes are not permanent, and minister is going back to the increased lease rates that his government imposed on the Crown land ranchers?

Mr. Johnson: It was—I clearly stated that this program reduces the rate by 50 per cent, followed by 33 per cent and then followed by 15 per cent. So, that's what the current program is.

And the member talks about engaging with farmers. We set up a producer-led advisory group to help with the 2021 drought, and it was producer-led. Not everything has to be led by government. Although they do a great job, sometimes the ideas coming from the front lines are sometimes outstanding ideas.

* (16:20)

So, you know, we listen. We support producers. And we support the—what they come up with from their advisory group and we listen to them. And that's all part of our consultations.

Mr. Brar: I just want to share with the minister that I did visit his own constituency, and I went to a farmer—I cannot disclose the name—in Ashern. And I met him and his father, who were struggling with the impacts of drought, and they clearly said to me that our MLA and the member from Interlake-Gimli is not responding to our emails. Who do we go to?

Then they knocked at my door, and I took my vehicle and visited them in Ashern. And they were hoping for some support, but they didn't receive any support from minister's office at that time.

But the thing is, if the minister and his government thinks that those changes were for the favour of the farmers, or doing something great for the stewards of land, especially people who care for these Crown lands, what was the impact of that decision?

I ask again, how much additional revenue these Crown land changes brought to Manitoba?

Mr. Johnson: So, the member's starting to get a little lonely with the truth there. He's taking snapshots of time.

The member is well aware, we have the—came up with the most comprehensive drought program in Manitoba history, and it takes time to put a program like that together. The other provinces that reacted—knee-jerk reaction and just said, okay, that's it, we're going to give everybody in the province \$100 per head—\$100 per head. So, whether a producer needed it or not, he got the \$100 per head. But the producer that needed \$250 per head didn't get it; they only got \$100. In Manitoba, we focused on the producers that needed the help.

So, the member is taking a snapshot in time and extrapolating from it. That producer, I well know who he's talking about, was ecstatic with the great work that the department did on producing that drought program.

Mr. Chairperson: Before I recognize the honourable member for Burrows, I will just remind the minister and other members of the committee, that the term lonely with the truth is coming awfully close to accusation of lying, so I would just throw that note of caution to members of this committee.

Mr. Brar: I'm really, really interested to hear the minister's thoughts about the recent survey done under his leadership: 85 per cent of the respondents support the ability for leaseholders to transfer their lease to someone else, something the PC government eliminated when they changed the rules in 2019.

Now, we have the results of the survey on the table. I want to know, and Manitoban producers, ranchers, want to know, what's the action that this minister would be taking after he has seen the results and the feelings of Manitoba ranchers?

Mr. Johnson: Well, I am very proud of this government for putting together the EngageMB website. Under the previous NDP government, they didn't listen to anybody. They didn't have EngageMB. They had nothing. Nowhere for somebody to go and put their opinion forward.

We, as this government, appreciate and respect the opinions of the Manitoba public, and that's exactly why we designed EngageMB and listen to farmers, listen to Manitobans. That is a very, very powerful tool that this government uses to engage and listen and then take that information and decide what policies can be brought forward out of it.

So, yes—yes—there was 85 per cent of people that responded in one certain direction. But, under the NDP, there would be zero per cent—there would be zero—because they never listened to anybody. They didn't have EngageMB.

So, I just want to say that that's outstanding work by this government to have that tool there so that we can actually listen to Manitobans and then act on the information and consultations that we receive through EngageMB.

Mr. Brar: What the results of this survey are saying is exactly what the ranchers were saying before the survey was launched, because they knew that these changes are wrong. Unit transfers should be allowed.

There are so many producers in Manitoba who planned their retirement according to the rules available at the time of making decisions. That was decades back. And now, the minister took away this option of unit transfer. So, it feels like somebody has worked for a department for 39 years and, all of a sudden, government says there's no pension. How does that sound?

Those ranchers are suffering. And now, the minister cannot run away from the fact, because it's in black and white, what the producers were saying and suggesting years ago—that is right. That's on his table now; 85 per cent of the producers are demanding unit transfers.

Does the minister plan to reverse those changes and help these producers who are feeding us all?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, one of the things that also came out of an—EngageMB is easier and—access to ag Crown land, and that's what we've done. It is up—it actually increased the young farmers' access in this last auction up to 40 per cent—40 per cent of the ag Crown land that was won as this last auction went to young farmers.

We also—our active leases have gone up. Under the NDP, we've increased our active leases by almost 4 per cent.

So, everything in the member's statement about them being for Ag is wrong. They wouldn't even listen to Ag producers. They didn't have somewhere to go. We designed EngageMB and—so now producers have somewhere to actually voice their concerns.

And, yes, we're a listening government. Everything that we do through EngageMB is taken in, it's 'looken' at, it's actioned upon. The policies that we'll be—we'll take that into consideration as our consultations.

* (16:30)

Absolutely, EngageMB is the most powerful tool for people to reach out to—on multiple fronts; not just Agriculture, but government in general. It's a very important tool for producers, in this case, to voice their opinion on.

Mr. Brar: And I want to continue on this point. It's good that people are using this virtual communication platform and I appreciate the wonderful people in the department who have developed this tool. But the fact is that there are still some people, due to many reasons, they're not able to participate in this way because of literacy issues or connectivity issues, or their comfort level using this system.

And if this PC government had not cut positions in the department, if we still had more number of farm-production-extension specialists in Crown lands, if we have more number of Ag offices still open, this number, 85 per cent, it would jump up to 95 or 98 per cent, because we are excluding so many producers who are comfortable going to—physically going to an office, knocking at the door, talking to the Crown lands specialist. How do they talk to the Crown lands specialist when there is no one available there?

So, survey is good. Results are there. But the minister refuses to commit any action on this survey. So what was the purpose of the survey, then? We have the survey, no plan to take action. That means that was just for the purpose of saying that, yes, we did listen to you. Listening without action means nothing.

I have to ask this question again and again, because I'm supposed to. I represent the people who are being impacted by these decisions, and I still wonder why this survey was not done earlier. So, if the minister is doing this survey now, that means the Crown land changes, they were done without any survey because if these—if this survey was done before making those changes, 85 per cent of the people would oppose those changes.

But the government didn't want to plan bottom up. The government didn't want to listen to the voices that matter. They simply went ahead and made changes.

I would like to ask the minister why this survey was not done before making these changes.

Mr. Johnson: Yes. The member talks about people not having access through EngageMB and I would like to inform the member that over and above community engagement and consultations, you know, we consulted with Manitoba grasslands and forage association and all their members. Manitoba Beef Producers, they were a large, large part of this. Keystone Ag Producers, and if the member remembers last night, they represent 15,000 producers, and they were part of the consultations.

And recognizing that Rome wasn't built in a day, but the members opposite, they want to keep everything stagnant. Under their government everything was stagnant. And when things continued to grow, like the hog sector, they actually brought in a moratorium to cease agriculture in the hog sector in Manitoba.

So, they're talking about consultations? I know for a fact they didn't consult on that. They did not, and

this government, we consult, we listen, we're going to continue to listen.

And the member opposite suggests earlier in his comments that we put a moratorium—like they did on hog barns, we put a moratorium on buying and selling farmland so the farm sizes don't change so we can keep small farms; I don't know, that doesn't look like any sort of government that I'd want.

So, I'm glad that they're not going to be successful in this next election, and we're going to continue to consult and listen to producers, whether it's through EngageMB, community consultations.

Manitoba Beef Producers has agents that are—representatives that are across the province; they have regions. They have regions and they have a representative in each and every region. And the producers know who they are.

Keystone Ag Producers, as I mentioned, represents 15,000 not just producers, households; 15,000 households. And the member suggests that there's no consultation? All that, and Manitoba grasslands and forage association, as well, was part of it.

And there's more that escapes my memory at the moment here, but I'll endeavour to get—to expand on that list in my next question.

Mr. Brar: We're talking about Crown lands, and the minister mentioned so many organizations that I respect so much, and I know their leadership personally, I communicate with them. They're doing great work for Manitoba ag industry.

But did the minister just miss or did not consult Manitoba Crown Land Leaseholders Association? Because that's an organization that represents the people who are being impacted by these decisions.

I just want to know if Manitoba Crown Land Leaseholders Association was consulted specifically, as the minister mentions other organizations and maybe the minister reached out to them with a letter or email or picked up the phone and talked to the leadership.

Did the minister's consultation process involve Manitoba Crown Land Leaseholders Association specifically?

Mr. Johnson: Yes. We had a meeting, we had a direct meeting—myself—excuse me—and multiple other MLAs, the department, right here in this building in room 230, that is kind of kitty-corner, it's across the hall over there.

I can take the member and show him the room if he would like. Beautiful room, I might add. There was actually a movie filmed in there if the member wants to check that out.

But the answer to his question is yes.

Mr. Brar: I was not successful getting any commitment from the minister that he would take any action on this 85 per cent respondents that want him to bring back unit transfers. He won't commit. So, how long I should keep asking the same question again and again and again?

So, let me change a bit here and ask the minister: Can the minister share what percentage of successful bidders of Crown lands were young Manitobans again?

Mr. Johnson: Okay, maybe I'll go a little slower this time, because I mentioned it multiple times.

It's just shy of 40 per cent of the ag Crown land was won by young farmers at our last auction.

* (16:40)

Mr. Brar: Is the minister shy of sharing the percentage of acres allotted to young Manitobans?

Mr. Johnson: That would probably take many, many hours of work by the department to break down each package and give that.

I am very proud of our young producers that are getting into the—into farming. As you—as I mentioned earlier in my comments, you know, I have some cousins that are getting older, and their three sons are on the farm with them. But I'm sure when the day comes that my older cousin retires, that farm's going to split up into three. And then, at that point, they might be looking at access for ag Crown land.

So I'm very, very proud to say that this system in the last auction was just shy of 40 per cent of Crown land was won by young farmers.

Mr. Brar: That's obviously the number of farmers; that's what we're talking about here. But I'm really interested to know what percentage of the land, number of acres, were allotted to young farmers.

In the meantime—maybe the minister is working on gathering that information—I would like to ask: What was the size of the largest parcel of land given away during the recent auctions done by the department?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, while we're waiting to see if we can get that information and how that falls under freedom of information and privacy protection act—if the member's trying to tie it to a certain name. I'll—I'm

pretty sure the information's public, so he could go on and look. All the results were posted online. So, I'm sure the member will endeavour to go and look online for the public information.

What I'm not prepared to do is disclose private information, which I recognize the member hasn't asked for private information as of yet.

But I would like to talk a little bit more about the other people that we consulted through not only EngageMB and Keystone ag producers; Manitoba Beef Producers, as I mentioned; Manitoba grassland and forage association; along with community consultations. We had Crown land clients; we actually reached out to producers that have Crown land and/or are looking to obtain Crown land.

So, we have that list from people that participated in auctions at certain points in the past. So, every single one of those people were reached out to. There is also the watershed districts, the Bison Association, community pastures association, AMM, Association of Manitoba Municipalities, Cattle Feeders' Association. And that's just a few more that I thought of, and I'm sure I'll add to those after.

But if the member wants to ask another question so we don't just roll time away here while we're endeavouring to find that previous answer.

Mr. Brar: Just wanted to clarify that. I didn't intend to ask any private information about somebody who took the land.

My purpose of asking the question was, for example, if one successful bidder took, say, 5,000 acres, one parcel of 5,000 acres, and another one that took just 500, say. So, that would mean one was the young farmer, another was not. That would mean that 50 per cent of the successful bidders were young farmers. So, that doesn't make any sense because we have to take into account, actually, the number of acres.

I have talked to so many producers, and producers are sharing with me that they have seen, like, buses full of people out—from outside Manitoba, and they are looking at the lands and making plans how to get this land, and just before the auction is held. So, people are worried about their land being taken by the people with deeper pockets.

But we are interested to hand over the land to those who love the land, who actually want to farm the land, who actually have passion about farming and they have some farming experience. So, we don't want

to end up having this land given to those who are just investing their money and keeping that land doing nothing.

So, the purpose was—the intention was not to get the names of who took it, but I was interested to know the size of the parcels that was given out. So, if it's still possible to know the largest parcel size and the smallest parcel size during the recent auctions that were held by the department.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, the member talks about young farmers and having them get access to land. Well, this government has increased the ag Crown land active leases by almost 4 per cent.

So, under the NDP, they put on moratoriums. They had lower ag Crown land allotments, and then, even the leader of their party, yesterday in the Chamber, said that they will roll back the education property tax credit, which gives \$54.8 million—\$54.8 million that goes to producers, and this government is going to take it away, this NDP government. If they ever form government, this NDP party has committed to rolling that back; \$54.8 million that goes right into producers' pockets today will be rolled back if NDP ever forms government.

So, I pity the day, 20, 30 years down the line, where that may happen. They will take that away. They will make producers pay more. How are young producers—the member talks about young producers and his passion for young producers. I'm adding the word passion; I'm trying to give him a little bit of leeway here.

But he is committing, and he hasn't said he's not, because he stood up in the Chamber and voted against \$54.8 million going back to the producers. He stood up in the Chamber, the member for Burrows, his leader, the whole NDP team, stood up in the Chamber and voted against \$54.8 million going back to producers, including young farmers. That's going to hurt them.

* (16:50)

And he talks about access to Crown land; we have, in the last auction, as I mentioned, over 40—just, sorry, just under 40 per cent of ag Crown land was won by young producers.

They talk about putting on moratoriums on buying and selling land just like they put moratoriums on hog barns. That's not the way this government's going to go.

Mr. Brar: So, let's talk about standing up.

I stood up for regular Manitobans, yes I did, in the Chamber. I voted against—what I voted against is what I want to share now. I voted against tax benefits to billionaires that this government intends to—they're writing cheques to billionaires.

I stood against a \$1-million cheque to Cadillac Fairview. I stood against a \$80,000 cheque to Charles Koch. I stood against a \$327,000 cheque to Galen Weston. Yes, I did stand against these decisions, and I do have a point standing against, because we don't want our taxpayer dollars being sent to billionaires. *[interjection]*

And this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson)—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

I want to just remind the members of this committee, this is a committee of Agriculture, a very important committee, and I expect there to be respect for people who have the floor and to limit the amount of heckling that's going on, and please have respect for the people that are asking and answering questions.

Mr. Brar: I would continue, that I stood against those decisions, which I think are wrong, because our schools need investment. Our health care, our infrastructure, our municipalities—they need help.

But this government is making the wrong choices to help those who never even asked for that help. And the Premier and the PC government is worried about these billionaires, these rich businesses getting out of business—a business which is making, like, over \$400 million in three months, if they didn't get a cheque worth \$327,000, they would go out of business. That does not make any sense.

It's clear that this PC government, they stand with billionaires, and we stand with regular Manitobans.

Let me make the minister's life a bit easier here, let's talk about 4-H clubs. And the minister said that he is going to give to me a green tie, because he has got two, I've only got one and I get a hard time matching with my turbans. So let's talk about 4-H clubs and green things.

I know the minister loves Clover the cow, and I'm also told that the minister also named her baby, baby Leaf, the calf.

I also love 4-H clubs. I also love people who work in 4-H clubs, and I respect those families who choose to send their kids to 4-H clubs because that's a great program to improve your communication skills, to improve your—to give an exposure to your kids regarding

various things, especially in rural Manitoba, in art, in beef production and so on, especially communications.

I also sent my older one to the 4-H clubs and I was so happy to see him, because I got to know about 4-H clubs when I was in university, and I am still impressed by that program, and we want that program to grow.

So, I expect that when I ask this question about 4-H clubs, the minister—can the minister commit that he won't talk about vet shortage, or he won't talk about the Crown lands.

Let us focus ourselves for a few minutes on 4-H clubs. Can the minister share that—how many students were—or registrants are there in Manitoba 4-H programs currently in Manitoba?

Mr. Johnson: Well, I don't have that number off the top of my head, so I apologize.

But yes, 4-H is an outstanding program. I remember going to it when I was young. Of course, I could—oh, I was only able to attend for the short period of time after calving and before we started haying, so I was on the very short program of it. So, at eight years old, I was out raking. So, I don't know if that'd be frowned upon nowadays, but it definitely wasn't back then.

So, yes, 4-H is outstanding, and we were proud to sponsor Clover the cow with \$5,000 going towards it. And just so people know what we're talking about, in case they—people that are watching today don't know what Clover is, if you didn't get the full video of me working with Clover, I will say it's an avatar that is—that you can give real scenarios of birthing a calf. So you can position—I've chosen to name the calf Leaf, I think it's kind of stuck. Four-leaf clover, you know. But Leaf is the calf that you're able to deliver from inside of Clover.

But real-life scenarios and important investments like that in 4-H from the government are important. So it actually has air bladders that you can pump up to increase the friction and simulate a harder calf birth. You can place it breached. They actually have one similar at the western veterinary college of medicine in our neighbouring province, Saskatchewan. They use it there for—right in the vet school.

So it's a very, very powerful tool, very powerful avatar. But you can inflate the bladders, you can place the calf breached, you can turn its nose back or you can have one leg behind and the head still facing

forward, and all these different scenarios actually can train the kids how to deliver calves.

So the calf, you can actually use real things that you would use to deliver a calf, like calving chains that you would use to put around the front hooves to pull it out and all the others tools that go along with delivering a calf. So it's a very important tool.

And it's important that we as a government continue to support 4-H and all of the work that they do. Again, I participated when I was young. I had limited time. I could go there throughout the year, but I thoroughly enjoyed everything that I was exposed to, and I still remember my director's name, Dianne Riding. I still remember her, and she's still involved with 4-H and different things. So when it's in you, when you start participating at a young age, people stay with it for a long, long time.

And it's very important to support our 97 clubs in Manitoba. All 97 of them, even though they have different focuses, they're still an outstanding way to educate children and incorporate them into agriculture so they can kind of do hands on.

And all 1,070 members are excited when they come to—I've had numerous visits here at the Legislature, and they're just excited to be engaged and learn about everything. And our 327 leaders that still help educate and get a hands on for those kids is outstanding. And they have 1,341 different projects that they do around the province.

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

CHAMBER

INDIGENOUS RECONCILIATION AND NORTHERN RELATIONS

* (14:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): 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 Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

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

If the honourable minister may introduce their staff, please.

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): Okay. Thank you very much.

To my left, I have Ainsley Krone, deputy minister. Next to her, Kevin McPike; next to him, Mike Sosiak, and next to him, Frankie Snider. And I gave all their positions last session, so, same people.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): Will the honourable critic please introduce his staff.

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): To my left, I have Julia Antonyshyn, caucus assistant.

Thanks.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): I thank the minister and member.

As was previously indicated, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

The honourable critic—[interjection]—the honourable member for Thompson.

Mr. Redhead: So, we'll continue off for—where we left off on Monday. On Monday, the minister mentioned several vacancies that currently exist within the department. I believe it was 25 per cent vacancy rate or 25 positions? [interjection] Positions.

I'm wondering if the minister can explain how and when these positions will be filled?

Ms. Clarke: Sorry. Thank you for your patience.

Indication 25 vacancies as of the end of February, which includes 10 positions, which we identified last time, are new positions within our department. All these positions are at various stages of recruitment, and how and when they'll be filled is very much dependent on the type of vacancy that they are.

But you also asked about Indigenous component within our staffing, which we take very seriously, and we have identified that there is an increase in Indigenous staff, as it is a key priority for our department and also across government; I want to add that. And we've been working to ensure priority is given to these candidates.

* (15:00)

And I just have to add to that, just the week that I was reappointed as minister, I was invited—we have a very large office over on Donald Street, and I was—went over to meet with the staff there, as I've done in the past. And I have to say, in my short vacancy from

this position, when I went in and met the staff that was there—and I have to say I was very proud of the fact that most of the staff was still there. That's excellent, because that's continuity in the work that we do.

But I was also very pleased to know that our DM had been ensuring that he brought in staff that he knew was competent and very worthy within our department. And many of them were Indigenous that I knew from other departments within government or outside in our other offices.

So, even for me, that's—that was a very high score for our department. And as an example, my DM here is of—Indigenous, and I'm very proud of that. And over the last several months that we have—we've done really well in this.

Through the Public Service Commission, our government is recruiting Indigenous talent acquisition professionals and—which have been funded through the R-A-R-I-F fund to increase Indigenous staff. And I've said this, not only in our department, this is all across government and it's also in our boards and committees.

Thank you.

Mr. Redhead: Can the minister please tell us more about what her priorities are as minister of this department?

Ms. Clarke: That's a great question.

It's actually really exciting. I have days now when I view my departure to retirement as a bit of a sad note because I see how far government has come working with Indigenous communities' leadership.

Economic development has to be just way at the top. The meetings that we're having with various First Nations communities and their leadership on the strides forward on economic development is—I would have to say it exceeds my expectations. And I have mentioned before that sometimes my expectations are a little lofty and hard to—sometimes hard to reach for myself, and maybe my expectations of others. But I find it pretty overwhelming, the direction that we're going.

And I've got a few examples. I was going to entertain you today with some remarks of things that I do see as priorities that have been happening—are happening, as this will be my last Estimates in my profession. And it's actually a part of my job that I enjoy Estimates, contrary to many.

But I have to point out—and to me, this is one that goes right back to day 1. It never happened in the previous government ever, and I think it is probably one of our biggest achievements. And I find myself

actually even a little emotional on this, because this has been an ask for many, many years. And it's revenue sharing. And that is going to make the difference in so many communities, for so many families, for jobs, the income.

And it's not even just about that, it's the sense of belonging, the sense of partnerships going forward. And there were—two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve—about 16 letters sent out—it was—initiative within the Department of northern—no, Natural Resources and Northern Development. And there were 16 letters sent out to First Nations to have this discussion. And I have to say, this was earlier this year, I believe—yes, it was March 31st, 2023, so it's not that long ago—and to date, there's at least six First Nations have signed these revenue sharing agreements.

And I'm extremely proud to say there's one taking place right now that I would have loved to be at. And I want to acknowledge these communities for coming quickly and I'm—it's long overdue.

And the emotions that are in—attached to this, for them, is almost hard to explain, but I certainly understand it because it—the—it just makes for so much ability for them to move forward where they haven't had that ability before.

So, I'm very proud of my colleagues in different ministries for the work that they are doing for inclusion, for revenue sharing. There's just a lot going on. I'm just looking for some of the other ones here.

I guess health care would have to be the next one for Indigenous peoples, especially in northern Manitoba, and we've heard that brought forward several times. And I have been meeting with the Health Minister as well as other partners within health care, and we are working with leadership with MKO, with AMC, with the tribal councils.

And I was at a tribal council AGM just two weeks ago, I believe—two or three weeks ago, and we discussed at great length health care in northern Manitoba and some of their most serious concerns. And you know, they're like the rest of Manitobans, they want health care close to home, they want, you know, the health-care professionals where they need them and their nursing stations man—you know, operational and that they are able to be confident in their health-care system.

There's a new CEO, as you know, in the Northern Health Region, and they talked about that that day. And I just want to acknowledge—his name is Raj Sweda [*phonetic*], and they indicated that he was

going to be coming to their A-G-A the following day and they were looking forward to that. They were a little 'amprehensive', but grand chief called me back later that day—the second day—and said that the CEO had come and had spent the full day with them and that they were really, really pleased with the conversations they had and they—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Redhead: I'd like to dive into the comment that the minister made about revenue sharing. I—you know, I know she had—or, sorry, they had mentioned the other departments in terms of revenue sharing.

So, which departments are sharing revenues with Indigenous communities and that—does that also include Manitoba Hydro? As you know, Manitoba Hydro has a big footprint within Indigenous territories. And, are Indigenous communities benefitting from the millions of dollars of revenue that Hydro is generating each and every year? And if so, which communities?

Ms. Clarke: I can't speak to Manitoba Hydro and I don't have that information with me, and that should come from that department.

I only have this particular information from Natural Resources and Northern Development today because I was invited to be at that revenue sharing. And I asked the minister, as he was leaving proceedings today, if he could give me some information, and he did leave me with some.

And as of March 31st, the pilot revenue sharing agreements have been signed with Chemawawin Cree Nation, Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Pine Creek Cree nation, Moose Lake Cree nation, Sapataweyak Cree Nation and Wusi Siphik [*phonetic*] Cree nation is there today.

And I'm—that's the list I've got but, as I said, there's many more. And I know that the minister is in conversation with these Cree nations—or northern nations, and I think this is just a big win for everybody.

Mr. Redhead: I'm going to ask the minister if she thinks it's priority that Manitoba Hydro do enter into revenue sharing with Indigenous communities? Because, you know, there is a huge, huge footprint that Manitoba Hydro has within Indigenous traditional territories and right in communities themselves.

And we know that this is a thorn, sometimes, in some First Nations, and I can speak to that as a former chief, former grand chief. And a lot of the times, what we hear is that Manitoba Hydro is extracting or

utilizing resources within their territories and not giving back enough to communities.

* (15:10)

And we know that sometimes creating these agreements can benefit the communities and have a ripple effect in terms of economic growth, prosperity and overall wellness when it comes to revenue sharing, especially like—for a conglomerate like Manitoba Hydro.

So, I'm wondering if this is a priority for the minister and if she can commit to exploring this with her counterparts and in the Indigenous communities.

Ms. Clarke: I think I've made it very clear that our government is working on revenue-sharing commitments to First Nations, for sure.

As I've indicated, I don't have information on Manitoba Hydro. There's every opportunity—I can't speak on behalf of other departments. As I've said, I've only got this information because I was invited to be there today, and I have not been in conversations directly with Manitoba Hydro Minister. And I strongly encourage you to pass those questions to them so that they can give you a clear indication of what their mandate is.

As you can understand, you perhaps get frustrated that I can't ask—answer questions that are related to other departments. However, Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations is a relationship department. We foster relationships between First Nations, Métis, Inuit, between other departments with our government, other organizations. However, when it comes to specific questions about the department, I am not in a position to answer those questions. Would I be a part of those conversations we're—you know, yes. We work all across government—we try to work all across government, and if that discussion is brought forward, I would certainly—I would hope to be a part of it.

Mr. Redhead: The minister did seem happy to bolster the revenue-sharing agreement when it comes to extractions of minerals. I just would assume she would be just as enthusiastic to foster that conversation within her government for Manitoba Hydro. But I didn't hear a yes from the minister, so I'm going to move on. I took that as a no.

So, on Monday, we were unable to get an answer to the—to this question because the finance officer wasn't able to attend the meeting. So I'm going to take the opportunity again today to ask this question. So, for the past five years, the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative has been underspent.

In 2019–2017, it was underspent by \$624,000; 2017-18, underspent by \$666,000; '18-19, underspent by \$659,000—and, mind you, this is pre-pandemic—2019-20, underspent by \$692,000. And in 2021, unspent by two hundred and—underspent, sorry, by \$244,000 for a total of \$2.85 million in underspending within that program.

Can the minister explain why the initiative is being underspent despite the levels of high demand, food insecurity in the North, inflation, yet this program is continuously being underspent. We just would like an answer to that. Thank you.

Ms. Clarke: Chair, I do have a printed response for the member opposite that I'd like to table from the previous question. Thank you.

And I would just like to add, further to the question previously on Manitoba Hydro.

I would like to share with the member opposite, do not assume my answer is a yes or no, that—an assumption is not an appropriate decision of my discussion. Thank you. Okay.

I'll add to that. We'll note in the review that we have dramatically increased spending by doubling from the 2016-17 to twenty–twenty—to '21-23, and decreased the underexpenditure. Thank you.

Mr. Redhead: Anyway, we were talking a little bit about revenue sharing in—with Indigenous communities, so I'm going to move on to a little bit of economic reconciliation here.

Can the minister tell us the difference between the economic reconciliation framework referenced on page 19 of the Estimates book, and the reconciliation strategy that her government is required to produce, by law, under the path of the reconciliation act?

*(15:20)

Ms. Clarke: I just want to take a few minutes to go back to the discussion on revenue sharing because I found some information here that I had not necessarily skipped over but I didn't read, but I think you'll be really happy to hear this.

The six First Nations—or Cree Nations, basically, that have had revenue sharing since January of 2022, to the end of 2022—it's done in six-month segments—but in that one-year time frame, the total amount of revenue, going back to just five of them—and I'll explain why just five—is \$3,524,830 in one year. So, that's significant, and that's only just the beginning in their treaty territories.

So, I need to add this. So, the lack of revenue shared with Chemawawin Cree Nation is due to the lack of activity in their revenue-sharing area in '22 to '23, and in partnership with industry, they are in the process of developing a new multi-year operating area, which will be the result in shared revenue beginning in '23-24, so this year.

The revenue-sharing agreement was a catalyst for this new operating partnership. And it's—is the 'disproportionately' large payment to the first three nations, period one, is due to record commodity prices for oriented strand board and softwood lumber, which is produced in their area. Manitoba's timber rates rise and fall, of course, with commodity rates, so we'll hope the prices stay up and that they all do really well. So again, I have to say I think this is very exciting and a big win for everybody.

Now to your question on reconciliation strategy and the framework. Okay, we'll start with the reconciliation strategy. And that will encompass a number of priority areas brought forward in the Calls to Action, as you are aware, and as are referenced in The Path to Reconciliation Act. And you will recall the Speech from the Throne made particular commitments to building on previous years' commitments to advance reconciliation by providing an important focus on wealth development and economic opportunities—and I think I've already given you a great example of that.

This focus has been a result of numerous engagements—meetings, as well as the calls for actions themselves. Now, the economic reconciliation framework—and we talked about this on our previous session—it'll be part of the broader reconciliation strategy, and that was referenced as I said prior. As indicated, the necessary first step is to engage with Indigenous leadership to determine what that looks like. And we can't develop this strategy or resulting frameworks in isolation or without those Indigenous partners.

Thank you.

Mr. Redhead: In this committee on Monday, the minister said that letters had been sent out to various First Nation organizations, such as MKO, SCO, AMC, MMF and MIA to begin engagement on reconciliation framework referenced on page 19.

When I later asked for an update on the reconciliation strategy that this government is required to—required by law to produce, the minister referenced these same letters.

Can the minister please confirm whether these letters were sent once or twice, and whether they were regarding the economic reconciliation framework or the reconciliation strategy?

Ms. Clarke: Yes, sorry if I didn't make myself totally clear on that. The invitation letters are forthcoming and expected out next week—and I'm reading this exactly as I had it here last week, and maybe I didn't articulate it clearly—and they are part of the larger reconciliation strategy.

So they are final draft, and will be going out within days.

Mr. Redhead: I'm going to go on to MMIWG2S a little bit, here. Regarding the MMIWG2S calls to justice, can the minister provide us with a list—for a list of justice—wait, sorry—with a list of Calls for Justice in order of priority within our government. I can clarify that, I kind of stumbled a bit, yes.

So, what are your priorities within your department for the MMIWG2S calls—order—for justice?

*(15:30)

Ms. Clarke: I would like to point out to the member opposite that he emphasized: what am I doing? I don't do anything on my own; I work as a team. I think my team knows that. I don't make the decisions; we make them collectively, and we also make them collectively as a government.

And I certainly want to thank all of my colleagues in the various departments who we work collaboratively with to ensure that we cover all issues, not just with MMIWG, but all Indigenous issues. And responding to the issue of MMIWG and gender-based violence is a priority for our government; I want to make that very clear.

We are also working with MMIWG2SL+ implementation committee to set those priorities, taking advice and guidance from them. And, as mentioned prior, this group has representation from community and will form our government priorities where they would like us to go. And I think that's very important to remember. This is an Indigenous-led approach, and that's the way we feel is the right way to go. We continue to work with Indigenous partners and, most importantly, families and survivors, to co-develop approaches. This approach has been developed and founded on the principles of reconciliation through listening to those that have been most impacted.

And I have some additional information I'll also share. Manitoba's pursuing a wide variety of activities

that align with the Calls for Justice and support efforts to end violence against Indigenous women and girls. Examples of these activities from 2022 include continuing to provide core funding to Indigenous community-led organizations and leadership to deliver services to families and survivors affected by MMIWG. Organizations include AMC, SCO, MKO, Manitoba Inuit Association, Manitoba Moon Voices. These organizations provide direct or indirect support to families and survivors.

Continuing to provide funding for support, healing and commemorative events in honour of MMIWG victims, survivors and loved ones. Organizations supported in 2022 include the Brandon Urban Aboriginal Peoples' Council and Wa-Say Healing Centre, amongst others. Invested funding support into 10 Indigenous-led residential school healing centres across the province to support and promote healing and advance reconciliation. This contribution builds on the \$200,000 investment previously made by the Province in September 2021 to support programming and awareness for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

The new funding aligns with IRNR's mandate to engage with Indigenous communities and organizations and all Manitobans on a path to reconciliation. And we will continue to work actively with the federal government and other provinces as well, and territories, in relation to Canada's efforts to respond to these Calls for Justice. And we will continue to align our activities with the national action plan.

Mr. Redhead: I understand in the response that the minister's office is working with Indigenous organizations to address some of the calls to justice. My—I guess—I wonder, is there an official working group—for—that the government is working with to implement all 231 calls to justice that sit regularly and that advises the government on this matter. If no, then why?

*(15:40)

Ms. Clarke: I did indicate in my former response that the implementation committee that I did reference is the group that we work with, and this is a group, by their design, that they have chosen the persons to sit on it. And that's where we address all issues coming forward.

And, of course, it would always be a goal to implement as many recommendations as possible. They can't all be done at one time. They're not done by one department. They're all across government.

And they're done not just across government, but they're also done by other groups and organizations. And we are always connected to all of that.

I work with—I sit on the Gender-Based Violence Committee of Cabinet. I also sit on—what was the other one—gender-based violence and—it leaves my mind right now. But I sat on both of those committees as previous minister, and I do again. And we work very collaboratively.

We also work with a lot of other groups that, you know, within Justice, within Status of Women and now, especially, Mental Health and wellness, because we are—we're not just looking to catch up. We're also working at a grassroots level so that, you know—it's not just the families and victims. We have to work, really, across government to ensure that this stops; that it doesn't continue. I mean, it's—it has to end.

And so, we are also spending time and, definitely, resources through—again, through the justice system, through Mental Health and wellness, through Families, especially, to ensure that families are getting the supports they needed. And sometimes it's financial, and sometimes, it's medical, education, so many different venues where we are trying to offer support so that they can get through. And we need to end this.

And we focus constantly on the women and girls. And I get a lot of response from First Nations or other communities: how about the men and boys? Why is nobody talking about that? And I've been watching our statistics, and I've been watching what's happening in our province just in the last weeks and months on boys, and very young boys; very, very young boys. And, you know, we have to be in mind that we have to help all genders, not just the missing, murdered women and girls.

So, I think it's very important that we continue to support any way that we possibly can going forward, and I'm—again, I have to say, I'm very happy to be working with colleagues that are all committed to these better outcomes and ensuring that we move forward in a better way.

Mr. Redhead: The minister had indicated that there is a committee that is advising her, I believe, on the calls to justice. Am I correct?

Ms. Clarke: It's called the implementation committee, and it's—I had a—I believe we give you the breakdown of that committee in—on Monday of who was involved in that. I don't have it in my notes here, but I think we gave kind of—no? Okay.

But, it's an implementation and it's—is there family members? I'm not sure. We can probably get a make-up of that committee for you, so that you—yes.

Mr. Redhead: I'd appreciate that. I know it's important that government work to address the 231 calls to justice, and I appreciate that. The list of who was on that committee and how they're appointed and the breakdown of that would really—I would appreciate that list.

You know, again, the calls to justice are there. There's 231 of them. I don't think adding more red tape to implementing these calls to justice is necessary.

But, what I will ask is: What's the department's timeline to implementing all 231 of the Calls for Justice?

Ms. Clarke: I will say: As quickly as possible.

And we have to work with this group, and sometimes that sets the pace, to be very clear. But, as I've indicated right from beginning, this is a very high priority.

I was the minister when this inquiry was first established. I was at the meeting with other ministers from 'across' Canada when this decision was made. I was a person that voted on this MMIWG inquiry.

I was also there in Gatineau when it was released. I was with the families and the leadership from Manitoba there. I made a commitment at that time, on behalf of our government, that we would work with this and we would do everything in our power to ensure that these actions were met.

And I will 'reiterate' again: I think our government has done a really good job, as good as job as could be expected, given that we had three years of COVID in between, where we could not meet personally. And it—you know, discussions with individuals in remote areas, specifically families, survivors, victims, you know, we couldn't have those meetings at that time. So, it set us back. I think we are all aware of that. There's a lot that didn't happen, but that, I think, is indicated.

And I have to say, coming back into the Cabinet in 2022 and being re-appointed to the Treasury Board, I was really, I'm not going to say impressed, but I was really happy to see the amount of funding that was going towards different avenues that would enhance the work that is being done.

Because there has to be funding in order to bring people to meetings. There has to be funding and so

much support services for anything that we do. You know, when it comes to MMIWG, it—you know yourself, there has to be a support system, and it takes a lot of people and it takes a lot of time.

This is something we can't rush. We have to be respectful and we have to be very aware that this pace is set by this implementation committee. We have to ensure that we are following their guidance. We have to do what is important to them, and we'll continue to do that.

* (15:50)

And I'll be honest, I have not been at an implementation meeting since I've returned, which is a very brief time that I've been back into this department. But I know the work that's being done and I know the funding that's going to it, and it's significant, I will add that.

Okay. I've got a bit more information here. Hopefully, it's helpfully to you.

Additional support has been provided to the Manitoba MMIWG2S+ Partnership Implementation Plan. It's a grassroots Indigenous-led program that will implement the Calls for Justice in a culturally relevant way. The program will be led by traditional Indigenous matriarchal governing body, comprised of knowledge keepers, elders, MMIWG2S and family members, survivors and Indigenous experts, also including poverty reduction and economic development board.

Both programs represent a whole-of-Manitoba approach based on partnerships, co-development and collaboration and emphasize a foundational principle of reconciliation and nothing about us without us.

It also says there's family. Ma Mawi—I can't read this—*[interjection]*—Tongasi *[phonetic]*, 2S people of Manitoba, The Pas Family Resource Centre, SCO, MKO, MMF, 'infimity'—and 'infimity'—'infimity'—oh, my gosh—my mouth is not still frozen—Infinity Women Secretariat—that's the MMF group. So it's a very broad group.

So that's the list you were asking for.

Thank you.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): The honourable critic.

Mr. Redhead: And I appreciate the minister providing that list.

I'm wondering, you know, it sounds as though the committee meets on a regular basis to discuss, you know, the Calls for Justice. To me it's—I'm wondering if the minister—or if I'm able to obtain minutes for these meetings and review them or even—maybe even be a part of that committee because I think it's important that we work together, moving forward, for these calls to justice.

I just would like to see what is being said and if the government is actually abiding by the recommendations of this committee that is in place. And that's why I'm asking if the minutes could be shared with me.

Ms. Clarke: Sandra DeLaronde is the chair of that committee, and we would have to speak to her in regards to how much information they'd be prepared to share.

But I've always had a really good working relationship with Sandra back from day one with her and Hilda Anderson-Pyrz, with MMIWG, so, you know, that conversation can be held. *[interjection]* We can ask her, but I can't guarantee what the response will be.

I will also add to the member opposite, I've opened my door; I've made it very clear that I'm willing and prepared to meet anytime on any issue that he might bring forward, and I would be more—that offer's always open.

Mr. Redhead: I look forward to a response and, hopefully, it's a positive one.

Since the minister has resumed her role—oh, sorry—I'm going to flip back. How many of the 231 calls to justice have been implemented so far?

* (16:00)

Ms. Clarke: Again, I think previously stated a lot of this. The Calls for Justice are interrelated and by design are extensive in scope, touching on fundamental aspects of Canadian society. They're not necessarily intended to be a checklist, and personally, calling them a checklist bothers me personally.

And we are working with our partners to address them in a culturally appropriate way through our work with the implementation committee. Our progress all across government departments are reported on our website as outlined by the path and reconciliation act or agreement our government passed in 2017 and the Manitoba Status of Women also reports publicly on responding to gender-based violence broadly through its gender-based violence framework.

And I will just add that—and I was going to respond to this earlier—not all the calls suggested are directed at provincial government, as you would know if you read them. However, in our PRA report, we have responded to as many as possible and we continue to work with that.

And I just have to say, further to that, as I've indicated, you know, having sat in this position before, and now coming back to it, I want to give a sincere thank you to Premier Stefanson for fostering a respectful and a sincere commitment, not just to MMIWG—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): Sorry, may I interrupt the minister?

Members can only be referred to by their title or their constituency, please—or portfolio.

Ms. Clarke: —for commitment to all aspects for Indigenous people of Manitoba. Specifically, to Indigenous leadership to work together and to ensure that their communities and their families have a voice in this government with successful outcomes and that is not just for MMIWG. It's—as you've seen, it's for economic development and so many other aspects.

When I say that this is a committed government, I mean that with most sincerity.

Thank you.

Mr. Redhead: I'm going to give a few minutes to the member of St. Boniface an opportunity to ask a few questions to the minister.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Yes, my question's about the issue of withholding payments or the issue of special children's allowances that were withheld by the Province of Manitoba for a number of years, and then in the 2020 Budget, the—part of that bill was to withhold that—to continue to withhold that money and to cancel all the—and bar any future legal action, though it didn't work.

Can the minister just explain why she voted for that legislation, which violated the human rights of First Nations children?

Ms. Clarke: I won't respond to voting for it, but I also—I have to advise the minister opposite—or the member opposite—that this is clearly a question for the member of—Minister of Families (Ms. Squires). That is totally within her department, and that is where that needs to be directed.

Mr. Lamont: Because I know that there's—I know that there's a court case, but is there—has there been any—is

there any consideration of negotiating a settlement over this rather than having it in the courts?

Ms. Clarke: Well, as the member already indicated, it was a lawsuit, and there is ongoing discussion, and it would be very inappropriate of me to discuss that because I'm not a part of those discussions.

Mr. Lamont: Just on the question of Lake St. Martin, the Lake St. Martin outlet, I know that there have been many delays and issues with section 35 consultation for Indigenous communities. There haven't been any public hearings on it.

Is there any—has there been any expression to the minister as far as Indigenous and First Nations groups having public hearings about—which is a \$600-million project which is going to have a major impact on the environment in the Interlake and on First Nations communities? Has there been any discussion of having public hearings on that, or has the minister heard of that?

Ms. Clarke: I am not a part of—directly a part of those discussions. Of course, that's under Minister of Transportation. And—although I was with—meetings with First Nations affected by that—Interlake tribal council, for instance—in my previous position as minister of Indigenous.

Since I've been reappointed, I have had meetings with those same chiefs, and they have not even brought the—that issue up at all. So they obviously are relatively satisfied with the process that's going forward and the—their relationship with the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Lamont: Just a question about Hydro-affected communities in the North. I know that there have been—I recently received an email from a representative south of Indian Lake, which is one of many communities that have had really devastating damage as a result of Hydro construction altering the flow of rivers, lakes, that sort of wiped out their ability to even sustain and feed themselves because of the destruction of fisheries.

Has there been any—has the minister been involved in any discussions with Hydro and Indigenous communities or First Nations communities about reparations or about compensation for the damage that took place?

Ms. Clarke: I don't want to be disrespectful or put the member from St. Boniface off.

Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations is a department within this government based on relationships. When I first was appointed to this position in 2016, I had a lot of work to do building relationships with all other departments, building relationships with Indigenous leadership, Indigenous communities, on various issues at that time. And at that time, I was almost always included in any of those discussions, which was great, and it provided me a lot of knowledge, especially learning at that time in point.

However, I have to say, in being reappointed most recently to this position, I don't know if it saddens me or I see it as a sense of accomplishment, but the partners—and whether it's Indigenous communities, leadership or external partnerships, whether it's the channel or whether it's to do with Hydro—these groups now go directly to the minister that is responsible for that.

I think that's a huge step forward, and I am typically not always invited to those meetings. If we are, we definitely would send a staff member.

Mr. Josh Guenter, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

* (16:10)

But these meetings take place, and I'm not necessarily always aware of it. And I don't see that as a particular bad decision because that shows that our government is taking responsibilities and they can go directly to any department that they want to get answers directly from that department.

Mr. Lamont: Yes, just one more question, then I'll pass it back to the member for Thompson.

The annual report from 2021 shows that the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative was underspent by \$244,000, or a 25 reduction—per cent reduction of the budget for the program.

Can the minister explain that reduction, and why there was no increase to the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative in the Estimates for 2022 to 2023? *[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter): The honourable minister—

An Honourable Member: Sorry.

The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter): Just—yes, the minister has the floor.

An Honourable Member: She's so eager to answer.

Ms. Clarke: I am. Okay?

The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter): The minister has the floor.

Ms. Clarke: We just provided a copy of that information to the honourable critic, and we'll see to it that you get a copy of that, as well.

Thank you.

Mr. Redhead: So I'm going to move on to a little bit more on reconciliation and the reconciliation strategy, and why has it taken so long to begin engagement with Indigenous communities on reconciliation—on the reconciliation strategy that this department is required by law to develop.

Now I know, you know, I was a chief during, you know, the worst pandemic in history, yet we were still able to engage with government federally and in other levels, and so I think this is an important question: why has it taken so long?

And, you know, COVID shouldn't have hindered that, because we've seen progress in other departments moving forward, so—yes. That's the question.

Mr. Shannon Martin, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

* (16:20)

Ms. Clarke: Again, I thank the member opposite for his patience. I wish we could have done this as an office meeting, because we could have probably had a really fulsome discussion.

However, in Estimates, it's a whole different process. So, you know, perhaps we can do that at some point, where I can have members from within my department that work on these initiatives on a daily basis and can give you, you know, more updated information, rather than trying to do it through virtual and those that are here today.

Engagement has been occurring all across a variety of departments, which I've indicated to you, and on a number of key priorities. And I'll have to go with this back to the Office of the Auditor General in April 2022; I don't know if you read the report on our implementation to The Path to Reconciliation Act—and he did indicate at that time that he released an independent audit on our implementation of The Path to Reconciliation Act.

His report noted that the minister responsible—at that time, that was myself—for 'recognition' had made attempts to lead reconciliation efforts, but overall, cross-government co-ordination was lacking, and no

strategy for reconciliation had, at that point, been developed.

I have been giving you significant information in the past two days that we've met on what our government is doing and that it is now working across all departments. And it would be great to have a list from each and every department of what is happening in regards to reconciliation.

And it's interesting, because some of the meetings that I've had and some of the discussions that I've had with First Nations, as well as the Métis Federation, and there'll be something that takes place, and, you know, it's a—it seems like a casual conversation, but it's like, now that's reconciliation; that's the way it should be. You know, it's not necessarily one of the Calls to Action, but there is so much happening that really, clearly indicates to me—because I watch for it and I look for it—to see that things are changing, you know, you got to look for the change. Things are changes.

However, when you asked the question the past day of these deliberations and when you questioned our vacancy rate on both occasions, we have historically had a very small staff in this department, but a hard-working team. And to co-ordinate the strategy development that we have been talking about and to formalize many of the pieces of the work already under way across government, we needed a bigger team. And have indicated we are hiring 10 more people to work on this throughout, not just our department, but across government.

Our department and our government have, however, been doing a lot—we have not been sitting idle—to advance reconciliation. And we have not waited on a published strategy to do this work. This is evidenced by the accomplishments published in The Path to Reconciliation Act annual report—as I've indicated, is online—as well as evidenced in numerous announcements since the passing of the act.

Mr. Redhead: You know, I look forward to the invite to your office, Minister, but you know, the point of Estimates is to get things on the record and have a public audience.

I'm going to step back a bit and talk a little—or, ask a question about the document that you tabled earlier today, and then I'll come back to the reconciliation strategy, if that's okay.

I'd like to—thank you, first of all, for providing some of the information in response to my question

regarding the \$2.85 million underspent in the healthy foods initiative since 2016.

I would like to note that the information shows an additional \$218,000 underspent in 2021-2022, bringing this underspending up over \$3 million. In the notes for 2021-2022, it says that the savings reflect cancelled projects due to pandemic travel restrictions.

Could the minister please tell us which projects were cancelled due to COVID and whether these projects will be reinstated? Thank you.

Ms. Clarke: In regards to the question, we can't get that list or a complete, fulsome answer for you on that, but we will get it for you, and we will present it to you.

Mr. Redhead: I'm glad the minister's taking that under advisement.

I'm going to go back to a little bit on the reconciliation strategy. Is there a timeline for the development and implementation of the reconciliation strategy?

* (16:30)

Ms. Clarke: I would like to just clarify that as a government, as a department, we are not waiting for the strategy to begin implementation based on the Calls to Action.

However, the timeline on the release of a formal plan will be dependent on a number of factors, including co-development of an agreed upon process for engagement through upcoming discussions with the Indigenous leaders. What should be included, who should be involved and what form the strategy should take is not to be determined by the government, but in keeping with the principles of reconciliation.

A progress report on this year's activities will be forthcoming in our path to reconciliation annual report.

And as also previously mentioned, we've been inviting key Indigenous leaders to begin this formalizing process by negotiating MOUs, documents affirming and clarifying our government-to-government relationship with respect to the co-development of provincial reconciliation strategy.

And I want to thank the Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness (Ms. Morley-Lecomte). She provided some information to me today and I think this really speaks to basic—exactly what you're asking about. February of last year, the Mental Health and Community Wellness released: a path to mental health and community wellness—a roadmap for Manitoba, along with \$17-million investment to support the one-year plan.

Now, this road map includes government commitment on advancing reconciliation and strengthening relationships with Indigenous governments, right holders and Indigenous-led organizations. It will also increase access to Indigenous cultural programming and healing services. As part of this road map, mental health community wellness has committed to establishing formal Indigenous planning and advisory groups that promote and foster collaboration as well as gathering input from diverse voices to ensure that we better meet the needs of all Indigenous people.

In 2022, the provincial Speech from the Throne included a commitment to build a co-ordinated provincial response to the prevention of suicide with a focus on at-risk communities and First Nations. In the upcoming year, mental health community wellness will begin to develop, also, a suicide-prevention action plan, which will identify key priorities for this work.

* (16:40)

And I have to say, my working relationship with this particular minister has proved to be very instrumental in taking good steps forward. We heard the emergency call for action from northern First Nations very recently, and we responded to it very quickly because their indication was that the provincial nor the federal government were there to help them.

This particular minister and I, we put out a call to the particular chief that was speaking at that time, Chief Ducharme, and we also put out a call at the same time to Grand Chief Settee, to ask them, specifically, what can we do? What can we do right now to help? What will make a difference? And they explained very much to us about their crisis-response team that was working up in the North at that time. They have only nine employees, and they were working across three different communities. They were exhausted; they were tired because it was a variety of different critical incidents that had happened.

And so they indicated that, we need help; we need additional help. And we responded. We responded immediately, within days, and we provided over \$1 million to MKO as well as \$1 million plus to SCO, so that they could strengthen their crisis-response teams, which they are working on. And they indicated that this definitely will make a difference. We know this is not a long-term solution, but it does give us the time to work directly with them to find solutions going forward, and they indicated they were very pleased with that response.

I also indicated that our government has taken a whole-of-government approach to increase access to co-ordinated care for mental health and addictions services, and it made investments in a number of initiatives for culturally safe services for Indigenous populations.

Our government is committed to working collaboratively and respectfully with Indigenous governments and right holders, including all elders, knowledge keepers and community members, as we seek reconciliation, healing and meaningful ways to honour the lives lost as well as support survivors of families in our province. The situations are—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Over the last couple years, of course, the minister is—was the former minister of this department as well, as well as myself also being the former critic, so we're very familiar with, kind of, the ins and outs of the department. And then questions I had in Estimates over the previous years, including when the current minister was the minister at the time, we talked about the consultation policy that was being developed for First Nations here in Manitoba.

And there was conversations back and forth where the minister had talked about it being in place, and there was kind of a structure or a blueprint or a skeleton of it, and that it was still—I believe the words at the time were 'ominent'—were imminent as to when that was going to be released, and then it came under—there was a Cabinet shuffle. The new minister had said, well, kind of nowhere now; we're kind of scrapping that idea because it wasn't going anywhere.

So wondering if the minister can share with the committee where that consultation policy is at, where she was the—when she was the minister at the time, and is now back in the ministry again.

Ms. Clarke: I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

We have—the department of IRNR has finalized a new framework for respectful and productive consultations with Indigenous communities and we are seeking Cabinet approval. And that is expected to go forward very shortly—happy to say that.

And once approved, this framework will replace the 2009 interim provincial policy and Crown consultations with First Nations, Métis communities, and other Aboriginal communities. And, I think, as we've

acknowledged before, that we are committed to working with Indigenous people to advance shared goals and promote truth and reconciliation.

And I have to say, I realize you weren't here for some of the previous discussion, but a lot of what's happening right now clearly indicates that consultation is taking place. Some good steps are coming forward out of that, even without this having the final, you know, approval.

Just knowing that it is already taking place is really good, but we've got to have that structure of the same consultation process for everything across government, which is—I look forward to getting that done.

Facilitating respectful and productive consultations and listening to the concerns of Indigenous people across our province is an important step forward towards reconciliation. And, again, I have to emphasize this is happening in a very, very good way.

Our department, in collaboration with other government departments, and through engagement with the Indigenous communities and proponents of natural resource development, has finalized a renewed framework for respectful and productive Crown consultations with the communities. And I'll just list a couple of the objectives of the framework so you have an idea of where it's going.

Number 1: to meet the—Manitoba's legal obligation under Section 35 of the Constitution Act; also to demonstrate a coordinated whole-of-government approach to consultation, which is happening.

Ensure consultation processes that avoid duplication of efforts and advancement of reconciliation with Indigenous communities.

And, over the past year, there has been a lot of engagement with First Nation leaders on this draft. They have been a part of it, helping to get it to what they feel is respectful to their needs going forward on a renewed framework. And we welcome proposals to work together on a renewed approach to the Crown's duty to consult and accommodate with the Indigenous communities.

I'll leave it at that.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): The honourable member.

An Honourable Member: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And the understanding was that this policy had already been forwarded to Cabinet—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): I apologize—sorry. The honourable member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie).

Mr. Bushie: Thank you. And the understanding was that this policy had already been forwarded to Cabinet.

So, the minister had mentioned that now it's pending Cabinet approval. Could she tell us what date it went for Cabinet approval?

Ms. Clarke: I said it was waiting for Cabinet approval.

It goes through a process to get to the Cabinet and that is up to the clerk. We don't get to decide when it's put before Cabinet. Yes. The process is going forward to Cabinet, but I cannot give a date for that because we don't decide when those are forwarded, like, when it's accepted by—onto the Cabinet agenda.

Mr. Bushie: Just for clarification, what date was it then submitted?

* (16:50)

Ms. Clarke: I don't have that information. I don't know if there's a specific date.

Mr. Bushie: So, just to clarify then, the minister's department, who was responsible for developing this consultation policy, is not aware of what date it was submitted or what date it was completed?

Ms. Clarke: Okay, I will clarify. It is in the process of going to Cabinet.

And I realize if you haven't been a part of Cabinet and the process that it takes to take these types of—when we forward as a department, it has to go through the signatures, it has to go through different departments, it has to go through the clerk. It is a process.

It is in the process. There's no date when it goes from one particular person to another for these signatures to get to Cabinet, but that—it is in process.

Mr. Redhead: You know, today is spirit day—Spirit Bear Day. I was hoping to see a statement on it from the minister in the Chamber today, but didn't happen. You know, spirit day, which is an important date in the history of the Jordan's Principle program and at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

What involvement has the minister had with the Jordan's Principle program to date, and how is the minister working to uphold Jordan's Principle in her work with this department?

Ms. Clarke: Very happy to talk about Jordan's Principle.

I've been to quite a few different discussion groups with Jordan's Principle. I've also met—visited, I think, no less than 10 First Nations to visit their program and what they're offering. The Minister for Families did put forward a statement for Spirit Bear today.

I think it goes without saying—I mean, the member opposite knows that I'm very committed to—it's—whether it's Jordan's Principle or any of the other topics that we have discussed, I think he clearly understands my commitment to the Indigenous people of this province and anything that relates to their well-being, to their culture, to their ceremony. I take it all very, very seriously.

And I have to say, because we're running out of time once again, but I have to take this opportunity, and I thank both critics here, past and present. You know, we don't get a lot of time in question period, unfortunately. Maybe that's good. But I want to thank you for your respectful dialogue throughout.

And I also want to indicate that today is national Indigenous—or, nurses day. Although nurses week is all week, but today is National Nurses Day.

I also want to indicate that we have several teams from across Canada for the national Indigenous hockey games this week, at which I attended—not last evening, the evening before. And I did, at my—in my comments, I spoke to reconciliation. I also spoke to the residential school survivors and children from the past.

So, this is not something that I take lightly, any of these items that you've brought forward. I take it all very seriously. I take this forward to my colleagues on a daily basis. We have these discussions.

And I have to say, with the most humble pride, that we have come a long ways from where we were in 2016. There's a long ways to go, but I'm also very confident in my colleagues for the future, that they will respectfully take all these considerations forward, and they will continue. The relationships between my colleagues and First Nations, Métis and Inuit people is respectful, and I have great admiration for the people that I have met along this journey, and I could not be more grateful for the experience that I've had, and I thank all of you for that.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): Are there any—the honourable critic.

Mr. Redhead: Oh, sorry. Being mindful of time, I have no questions—no more questions, no further questions.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): We shall proceed with resolutions.

Resolution 19.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$36,200,000 for Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 19.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 19.1. If necessary, at this point, we will request that the—all ministerial and opposition staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

So, the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Redhead: I move that line item 19.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations' salary be reduced to \$21,000.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): It's been moved by the honourable member for Thompson that line 19.1(a)—[interjection]—sorry, that line item 19.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations' salary be reduced to \$21,000.

The motion is in order.

It's debatable. Is there any debate on the motion?

The—he's not—[interjection]

The honourable member is not in his chair. The honourable minister of conservation.

Hon. Greg Nesbitt (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development): Well, close, Mr. Chair, but thank you very much.

I'd like to speak to the good work being done by the minister here, and I really feel it's unfair to try to reduce her salary, you know, given the excellent work she's doing in this department in terms of reconciliation. I know she works hard along with my department in trying to ensure that First Nations have access to our government, every department, and I know she regularly meets with the First Nations.

This afternoon, for example, Mr. Chair, she was in Estimates here; I was busy signing an historic revenue-sharing agreement with Chief Elwood Zastre of the Wuskwi Siphik First Nation. And, you know, Chief Zastre sent his regards to minister—the minister here, and—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Martin): The time being 5 p.m., the motion carries over. Committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

The Acting Speaker (Shannon Martin): The time being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 10, 2023

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Introduction of Bills		Education Property Tax Credit	
Bill 242–The Police and Peace Officers' Memorial Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)		Wasyliw	2182
Isleifson	2175	Cullen	2182
Bill 233–The Chartered Professionals in Human Resources Act		Agency Nursing Costs	
Martin	2175	Asagwara	2183
		Gordon	2183
Committee Reports		Allied Health Professionals	
Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs Sixth Report		Naylor	2184
Smook	2175	Teitsma	2184
Members' Statements		Highway and Road Safety	
Summer Activities in Brandon		Bushie	2185
Isleifson	2177	Piwniuk	2185
Reetu Chahal		Brandon School Board Meeting	
Sandhu	2177	Lamont	2186
		Guillemard	2186
Ridhwanlai Badmos		Khan	2186
Gordon	2178	Management of Health-Care System	
Steven Bignell		Gerrard	2187
Lathlin	2178	Gordon	2187
Green Team Program		Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit	
Smook	2179	Lagassé	2187
		Squires	2187
Tabling of Reports		High-Speed Internet	
Goertzen	2179	Lindsey	2187
		Teitsma	2187
Oral Questions		Petitions	
Health-Care System		Punjabi Bilingual Programs in Public Schools	
Kinew	2179	Altomare	2188
Stefanson	2179	Diagnostic Testing Accessibility	
Education Property Tax Credit		Maloway	2188
Kinew	2180	Drug Overdose Reporting	
Stefanson	2181	B. Smith	2189
		Brandon University Funding	
		Moses	2189

ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Committee of Supply
(Concurrent Sections)

Room 254

Consumer Protection and Government Services

Teitsma	2190
Sandhu	2191

Room 255

Agriculture

Johnson	2204
Brar	2206

Chamber

Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern
Relations

Clarke	2221
Redhead	2221
Lamont	2228
Bushie	2231
Nesbitt	2233

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>