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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 25, 2017

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 212—The Conflict of Interest Act

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Madam Speaker, I'd like to move, seconded by the member from River Heights, that Bill 212, The Conflict of Interest Act, be read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Fletcher: Madam Speaker, this is a non-partisan issue. The current legislation for conflict of interest is woefully inadequate and must be changed to relate to the realities of the 21st century.

This bill is based on legislation brought forward by Premier Brad Wall in our sister province of Saskatchewan. The bill includes any assets owned by a member or immediate family, including stocks, bonds and real estate in Canada. In the last 15 years, the world has changed dramatically from tax-free savings accounts to public policy. This bill will ensure that no MLA or immediate family can benefit financially. For example, issuing a licence for environment or a mining claim or new pot—or the marijuana regime. You can—we need to fill that pot hole.

Manitobans expect the best. Brad Wall has introduced the highest standard that I'm aware of, and I hope this will be a framework for the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Crown Services. The required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement?

MPI Accepts Military Identification

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): Madam Speaker, as Minister for Crown Services, I was proud to announce earlier this morning a new way our government is making life a little easier for the amazing members of our Canadian Forces stationed in Manitoba.

From training and missions to the sacrifices they and their families make, military personnel's daily lives can constantly be in flux. And that includes relocations, resettling from all corners of Canada, often quickly and without much notice, can be stressful and difficult.

That is why today, along with my colleague, Manitoba's special envoy for military affairs, the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Reyes), our government was proud to announce a new change that makes transition to our province easier for all military personnel. To truly live up to our friendly Manitoba reputation, I am pleased to announce that Manitoba Public Insurance is now accepting military ID and Canadian Forces driver licences as proof of identity when applying for a Manitoba driver licence or identification card.

Manitoba already recognizes commercial-class driver licences issued by the military for equivalent class exchange to a provincial licence. Manitoba was, in fact, one of the first provinces to recognize military driving permits for this purpose.

These are just two small ways that, as a government, we can show our support for the military by making it as easy as possible to transition to friendly Manitoba when stationed here.

I have the utmost admiration, respect and gratitude for the men and women of Canada's military. They have dedicated their lives to protect all of us. I know I speak on behalf of our government and all Manitobans when I say to all past and present members of the Canadian Forces and their families, thank you for dedicating your lives to protecting ours.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): We owe our service members and their families, who sacrifice so much for us, an enormous debt of gratitude. We strongly

support our reservists, active service members and veterans.

For those members who may have slept in this morning, the member for Kildonan and I had a very positive discussion about that today as we passed on Bill 215 to committee.

Our former NDP government undertook many initiatives to make life easier for military personnel and their families. We made it easier for military personnel and their families to find a family doctor. We extended the right to vote in provincial elections to Armed Forces personnel serving outside of Manitoba. We brought in legislation to allow military personnel to end their rental agreements before they expire if they were deployed in military service. We changed The Employment Standards Act to protect the jobs of reservists on tours of duty. We introduced legislation allowing military members to retain their Manitoba driver's licences while serving in other countries and continue to earn merits, and we also made it easier for personnel posted here to obtain their Manitoba driver's licences.

Military personnel and their families often need to relocate quickly and suddenly to serve our country. In recognition of the sacrifices they have made and continue to make, the least we can do is to ease their transition when they move from or to another province and make sure they have access to the front-line services they need.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of our NDP caucus, I thank all military personnel for their service and their courage and dedication. We will continue to support actions to make their lives in Manitoba easier.

Thank you.

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

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to speak to the minister's statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I first want to thank the Clerk and all the legislative staff for so diligently staying in the Chamber until after 1 o'clock this morning.

Madam Speaker, in 2015, Manitoba was one of two provinces in Canada to start recognizing commercial-class military driver's licences for upgrade to equivalent-class civilian driver's licences. Recognizing these licences, and now identification

cards, to satisfy applicable identity requirements is a logical extension.

As my colleague, the member for Burrows (Ms. Lamoureux), has said this morning, the Liberal caucus is happy to support any enhancements for our military personnel and to thank them for all the wonderful work that they do. This measure will help military personnel to meet the requirements for photo ID so that they can vote and fully participate in other ways in Manitoba.

However, I note, mister–Madam Speaker, that there are still many others that have—some in our northern communities, for example, who are not with driver's licence and photo ID, and they also need attention in terms of how we make sure that they have the photo ID that's needed so that they can fully participate as well.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada

Mr. Nic Curry (Kildonan): I rise today with respect to the recent centennial anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

I take this moment to recognize the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada, who joined thousands of Canadians who captured Vimy Ridge 100 years ago. Especially of note are the Cameron Pipes and Drums, today led by Pipe Major John Dawson.

* (13:40)

At Vimy Ridge on 9 April 2017, John Dawson was the Pipe Major for the Pipes and Drums of 3rd Canadian Division honour guard. I've known John Dawson for years as one of the veteran sergeants who is mentoring young infanters and pipers who joined the Cameron Highlanders of Canada. In 2008, he was deployed to Afghanistan and is one of the many veterans who continue to serve with the Canadian Armed Forces reserve.

For well over 100 years, the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada Pipes and Drums have been sounding in battle and at home. In the trenches of the Somme, they led the men over the top. From the landing craft, the Cameron men deployed to the shores of Dieppe to the sound and the tune of their pipers, many of whom were captured that day. From the 1950 floods, when thousands of Manitobans went out to their

communities, Camerons were piped to the dikes and piped to the sandbag lines. And at the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, the Cameron Pipes were there.

The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada Pipes and Drums' most recent accomplishment came in 2016 when they, as part of a composite with the Camerons of Ottawa, won the Grade 4 North American Pipe Band Championship. Of course, they were led by John Dawson.

Over 100 years ago, the Cameron highland men looked up at Vimy Ridge with their rifles and pipers at the ready. Today pipers like John Dawson remain at the ready to lead our men at home and abroad.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Reproductive Health-Care Services

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Reproductive health is a fundamental right of women and girls. Our NDP team believes in tangible, substantive reproductive equality for women and girls, including accessible reproductive health-care services.

Manitoba has a high youth-pregnancy rate which highlights the very real barriers in accessing birth control and public education.

Doctors are increasingly prescribing IUDs as a primary method of birth control for women and girls. IUDs are the easiest, most effective and cost-efficient form of birth control, lasting upwards of five years per device. The increased use of IUDs has not only led to a reduction in the number of unplanned pregnancies, but has also reduced the number of abortions sought out by women and girls.

IUDs carry a high up-front cost many women, and certainly young girls, are simply unable to pay. Women and girl clinics here in Manitoba and across Canada have called for IUDs to be fully covered and paid for by governments in order to eliminate this barrier.

Certainly, IUDs may not be the right choice for every woman or girl, so, consequently, we believe all birth control options should be covered by Manitoba, ensuring women and girls are able to practise real reproductive choices for themselves.

Our NDP team will continue to support a broad range of reproductive health services, including the call to fully fund the abortion pill.

We recognize the importance of accessibility and control over one's reproductive health as a

fundamental expression of women and girls' equality. Certainly, we encourage the Pallister government to stand with us not just with words, but with actions by fully covering the range of birth control and abortion services for Manitoba women and girls.

Miigwech.

Keystone Cup

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake): Earlier this month I had the pleasure to bring greetings at the Keystone Cup in Arborg arena. The Keystone Cup is a tournament that brings together Junior B hockey teams from across western Canada. I am very pleased that it was hosted in my home constituency of the Interlake and the town of Arborg.

Two local teams, the Arborg Ice Dawgs and the Peguis Juniors, qualified for the tournament, so the Interlake was well represented.

In the regular season, the Ice Dawgs play in a league with teams from all across Manitoba as far south as St. Malo to northern Manitoba in communities like 'opaskaway' Cree nation.

It takes a lot of dedication to play hockey at this level. All of the teams spent a lot of time on the road and away from their homes and their families. I admire the commitments and accomplishments of the players, who worked very hard to get to this level.

Once they've made it through the regular season, the highest ranked and hosting teams get to face off the best of western Canada in the Keystone Cup.

The tournament brought great many visitors from across the Interlake, western Canada and as far away as Iceland. The boost for the local hotels and restaurants was quite evident.

Unfortunately, neither of the local teams made it through to the final, but, nonetheless, they can be proud of their achievements this season for all their hard work.

Please join me in congratulating the Arborg Ice Dawgs and the Peguis Juniors in their success in the very challenging league.

National Volunteer Week

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, happy National Volunteer Week.

Today I want to recognize, thank and celebrate the countless volunteers who give their time and talent to help make life better for others. I would

like to express how grateful we all are for these exceptional Manitobans.

People from all walks of life dedicate their volunteerism to events such as Folklorama, to spending an afternoon with our furry friends at the Winnipeg Humane Society, to helping local not-for-profit organizations fundraise. Whatever the case, Manitobans always show up motivated in full force to volunteer.

In fact, Winnipeg is set to host the 2017 Canada Summer Games this July and August, and no doubt Manitobans are already lining up to be part of this special event taking place in our province.

With that said, it's important that we don't forget even the smallest acts of kindness or the amount of given time is any act of volunteerism. From those who volunteer at local churches or community centres, to parents here in Manitoba who dedicate their time to support their local parent councils, to our friendly neighbours who shovel our walkways or carry up our garbage bins from the curb, to the hard-working, dedicated and driven campaign volunteers who helped each and every one of us get elected, the gracious act of volunteering impacts all of us in one way or another.

Madam Speaker, allow me to end with a quote written by Kimberly Rinehart: Volunteers are just ordinary people with extraordinary hearts. They offer the gift of their time to teach, to listen, to help, to inspire, to build, to grow and to learn. They expect no pay, yet the value of their work knows no limit. They've known the unexpected joy and have planted seeds of love. Volunteers are just ordinary people who have reached out and taken a hand to make the others' lives—that last a lifetime.

So, happy volunteer week.

Thank you.

National Organ and Tissue Donors Awareness Week

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand in the Legislature today to celebrate the 20th anniversary of National Organ and Tissue Donors Awareness Week and the fifth anniversary of Transplant Manitoba's online Sign Up for Life registry.

Yesterday, I had the opportunity to join with Dr. Faisal Siddiqui, who grew up in Brandon, by the way, and Transplant Manitoba at The Forks on behalf of the Minister of Health to proclaim National

Organ and Tissue Donors Awareness Week and to bring awareness about those who have donated human tissues or organs to someone in need as well as those who are in need. Kathy Urban, a kidney recipient, had a great story to tell and she is very encouraging to donors and potential donors.

Over the next week, green landmarks and ribbons will be seen across Canada, honouring donors and donor families who have given the gift of life, the gift of hope, and to recognize the thousands of patients in need of a transplant and those who have died waiting. This year alone, 4,600 Canadians are in need of an organ transplant, and more than 250 Canadians will die on waiting lists.

As you know, Madam Speaker, our daughter Jessica fell ill with a kidney disease in 2010 that progressed to the point where she was placed on dialysis. Thanks to my incredible wife Aynsley and our son Andrew, their gifts as living donors helped save Jessica's life.

Five years ago, I stood in this House to raise awareness for signupforlife.ca which was introduced by then-Health minister Theresa Oswald, and to date, over 19,000 Manitobans have registered. The gift of life is the ultimate act of generosity, and I encourage all Manitobans to discuss organ and tissue decisions with your family and then register their intent to donate at signupforlife.ca to make your wishes known. I have registered; I know many of our family, friends and colleagues have stopped me to let me know that they have registered.

Please visit the website and sign up for life as a donor and tell your friends and loved ones. Give someone the gift of a second chance.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

* (13:50)

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests to introduce to you.

Seated in the public gallery from École Christine-Lespérance we have 41 grade 6 students under the direction of Philippe Champagne, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Seine River (Ms. Morley-Lecomte).

And also in the public gallery we have the grandmother of our member for the Interlake, Elsie Gislason, and I understand Elsie is 95 years old. And

also with the member's grandmother are his aunt and uncle, Donna and Mark Johnson-Russell.

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

And to the—in the loge to my left, we have Ron Kostyshyn, the former member for Swan River. And on behalf of all members here, we welcome you back to the Manitoba Legislature.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Emergency Room Closures Impact on Patient Care

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Premier concealed his motivation for closing emergency rooms. Now, the truth has finally come out: the Premier is putting the bottom line ahead of concern for patient care.

Nurses have told the Premier this is a front-line cut. Doctors Manitoba and the Manitoba College of Family Physicians are calling on the government to rethink this plan.

Madam Speaker, if the Premier won't listen to us, will he at least listen to the doctors and nurses who are our front-line service providers?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, again, Madam Speaker, we're very excited to be on a road to recovery in terms of improving our health-care system, which was broken under the previous government.

In terms of listening, we've had input from over 20,000 Manitobans, including a significant number of front-line workers in the health-care system, including physicians and nurses. And we will continue to have a willingness to listen going forward, Madam Speaker, because we believe that improving the system is a goal that is shared by all who work in the system and a goal that is shared by all who need the services which they had to wait record lengths for under the previous administration.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Recent letters from both Doctors Manitoba and the Manitoba College of Family Physicians are both concerned that the changes the government is proposing will lead to less timely access to emergency care and the loss of access to family physicians. The government's response in a

media statement is to tell doctors that they had their chance to provide comments.

Madam Speaker, patients, workers, nurses and doctors are calling on this government to rethink their plans, focused only on the bottom line.

Will the Premier today cancel his plans, go back to the drawing board and actually listen to Manitobans?

Mr. Pallister: Well, it's a puzzling question, Madam Speaker. The member refers to less timely care being a fear of some who work within the system, and yet it seems that the members opposite are trying to defend a system which resulted in the least timely care of any Canadian system.

Across the country, from coast to coast, no Canadians had to endure longer waits in many categories—emergency health care, diagnostic testing, necessary surgeries, the worst wait lines in the country. The members opposite had said for years—in fact, they borrowed hundreds of millions of dollars from the rainy day fund of our province, Madam Speaker, and said they were using it for wait times reduction when wait times were getting longer with every passing year.

So, Madam Speaker—[interjection]—they commissioned the study—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —they refused to listen to the recommended advice.

And, Madam Speaker, the difference between us is clearly this: they didn't have the courage to implement the recommendations and we do.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, those statements need fact checking.

Madam Speaker, the closure of three emergency rooms is of concern to us and many people who provide and receive services at those facilities, and, for those facilities that remain, we're concerned that they may not be provided with the necessary resources to keep up with greater need and more and more acute demand.

Those weren't our words, Madam Speaker. They are the words of Dr. Barbara Kelleher, president of Doctors Manitoba.

The Premier needs to cancel his plans, focus only on the bottom line and actually draw up a plan focused on patient care.

Will the Premier do that today?

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, again, now as opposition, the NDP is forced to defend the system which they created, a system which was the worst in Canada, the most broken in Canada.

The member asked about fact checking. She challenges the facts presented to us and to the previous government by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, which noted that Manitoba's wait times for emergency services are double the national average and, in many cases, exceed six hours.

They also noted, Madam Speaker, that our wait times for many areas of diagnosis and treatment were the longest in Canada, and yet they failed to act. They failed to act because they lacked the courage to act. We do not lack that courage. We will act. We understand that change is difficult, it's difficult for all of us, but the status quo is not good enough and we will make the system work better for Manitobans.

Emergency Room Closures Impact on Patient Care

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): It's now becoming clear that this government decided to take an axe to the health-care system without checking first who would be hurt.

It's also clear that this government failed to adequately consult with front-line workers before chopping emergency rooms and QuickCare—sorry, urgent-care centres in our communities.

They say that this is a cut—this is the nurses—they say this is a cut and that they are disappointed because, quote, they were promised by this Premier (Mr. Pallister) that they—that he wouldn't cut front-line services.

So, they have no real plans for immediate investment in the remaining ERs and the nurses say that this will cause chaos and confusion.

Madam Speaker, will the minister admit his mistake, listen to our front-line workers—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, many inaccuracies in the statements by the member,

continuing a pattern of inaccuracy. We've indicated, of course, there are more resources going into the expanded emergency room at the Grace Hospital, so he was wrong on that account.

There certainly was consultations with Doctors Manitoba in the lead up to the Peachey report. They were part of the steering committee, so he was wrong on that account. And, of course, the member opposite, along with the interim leader, says that we need to go back to the drawing board. Well, the drawing board was their drawing board, is the Peachey report which they commissioned, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, the fact is that this government clearly failed to meaningfully consult with doctors before deciding to wield the axe to the health-care system. Doctors Manitoba says this plan could have, quote, serious consequences for patients and it will increase the burden on doctors.

They say—see that cuts will negatively affect patient care.

Why didn't the minister work with the people who know our health-care system best before he eliminated emergency care for half the city?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, the member opposite again ignores the fact Doctors Manitoba was part of the steering committee when it came to the Peachey report. They certainly were consulted under the NDP when the NDP consulted or commissioned the Peachey report.

He fails to add up the cost for those who are waiting in the system for hours at a time in emergency rooms. He doesn't seem to care about the fact that many Manitobans have been waiting for five, six, seven, eight hours over the last 17 years of the NDP government for care.

* (14:00)

He fails to acknowledge, as Dr. Brock Wright did today in responding to Doctors Manitoba, that they don't anticipate any reduction in the physician positions in emergency or critical care.

He should get his facts straight, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, it's clear that this Health Minister wasn't interested in listening to front-line workers and he's only listening to those health-care experts and ignoring others, only choosing those that fit his particular narrative. Dr. Alan Katz, for instance, of the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy says, quote, he just doesn't see the government being able to meet targets without cutting front-line jobs.

Why isn't the minister being clear with front-line workers about their future and about the future of our health-care system?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, I assume—although, perhaps, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) could confirm it—that one of the reasons the Selinger government commissioned the Peachey report is because their previous strategies hadn't worked. In fact, in 2013 the NDP released five wait-time targets that they were going to try to meet in terms of reducing the amount of time that individuals waited in hospitals.

After that, after two years, in 2015 they came forward and they acknowledged that they wouldn't be able to meet any of their targets. That was after putting more than \$100 million into the ER system.

They failed. We'll deliver, Madam Speaker.

Emergency Room Closures Impact on Patient Care

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): This Pallister government is focused on the bottom line and not on Manitoba patient care. The Premier and Health Minister are not listening to Manitoba front-line health-care providers who have real concerns about this government's plans.

Dr. Deirdre O'Flaherty from the Manitoba College of Family Physicians affirms these ill-thought-out changes, and I quote: undermine family doctors, jeopardizing their ability to provide continuous care to all patients in all communities.

Clearly, this Pallister government is unwilling and unable to listen to us. Will they at least listen to Manitoba doctors and nurses who have real concerns about this government's plan for patient care?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, I have had dozens of communications sent to me from patients, from physicians, from workers, nurses in the health-care system over the last year. And I can tell you that there is a shared concern about the inability of the system, as it was constructed and as it

was maintained by the previous administration, to make available to people, in a timely manner, care.

Madam Speaker, I have had a lady write to me with 40 years of nursing under her belt and tell me about an 11-and-a-half-hour wait with her mother at an ER without a blanket to be put on that lady while she was waiting. And I can tell you that no one is more motivated than the members of this government to stop the system from shortchanging Manitobans who need care and who are vulnerable.

When people in our province need our help, Madam Speaker, we will not run away, as the previous government did, and hide. We will step up and we will do our part.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Day in and day out the Premier and the Health Minister provide us with a distorted narrative on hearing from and consulting with front-line workers, when, in fact, it is the absolute antithesis to this when the Pallister government simply charges ahead like a bull in a china shop regardless of what Manitoba front-line doctors and nurses say.

Doctors Manitoba and the Manitoba College of Family Physicians—let us be clear, the experts in health care—have expressed real concerns about the effects of this government's plan for patient care, noting, for instance, patients who will be most hurt are our most vulnerable citizens.

Will the Health Minister just start over and begin by talking with front-line doctors and nurses?

Mr. Pallister: Sadly, Madam Speaker, the member's question continues on the theme of fear mongering among Manitobans, encouraging fear, and fears are a natural emotion when change is in the offing. I accept that and I understand that, but I don't see it as a strength of character to multiply and amplify the fears of the people around me. I think that Manitobans deserve to feel confident that their health-care system can provide the care they deserve, and it has not done so, and it will in the future.

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

Ms. Fontaine: When the Pallister government announced its misguided plan to cut emergency rooms, it tried to justify it by saying that most patients don't have real emergencies and Manitobans will just have to self-diagnose to figure out what's an

emergency and what's not. The reality is that tens of thousands of patients have urgent health concerns requiring real care that can't wait to make it for a doctor's appointment.

In a recent letter, Dr. Barbara Kelleher from Doctors Manitoba explains her deep concern the remaining hospitals will simply not be able—provided with the investments and resources needed to meet the exponential increase in demand for health-care services.

Will the minister cancel this ill-thought-out, hurried plan—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Pallister: The member references a plan which was misguided. The plan was designed in consultation with Manitoba professionals, caregivers, who listen to Manitobans in every respect. The plan was designed and presented to the previous government. What was misguided at that point—it was only in the fact it had no guide.

Madam Speaker, we will guide this health-care system forward, because the member referred to real care that can't wait. Manitobans can't wait for a system that stops making them wait so long; 600,000 hours plus last year alone Manitobans sat in waiting rooms in fear, in pain, waiting for care that might never arrive.

Madam Speaker, that's not good enough for this government, and it shouldn't be good enough for the members opposite, either.

Emergency Room Closures Request to Withdraw Plan

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Patients, workers, nurses and now doctors have all expressed their concerns about the government's health-care plans. Government is throwing our health-care system into chaos.

The minister's own words are that this health-care plan is going to cause considerable disruption all across the system. The government has rushed its plans, and it's only interested in the—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Allum: —bottom line.

So will the Premier do the right thing today: Will he withdraw this botched plan, right here, right now, today? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, that's true. We have said, and health professionals have said, there will be disruption to the system, as there is with change. That is accurate.

But the member fails to talk about what a disruption it is for a mother who brings a child to an ER and has to wait for 10 hours for that young child to be seen. He fails to talk about the disruption on the life of a daughter who brings their mother to an ER to be seen and it takes seven hours before they get into an ER.

That is the disruption we're most worried about, Madam Speaker. And if he doesn't want us to disrupt that, well, that's something he can defend, but we certainly are going to try to disrupt that and bring real care to Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Allum: Madam Speaker, more than a year ago, the government members were on the doorsteps of Manitobans saying that they would protect front-line services and protect front-line workers.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Allum: And instead—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Allum: And instead, what we have is a government who is disrespecting the constitutional rights of workers to collectively negotiate their contracts. He's putting in—their government is putting into question the programs and health-care—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Allum: —services that they rely on.

So I'm going to ask the Premier, again—he's—the minister's already said that this plan will cause considerable disruption all across the system: Why doesn't it—just simply admit this is a botched plan and it needs to be withdrawn right now?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, there you have it, Madam Speaker. It's no longer a defence of Manitobans who need care. They can't offer up any kind of criticism in respect of anything that is of substance in regard to our willingness to move forward and shorten wait times, so now it's all about

protecting the system itself as it existed under the previous government.

* (14:10)

That defines the status quo, Madam Speaker. The status quo is not good enough. But what would you expect from a party who's just solidified its position as the only party in Canada, the only political party, that actually gives control over its leadership process to three or four public sector union bosses?

Madam Speaker, that's what the member is doing. He's defending the status quo of a desire not to protect patients, not to give care to people, not to provide shorter wait times for diagnosis or treatment or emergency services, but rather to protect his own petty, vested interests.

And, Madam Speaker, that's not what this government's about. We're about providing better care sooner to Manitobans who need it.

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

Mr. Allum: Well, Madam Speaker, the Premier's interested in defending one status quo and that's the status quo from the 1990s, and we don't want that anymore.

But, you know, this Premier talks a lot about—the Premier talks a lot about having courage—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Allum: He talks a lot about having courage.

We know that nurses are having an AGM today, and we know also—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Allum: —that they're going to gather on the steps of the Legislature tomorrow.

So, will he have the courage to step outside tomorrow and defend his actions to cause considerable disruption in this health-care system, or will he do what he always does: put his hands in his pockets, shrug his shoulders and say there's nothing he can do?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The Speaker has been standing for some time now and there are still conversations that are

happening. I would remind everybody that when the Speaker stands, there is to be silence.

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, the good news is the member won't need to bring a bullhorn to the rally tomorrow; he can just simply speak to them in the way that he spoke in the House today.

Madam Speaker, but we respect the right of nurses and others, of course, to gather here at the Legislature and to bring forward their views. But what he forget, of course, is we're not just thinking about them; we're thinking about those who are waiting in an ER, waiting for service—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, we continue to think about those who are waiting in the emergency rooms, waiting for hours at a time. And I know the member doesn't want to defend them. He doesn't want to defend those patients who need care. He doesn't want to help those who've waited for hours.

We're going to defend them and we will always defend them, Madam Speaker.

Emergency Room Closures Impact on Patient Care

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): How on earth does it make sense, in this government's bizarre version of logic, for communities in the suburbs of Winnipeg to lose their emergency rooms, to have those replaced with urgent-care centres, but for the inner city to lose its urgent-care centre?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I recognize that, Madam Speaker, the member opposite wasn't a Cabinet member in the Selinger government when they commissioned the Peachey report, but he certainly has access to it now; it's online.

The access to the Peachey report would give him the information that Winnipeg is an outlier when it comes to the number of emergency rooms it has compared to cities that are much larger like Vancouver or like Calgary or like Ottawa. It's about making the system more efficient and ensuring that people get patient care, real care when they need it. I would hope he'd be onboard with that, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Altemeyer: Madam Speaker, my constituents would be very happy to be able to access care under

this government's plan, but I don't see, and they don't see, and the workers and the doctors and the nurses do not see, how that could possibly happen.

This minister closed the closest QuickCare clinic to my community. This government is now closing the urgent-care centre, which is a model supposed to help people stay out of the ERs and get care at the appropriate level.

Where does he think 40,000 people from the inner city are going to go when their urgent-care system disappears? They're going to go down the street to the Health Sciences Centre ER, the very place he's trying to help the wait times.

Mr. Goertzen: If the member opposite would listen to the doctors, the very doctors that he purports aren't being listened to, he would've heard the doctors say that the majority of individuals who are going to the urgent-care centre at Misericordia are coming from different parts of the city, Madam Speaker. They're coming in from the south, and they're coming in from the north.

They will certainly be able to access the additional urgent-care centres in the south and in the north, but overall, they'll have a system that works better, a system that didn't work for the past 17 years, that left people waiting for five, six, seven, eight hours.

Maybe he's getting letters into his constituency office, people saying nothing should change. But that's not the letters I'm getting, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Altemeyer: I think in that answer, Madam Speaker, it is very clear that this minister and this government have a bias. They simply do not see the illogical steps that they are taking with this flawed, flawed plan.

I would invite the minister to imagine, if he can, that not only did he not get a 20 per cent salary increase, but that he is actually a low-income person living anywhere in the core area and he feels he needs urgent medical assistance.

If the closest facility is now an emergency room, where would he take himself? Where would he take his loved ones to get urgent care?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, the plan that the member refers to as illogical is actually a plan that was created by the Selinger government.

Now, I know he created a solidarity pledge. He wanted everybody to be onside in the NDP. Perhaps he would like to speak to the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) and determine why it is that he doesn't like the plan that the member for St. Boniface and the Selinger government came up with, Madam Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Legislative Session Voting on Bills

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, my questions today are about waste and eliminating waste.

Last night, Liberals supported the principle of Bill 22, to reduce waste, extra paperwork and red tape, by voting for it at second reading. In contrast, the NDP voted against it.

We also note that the NDP last night rang the bells for nine hours. Sadly, it was essentially a waste of nine hours which could have been used more productively.

Will the government help us send a message—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: —to the NDP to stop wasting people's time ringing bells when there's little to be gained from it?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, perhaps the member would stop wasting Manitobans' time by defending every move that Ottawa makes and the federal government makes and start using his time more effectively in standing up for Manitobans on issues that matter to Manitobans.

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

Tuition Fee Tax Rebate Effectiveness of Rebate

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, my colleagues and I work hard every day on behalf of Manitobans.

In my second question, I expand on the issue of waste with respect to the recent budget. The

recent budget eliminated the tuition rebate for post-secondary education students, calling it ineffective and wasteful. The government claimed that it was waste and not effective, but I will, in my next supplementary question, table evidence which says it was effective.

Would the Premier admit that if the tuition rebate was shown to be an effective measure, it would be a waste to get rid of it?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, when we had the opportunity, as Manitoba's new government, to stand up for Manitoba's best interests, the interests of seniors, in respect of the CPP discussion and the negotiations with the federal government, we took that opportunity and led the charge on a better CPP for our seniors while the members opposite sat on their hands and did nothing.

When we had the opportunity to stand up for Manitobans who deserved to not lose half a billion dollars in health transfers over the next decade, the members opposite sat on their hands and did nothing, including the member opposite, who was part of a government that made the largest cut to health-care supports in Manitoba history when he was in Ottawa with the Liberal government then.

* (14:20)

And, finally, Madam Speaker, when we had the opportunity to stand up for refugees seeking a home of hope in our beautiful province, in our beautiful country, we took the lead in working with other provinces to have unanimous support, calling on the federal government to do its part while the members opposite, again, sat on their hands.

I see a pattern 'emerging'—emerging here, Madam Speaker: the member opposite represents Ottawa to Manitoba. We here on this side of the House will represent the views of Manitobans in all discussions with other governments.

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

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, if it is effective the tuition rebate is not waste to be eliminated, but a treasure to be continued. In the seven years leading up to 2007, Manitoba's population increased by an average of 6,000 people per year. After the tuition rebate was implemented, in the nine years from 2008 to the present, Manitoba's population increased an average of 14,300 people per year. I table the evidence.

It may have been one of the most successful measures to tell young people that Manitoba is a great place to be.

I ask the Premier: Why did he break his promise not to increase taxes by ending the successful tuition fee rebate? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: The member speaks of evidence. He would be aware, if he chose to do the research, Madam Speaker, that high school graduation rates among indigenous young people in our province have declined in the last number of years. He would be aware also that university graduation success rates have declined among our most vulnerable population. He would also be aware, if he was choosing to do objective, empirical data—consult empirical data, that out-migration rates in this province have increased under the previous administration and are now the largest in Canada.

Madam Speaker, each of these statistics supports the contention that there's a better way. We're pursuing the better way.

Recycling Initiatives Expansion of Services

Mr. Nic Curry (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, on Saturday, April 22nd, it was international Earth Day. My family and I spent the afternoon in Kildonan Park in the heart of my riding.

I was pleased to see that the government made an exciting announcement this morning regarding recycling in Manitoba, near and dear to my heart. My home recycling is a family effort and our blue bin is almost always full. We believe it is an easy way to ensure that we keep our environment beautiful and healthy not just for today, but for tomorrow, especially for my new child that is three—almost three weeks old. I know—*[interjection]*

Can the Minister of Sustainable Development provide more information on today's wonderful recycling announcement?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): I'd like to thank our member on this side of the House for that excellent question today.

Our government has decided to empower our recycling organizations in Manitoba to become more efficient regulators of recycling services. The status quo is not good enough for this government, and I am pleased to announce that we will be one of the

first provinces in Canada to expand recycling services to industrial, commercial and institutional buildings, and, also, expand throughout our parks to campgrounds and campground owners. By expanding recycling services to these facilities and parks, we will divert significantly more recyclables from landfills and contribute to a cleaner environment.

Manitobans want to do their part and they are proud—and we are proud to expand recycling initiatives so Manitobans can recycle everywhere. We are—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Changes to Health-Care Services Impact on Front-Line Workers

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): If there was a prize for breaking promises this government would win it. They promised to protect front-line services; they broke that promise. They promised to protect jobs of front-line workers; they broke that promise. The health-care system has been thrown into chaos by this government. This government's scheme focusses on one thing and one thing only, and that's the bottom line.

Madam Speaker, will the Health Minister admit his scheme is a total failure and should be halted immediately?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, I'm surprised at the member opposite. Although I know he's a new member and I—he's been an addition to the House—I won't qualify what kind of an addition, but he's been an addition to the House. I'm shocked that he would suggest that the plan by the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) under the Selinger government is a scheme. I think that's dangerously close to unparliamentary. He shouldn't reflect on the plan by the member for St. Boniface in such a negative way.

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

Mr. Lindsey: The Health Minister has shown total disdain for front-line health-care workers. He's ignored them in launching a misguided scheme to cut health-care services. Front-line workers are doing the best they can do. But how can they continue while this government shows it doesn't have their back?

Doctors, nurses, health-care aides, technicians don't know what their future will be under

this government's scheme. That's because this government is only concerned with the bottom line.

Madam Speaker, will the Health Minister stand up today, do the right thing, apologize for the chaos and confusion he's bringing to our health-care system?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, the question by the member, my friend from Flin Flon, was revealing because he listed a number of different groups, but he didn't list patients. He never mentioned patients in his question. That's very revealing that the members opposite—they've done a lot of things today, but they haven't actually represented patients.

They don't seem to be concerned about those long wait times in the ERs. They don't seem to be concerned about the mother who brings in a child and has to wait her eight to 10 years. I thank him for that question because he's revealed what this opposition, the NDP, care about, and it isn't patients, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Lindsey: Unfortunately, this government doesn't grasp the concept that protecting front-line workers and front-line services does protect patients.

Madam Speaker, with the chaos that this government has introduced, they need to stop.

Will the Premier apologize for breaking his promise to workers that he would protect their jobs and protect and respect their workplaces?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I appreciate the question the member has asked. He mentions if there was a prize for that we would get it.

Well, Madam Speaker, if there was a prize for rhetoric he'd be in contention for that. If there was a prize for raising taxes his government would certainly get the first-place ribbon. And if there was a prize for failing Manitoba patients on health care they would get the last-place orange ribbon.

Seven Oaks Hospital Emergency Room Closure

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): My question is not to the Minister for Crown Services. Relax.

If this government had the best interest of families in mind, why was Seven Oaks' emergency room cut?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, I'm going to do something that I would admit is rare for me. I will take the word of the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) and the former Selinger government.

I assume that the reason they commissioned the Peachey report was because they thought it would better care, including for the residents of the member who asked the question. I assume that the Selinger government thought that the Peachey report was something that would be valuable for the system. I assume that the Selinger government thought it would improve patient care.

Now, maybe I shouldn't be making the assumptions and defending the Selinger government. Maybe I'll never do it again. But, in this case, I think it's appropriate, Madam Speaker.

* (14:30)

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

Mr. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, I think the cut of the ER at Seven Oaks is a done deal.

So, my next question is this: How can an extra 16 minutes travel time to Health Sciences Centre—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Marcelino: How can 16 minutes travel time to the Health Sciences Centre from The Maples be something that's helpful to my community?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, I do respect the member opposite, and I respect his question. I know that he is asking it on behalf of his constituents, and I appreciate that. I know what it's like to be in opposition, and he has a role and responsibility to ask questions on behalf of his constituents, and I applaud him for that.

And I would say to his constituents, the ones that are asking him this question, that the extra 16 minutes will be particularly helpful when you don't have to wait seven hours to get service, Madam Speaker. There is no point—there is no point—in having an emergency room five minutes from you when it takes eight hours to get service.

I would tell him he should bring that back to his constituents. But I appreciate he's asking this in the best—in with all good faith on behalf of his constituents, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Taxi Industry Regulation

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

The background of the petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure that there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

The regulated taxi industry also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as been—what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition, Madam Speaker, the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

And this petition's 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.

Concordia Hospital Emergency Room

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government has announced the closures of three emergency rooms and an urgent-care centre in the city of Winnipeg, including closing down the emergency room at Concordia Hospital.

(2) The closures come on the heels of the closing of a nearby QuickCare clinic, as well as cancelled plans for ACCESS centres and personal-care homes, such as Park Manor, that would've provided important services for families and seniors in the area.

(3) The closures have left families and seniors in northeast Winnipeg without any point of contact with front-line health-care services and will result in them having to travel 20 minutes or more to St. Boniface hospital's room for emergency care.

(4) These cuts will place a heavy burden on the many seniors who live in northeast Winnipeg and visit the emergency room frequently, especially for those who are unable to drive or are low income.

(5) The provincial government failed to consult with families and seniors in northeast Winnipeg regarding the closure of their emergency room or to consult with house-health official—sorry, health officials and health-care workers at Concordia to discuss how this closure would impact patient care in advance of the announcement.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse the decision to close Concordia Hospital's emergency room so that families and seniors in northeast Winnipeg and the surrounding areas have timely access to quality health-care services.

And this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Taxi Industry Regulation

Mr. Greg Selinger (St. Boniface): I wish to present the following position—petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

The taxi industry is regulated to ensure that there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings in the industry.

The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and patient safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by many, many Manitobans. Thank you.

Kelvin High School Gymnasium and Wellness Centre

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitobans recognize how important it is to provide young people with quality learning spaces to succeed in school.

(2) Sport, recreation and the spaces to engage in them are critical to the health and welfare of all students.

(3) All forms of educational infrastructure, including gymnasiums and recreation centres in general, represent an incredible value-for-money investment whereby the return is improved physical and psychological health and wellness.

(4) Kelvin High School is one of the largest high schools in the province with over 1,200 students.

(5) Kelvin High School spent several years raising almost \$1.2 million towards the construction of a new gymnasium and wellness centre.

(6) Some Kelvin students currently have to pay to use outside facilities to obtain their mandatory physical education credit.

(7) The provincial government, in a regressive and short-sighted move, cancelled funding for the Kelvin gym and wellness centre for political reasons, despite the extensive community support, fund-raising and engagement.

(8) It is wasteful and disrespectful to the dedicated efforts of students, staff and the community in general to simply lay their goals aside without consultation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to recognize the need for excellent recreation facilities in all Manitoba schools, to reverse this regressive cut and to provide Kelvin High School with the funding necessary to complete a new gymnasium and wellness centre.

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

Thank you.

Neighbourhoods Alive! Funding

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Since 2001, the Neighbourhoods Alive! program has supported stronger neighbourhoods and communities in Manitoba.

(2) Neighbourhoods Alive! uses a community-led development model that partners with

neighbourhood renewal corporations on projects that aim to revitalize communities.

(3) Neighbourhoods Alive! and the neighbourhood renewal corporations it supports have played a vital and important role in revitalizing many neighbourhoods in Manitoba through community-driven solutions, including: employment and training; education and recreation; safety and crime prevention; and housing and physical improvements.

(4) Neighbourhoods Alive! now serves 13 neighbourhood renewal corporations across Manitoba which have developed expertise in engaging with their local residents and determining the priorities of their communities.

* (14:40)

(5) The provincial government's previous investments into Neighbourhoods Alive! have been bolstered by community and corporate donations as well as essential support from community volunteers, small businesses and local agencies.

(6) Late in 2016, the minister responsible for the Neighbourhoods Alive! program said new funding for initiatives was, quote, paused, end quote, and that the future of the Neighbourhoods Alive! program was being, quote, reviewed, end quote, bringing hundreds of community projects to a standstill.

(7) Neighbourhood renewal corporations and their communities are concerned this funding freeze is the first step in a slow phase-out of the Neighbourhoods Alive! grant program, which would have severe negative impacts on families and communities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be urged to support the Neighbourhoods Alive! program and the communities served by neighbourhood renewal corporations by continuing to provide consistent core funding for existing neighbourhood renewal corporations and enhancing the public funding available for specific initiatives.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

High School Recreation Facilities

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Manitobans recognize how important it is to provide young people with quality learning spaces to succeed in school.

Sport, recreation and the spaces to engage in them are critical to the physical, mental and social welfare of students.

Kelvin High School and Dakota college have both spent several years raising money toward the construction of a new gymnasium and wellness centre and a new sports field, respectively.

Kelvin High School is one of the largest high schools in the province, with over 1,200 students.

Some Kelvin students currently have to pay to use outside facilities to obtain their mandatory physical education credit.

Likewise, Dakota's varsity teams have been forced to play elsewhere because of the negative condition of its playing field.

Football and soccer teams at Dakota college must put the project out to tender and break ground in a matter of months for the field to be completed for this coming school year.

The provincial government is a regressive and short-sighted move, cancelled funding for both projects for political reasons despite the extensive community support, fundraising and engagement.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to recognize the tireless efforts of Kelvin High School and Dakota Collegiate, to recognize the need for excellent recreation facilities in all Manitoba schools, to reverse this regressive cut to Manitoba schools, and to provide both schools with the funding necessary to complete the new Kelvin High School gymnasium and the Dakota college field of dreams.

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

Taxi Industry Regulation

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service, and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom invested their life savings into this industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing to service to some areas of the city, and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

This petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans. Thank you.

Neighbourhoods Alive! Funding

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Since 2001, the Neighbourhoods Alive! program has supported stronger neighbourhoods and communities in Manitoba.

(2) Neighbourhoods Alive! uses a community-led development model that partners with neighbourhood renewal corporations on projects that aim to revitalize communities.

(3) Neighbourhoods Alive! and the neighbourhood renewal corporations it supports have played a vital and important role in revitalizing many neighbourhoods in Manitoba through community-driven solutions, including employment and training, education and recreation, safety and crime prevention, and housing and physical improvements.

(4) Neighbourhoods Alive! now serves 13 neighbourhood renewal corporations across Manitoba which have developed expertise in engaging with their local residents and determining the priorities of their communities.

(5) The provincial government's previous investments into Neighbourhoods Alive! have been bolstered by community and corporate donations as well as essential support from community volunteers, small business and local agencies.

(6) Late in 2016, the minister responsible for the Neighbourhoods Alive! program said new funding for initiatives was paused and that the future of the Neighbourhoods Alive! program was being reviewed, bringing hundreds of community projects to a standstill.

(7) Neighbourhood renewal corporations and their communities are concerned this funding freeze is the first step in a slow phase-out of the Neighbourhoods Alive! grant program, which would have severe negative impacts on families and communities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be urged to support the Neighbourhoods Alive! program and the communities served by neighbourhood renewal corporations by continuing to provide consistent core funding for existing neighbourhood renewal corporations and enhancing the public funding available for specific initiatives.

And this petition was signed by Joan Wilson-DeLorme, Sandy Dzedzora and Edward Cloud, as well as many other Manitobans.

Provincial Nominee Program

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows.

(1) The provincial government has proposed regressive changes to the Provincial Nominee

Program that create financial and social barriers for newcomers.

(2) Starting this year, successful provincial nominees must pay a \$500 fee as part of their application, adding to the financial burden of applicants.

(3) While the provincial government's stated justification for the fee is that it will be reinvested into language-support programs, the PNP already requires nominees to have proven English- or French-language skills.

(4) The provincial government is also changing its criteria from selecting nominees with family and community connections in Manitoba to an employer-driven focus that will only select nominees with approved job offers from established employers.

(5) The shift in focus jeopardizes the PNP's successful 86 per cent retention rate as, without family or community ties, nominees will move to other provinces with larger job markets.

(6) This change provides employers with an incentive to select newcomers based on reduced cost, leaving nominees vulnerable to exploitation.

(7) The business community and the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce have made it clear that the PNP is a successful program, driving the economy with skilled workers.

(8) According to a report in 2014, 94 to 98 per cent of nominees reported employment earnings within the first year of arriving in Manitoba and had the second lowest unemployment rate among immigrants in Canada.

* (14:50)

(9) Despite the wealth of economic and social benefits that newcomers bring to the province, the Premier cruelly portrayed them as a burden to society by inaccurately linking provincial nominees to high unemployment rates and social assistance.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to maintain the PNP's nomination criteria, to remove the \$500 fee and to continue to invest in newcomers who build the province, drive the economy and promote diversity and inclusion in Manitoba.

Signed by many, many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Taxi Industry Regulation

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service, and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city, and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service, and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

This petition was signed by many Manitobans.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr. Jim Maloway (Official Opposition House Leader): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Logan (Ms. Marcelino) that in accordance with rule 38(1)—I better start that over.

In accordance with rule 38(1), I move, seconded by the member for Logan, that the regularly scheduled business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, that the United States of America has

imposed new tariffs of up to 24 per cent on Canadian softwood lumber exports.

Manitoba's forest industry is facing an uncertain future and these punitive duties will negatively impact an industry that directly and indirectly employs hundreds of Manitobans and generates millions of dollars of export business with the United States each year.

We urge the provincial government to work with the federal government to protect Manitoba's forest sector by preventing job losses, investing in natural resource development and strengthening Manitoba's economy.

Madam Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), I should remind all members that under rule 38(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other recognized parties in the House are allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately.

As stated in Beauchesne's citation 390, urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion.

In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there is urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interest will not suffer.

Mr. Maloway: And, of course, this is certainly the first opportunity we've had to bring this matter before the House because I believe that it was only late last night that members of our caucus did hear that the President of the United States was instituting this tariff on the softwood lumber and, in fact, I believe that it is taking effect immediately.

Manitoba's forests play a crucial role in developing our economy and society and, in fact, it's very important in a number of constituencies in northern Manitoba. The forest—Manitoba's forest industry is the fifth largest manufacturing sector in the province. Approximately 9,000 people are employed directly by the forest industry. More than 2.6 million cubic metres of softwoods and 1.3 million cubic metres of hardwoods are currently allocated by agreements with forest product companies or through quotas to small forestry companies and individuals.

In addition, there's approximately 3 million cubic metres of unallocated softwood and hardwood of productive quality, but much of that wood is in remote northern areas which do not have road access.

Under the previous government, the government's three primary goals for the success of the forests were to protect the ecosystems throughout the province, increase the opportunities for Aboriginal communities and making Manitoba a leader in the promotion of a sustainable forest economy.

* (15:00)

In order to meet these goals, Madam Speaker, our strategy included five priorities for sustaining Manitoba's forests. One was increasing the scientific and traditional knowledge of Manitoba's forests, enhancing forest stewardship, increasing employment, economic development and co-management opportunities for Aboriginal communities, and also promoting a sustainable forest economy and updating and improving legislation and guidelines.

Now, Madam Speaker, in terms of the softwood lumber, Manitobans want to know if the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is going to stand up with the forest industry or if he's just simply going to hold up his hands.

The other provinces, for example, I believe Quebec—[*interjection*—and I'll get to that in a minute, but the Quebec government is offering guaranteed loans as of today. This is, like, this happened last night, and already, today, the Quebec government has acted. Quebec government is offering guaranteed loans to 178 companies to offset the actions of the Trump administration actions here and the Quebec government is also taking further steps to protect the forest industry employees and their families.

Also, Madam Speaker, British Columbia has already decided to put pressure on the federal government. British Columbia's political parties are vowing to fight the—for the forestry workers after the Trump administration announced they would impose a tariff of 20 per cent on Canadian softwood lumber.

So the question really boils down to, we have two provinces who have acted within less than 24 hours, and we want to know what this government is doing. We've gone through a question period here. We've gone through most of the day. This government appears to be asleep at the switch.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader? *[interjection]* Oh, the honourable Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I know we're speaking to the urgency of the issue, Madam Speaker, and when it comes to a MUPI there are a number of different requirements you, as the Speaker, need to consider, not the least of which being whether or not there are other opportunities to have the debate in the House. And I don't dispute with the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) that this is an important issue and I wouldn't take that away from him. Obviously, trade as it relates to many different issues in Canada and Manitoba is very important; that has been seen. And actions by our government, when it comes to signing the New West Partnership, which was not signed under the previous government, it's been seen in negotiations on trade between provinces in Canada.

But we also know that—and the member mentioned in his discussion—that the issue around the new President and trade policies from the new President do have an impact on Canada, and we all watch that closely, Madam Speaker. It is important. It is an important issue.

We've heard different discussions not just around softwood lumber, although that's the one the member mentions, but possible renegotiation of NAFTA, for example, has been talked about with the Trump administration. And we all have a concern in terms of our relationship, our trading relationship with the United States.

Clearly, we are friends and allies in every true sense of the word with our American friends, but there is more to consider than just being friends and allies. We are also partners. We are trade partners. One of the reasons I wanted to speak to whether or not this should be considered a MUPI is I have the opportunity to co-chair the international Canada-US relations committee as part of the midwest legislators conference.

And the member will know—he's attended those meetings and others—that a great deal of the discussion that we have, time that we have within those committees is dedicated to trade. In fact, we'll have an opportunity this summer in Des Moines, Iowa. We have the opportunity to—in Iowa—to discuss the issue of trade. We'll have the opportunity with our congressmen and with senators in the United States to discuss the issue of trade and tariffs,

Madam Speaker. I think that that is an important issue.

I think that I would not want to dismiss at all the concerns that the member raises. The issue, of course, is timing, and where is the best timing? So we'll have opportunity obviously at that conference, but I recognize that's a long time away.

There are other opportunities. Question period is often a time to pose these questions to the government. I know they have other questions. I received a few myself today, but there are questions that they could ask in terms of trade policies with the government.

We are always more than willing to talk about not only the New West Partnership, which was signed, but also the great work that our minister of growth, economy and trade and our Premier (Mr. Pallister) have been doing in terms of the relationships between the provinces and getting a good, solid trading—internal trading agreement.

But I recognize that the international overlay of that and the different things that we are hearing from the Trump administration give many Canadians great concern about where that trading relationship is going. And we need to respond to that in a respectful but in a real way. It shouldn't be ignored. I acknowledge that, and I don't think it is being ignored by any member of this House, Madam Speaker. So, we do agree that it is an important issue; there's no question about that.

The question that does arise in terms of the parliamentary procedure that we have in the House is whether or not this fits the definition of a matter of urgent public importance, whether or not this is not only the earliest opportunity which applies to different matters of procedure in the House, but whether or not it is the best opportunity, and whether or not the issue is so urgent that it should set aside other matters of the House.

And I know there are other matters that are to be debated and discussed this afternoon. Members opposite, I think, wanted to have a robust discussion on health policy in Health Estimates this afternoon. There are other departments that were lined up to speak as well, Madam Speaker. But I do want to acknowledge that the importance of the issue and the concerns that we hear out of the United States and from the Trump administration do concern all Canadians.

And I would think that our Prime Minister, along with other political parties in Ottawa, the official leader of the opposition, Rona Ambrose, along with the leader of the New Democratic Party in Parliament are all fully engaged in the issue to try to ensure that we maintain that strong trading partnership. All of us know that Canada truly is built on the issue of trade going back many years, and though that trade has changed in some ways in terms of value added and what is—what crosses the border, the relationship is as strong as ever.

I also know, Madam Speaker, that how the relationship has changed is important as well. We no longer just send one issue from this side of the border to the other side, but now there's often you'll have the same product which goes back and forth across the border as they get manufactured. I think it was described to me that it is more about working together as business partners as much as it is trading partners because we build things together between the United States and Canada.

So, I appreciate the fact the member of—from Elmwood has brought forward this important issue. I think he's done it with all the right reasons, Madam Speaker, and I would say to him as well—and I hope in some ways this is a new member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) that we're seeing here today, because I know over the past 17 years when they were in government and in the 30 or so years that he's been in this Legislature, that trade has never been really the key issue for him. He'd never really pushed the issue of the Free Trade Agreement with western provinces strongly. He never pushed strongly in government internal trade agreements with other provinces.

He spent a little bit of time in Ottawa. I don't remember him speaking about many trade issues there. I know he spoke a bit about airline passenger bill of rights. And that airline passenger bill of rights would have been pretty high on the radar had he stayed in Ottawa over the last few weeks.

* (15:10)

But I don't remember that he really engaged in the issues of trade, Madam Speaker. But I hope that this is the conversion on the road to something greater that the member opposite will now look to trade and look to the issues of trade as far more important

Having said that, Madam Speaker, I would offer the advice to your good office that while this is

clearly an important issue and one that impacts all Manitobans and that would engage all Canadians, there are many different forms by which this particular issue could be debated that would be outside of a matter of privilege. There are opportunities such as question period, which we've just concluded. There are opportunities of Estimates for the minister of growth, economy and trade by which this issue could be debated. Of course, there are public forums in which the issue can be discussed and debated.

And my guess is the member opposite might be surprised. We would probably have great agreement on a number of the different issues around it, maybe not on every specific, but there would be vast agreement, I would hope, if he truly is now a free trader which he hasn't been for the vast majority of his career, Madam Speaker. But if he is truly a free trader as he now purports to be, I think we would find many areas of agreement.

But in terms of the definition of what a matter of urgent public importance truly is, Madam Speaker, I think that the member opposite, while well intended, has missed the mark here today.

But I would encourage him. Tomorrow in question period—he can spend all of question period tomorrow asking issues of free trade. I suspect my colleague from—minister of growth, economy and trade might not be—appreciate me giving that suggestion, but he can spend all of question period tomorrow asking questions about trade, and he'll get all sorts of answers—*[interjection]*—all answers and responses. But if he chooses not to do that, then, I guess, we'll truly know whether or not the member has had a conversion when it comes to his views on trade.

So while I do very much appreciate the fact the member has raised this—and it is an important issue, none of us will dispute that—I don't believe that it fits the technical definition of a matter of urgent public importance, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Madam Speaker, I rise to speak briefly on this—

Madam Speaker: The—I would remind the honourable member that he would have to seek leave to speak to the MUPI.

Mr. Gerrard: I ask leave to be able to speak on the MUPI.

Madam Speaker: Could the member please restate it that he is speaking to the urgency of the issue.

Mr. Gerrard: I rise to speak to the urgency of this issue.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for the member to speak to the urgency of the issue? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. Okay. Thank you.

This is an issue of vital importance to us in Manitoba, and it is clearly urgent and it has come up very quickly and it needs to be addressed. We can't stand by and just, you know, let this go unanswered without a major effort with the federal government and the provinces all working together.

It is very timely. It needs to be addressed quickly, and I believe that we should have this debate on this matter of urgent public importance.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: I thank honourable members for their advice to the Chair on whether the motion proposed by the honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) should be debated today.

I would note that notice of this matter required by rule 38(1) was provided, however, I must note that there were problems with the form of that notice. First, the document was not addressed to the Speaker. Second, it was not in the form of a letter explaining the member's intention, but rather was in the form of a motion. Third, the form of the motion itself was incorrect as motions should not contain extra information beyond the specific purpose of the motion.

For future reference, I would encourage members to consult our table officers in advance on the proper form of a notice letter.

Under our rules and practices, the subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention. There must also be no other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter.

I do not doubt that this matter is one that is a serious concern to all members of the House, as trade matters with the United States of America are a key concern of Manitobans and of this Legislature. However, I have listened very carefully to the arguments put forward and I was not persuaded that

the ordinary business of the House should be set aside to deal with this issue today.

I would note that there are other avenues for members to raise this issue, including questions in question period, raising the item under members' statements and grievances, as well as during the consideration of departmental Estimates in the Committee of Supply.

Therefore, with the greatest of respect, I rule the motion out of order as a matter of urgent public importance.

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, this afternoon I'd like to call Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker: The House will now resolve itself into Committee of Supply. Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

AGRICULTURE

* (15:20)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): 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 of Agriculture have an opening statement?

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Agriculture): I do, Mr. Chair.

Agriculture is one of the province's leading industries. Farm cash receipts are \$6 billion and the agricultural sector employs almost 25,000 hard-working Manitobans. With a focus on fixing our finances, repairing our services, rebuilding our economy by growing our livestock sector and driving value added, capitalizing on the world's demand for sustainable protein, reducing red tape and protecting our environment, we're well on our way to being the most improved province in all of Canada.

2017 Budget: Our goals are, with this budget, are simple: to accelerate growth in agriculture, agri-food and agriproducts sector; to increase competitiveness, sustainability and adaptability of agricultural commodities. This includes growing the agri-food and agriproduct processing industries in Manitoba.

The Livestock Growth Strategy: The livestock industry plays a significant role in the agricultural sector, Manitoba's economy and the potential for growth. We have made it a priority in this budget to support livestock producers and growth in the livestock industry.

As we focus on rebuilding our economy required a regulatory framework that protects our environment and reduces red tape. First, we want to assure Manitobans that livestock producers are responsible stewards of our land, and we are supportive of the Province's climate-change mandate. Growing our livestock sector will not change that.

Our Livestock Growth Strategy focuses on three primary components growing segments of the industry. A livestock engineer will work with producers to evaluate environmental risk and prepare for conditional-use applications improving productivity on agricultural Crown lands. The department will sharpen its focus on furthering uptake and productivity. MASC will administer a proactive monitoring and complaint-driven investigation program. The Manitoba Beef and Forage Initiative is already making strides with collaborations between beef producers, researchers, the public sector and government to advance the beef and forage sector. This Livestock Growth Strategy aligns with our government's commitment to be a world supplier of choice, sustainable protein, advance the agricultural sector and make Manitoba the most improved province.

Under the Business Risk Management: Business Risk Management Program continues to be a primary focus in this budget, with over \$90 million dedicated to a cost-sharing program with the federal government. This program helps producers mitigate risk at the farm level.

Farmland School Tax Rebate: The full—the Farmland School Tax Rebate has seen an increase of \$5 billion this year, for a total of \$41 million. This is reflective of the fact that in 2016 Manitoba farmland assessed values increased by 47 per cent, which has resulted in higher farmland property taxes and larger tax burden on farmers. School taxes on farmland

alone increased by \$17.8 million, or 28 per cent, in 2016.

Innovation: Manitoba has a global focal point for the gains industry, and this budget includes continued funding for support from going forward 2 for research activities through the Grain Innovation Hub. This funding will support research and development activities such as applied research projects undertaken at our crop-diversification centres. Research and innovation enhances the profitability and sustainability of Manitoba grain farms.

Building Public Trust: Manitoba Agriculture is committing resources in this budget that assist agriculture and industry groups to work alongside government to increase trust in the food sector, including increasing transparency of industry practices and creating value-based dialogue with the public. Capitalizing on existing activities will ensure complementary efforts, maximize resources and results.

Consultations: We continue to demonstrate our commitment to transparency. I've held many industry consultations the past year, which has played a predominant role in informing federal-provincial-territorial discussions, a new policy framework and, most recently, agricultural producers' funding act. We have consulted with Manitobans, all farmers, on the changes to this legislation. We held an online survey in which we asked for their feedback and will see, based on our decisions, those results.

In closing, I am confident this budget provides the tools our sector needs to continue rebuilding our economy. This budget allows us to continue to rebuild our sector and achieve my mandate to grow the agricultural sector. It's an honour to present the 2017-18 budgetary Estimates for Manitoba Agriculture.

This concludes my opening remarks, Mr. Chair.

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

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Lindsey—or the honourable—the member for Flin Flon.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My opening comments will be relatively brief.

First off, we need to be really clear that we on this side support our farmers and support their ability to feed the world. We need to make sure that in the process of supporting farmers and agriculture that we support the long-term sustainability of agriculture to make sure that the farmlands remain fertile for generations to come so that it's not growth now at any cost, but it's long-term sustainable growth that we need to make sure we're looking at.

We, of course, have concerns with how some things like carbon pricing may affect agriculture. We want to talk somewhat about food security. We want to focus some on food availability, particularly for people in the northern part of the province, that agriculture for them means a small garden plot or greenhouse at best. So we want to be able to make sure that the department has not forgotten them in the mix of things.

With that, I think I'll conclude my opening remarks and will go on to questioning the minister.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in 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 that the minister introduce the staff in attendance.

Mr. Eichler: I would like to introduce my deputy minister, Dori Gingera-Beauchemin; Leloni Scott is the assistant deputy minister of Stewardship and Assurance; Maurice Bouvier, assistant deputy minister, Production and Economic Development; David Hunt, who's assistant deputy minister of Policy and Transformation; and Ann Leibfried, executive financial officer; and Kim Beilby, acting executive director for Strategy Management.

And from the MASC Corporation we have Neil Hamilton, and Fern Comte, CFO.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for that, and we welcome the staff here.

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

Mr. Lindsey: A global discussion.

Mr. Chairperson: Global, is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

Then it shall be in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Lindsey: Where to begin? Well, we can't talk about the minister's salary, so I guess we won't begin there.

Let's talk about vacancy management within your department for a minute.

How many positions have you kept vacant for the 2017-18 year?

* (15:30)

Mr. Eichler: Staff is a key part of our administration, of course, delivering our programs, providing the services that every day farm families need. We are very proactive in making sure that any vacancies that become vacant, be it through retirement or moving on to other opportunities, we want to make sure we get those positions filled as quickly as possible.

I don't know of a department in government or in business that doesn't have some form of vacancy. But I would love to ensure the—my critic and the member opposite that we take any vacancy very seriously in order to make sure we get it filled as quickly as possible in order to help us be the most improved province in all of Canada.

Mr. Lindsey: So how many positions are presently vacant within your department?

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

We have 30 positions that are—at the current point, attempting to be filled. There's applications that are being submitted on those 30. And there's 58 that have lapsed that have not yet to have action put on them to be filled at this point, but certainly working towards getting them filled.

Mr. Lindsey: So just to clarify the numbers that you've just given me, there's 30 positions currently shown as being vacant and 58 more that have dropped off the radar that will remain vacant? Is that—?

Mr. Eichler: The member is correct. There's 30 that's in the process of being filled, with 58.4 that's—that there's no action being taken on at this point in time, for a total of 88.4.

Mr. Lindsey: So is that number greater than it was last year? Less than? Equal to?

Mr. Eichler: It's less than last year.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you for that answer.

So your plan is to fill, presently—or attempt to fill, 30 of those positions and leave the other 58.4 vacant for the coming year. Is that just for the coming year, or do you see that number going up in the years going forward, or staying the same, or going down?

Mr. Eichler: May 3rd of last year I got sworn into this position and I had the opportunity of attending the graduation at the University of Manitoba, and I'd love to share with the member that every one of those graduates got jobs in agriculture. And agriculture is up and coming and always has been one of the most sustainable departments in the government, and it's not easy to fill a lot of these positions.

But of the 30 that I mentioned, those applications are out and we're receiving applications on them as we go forward. The process can be somewhat cumbersome: time you advertise, time you get the application in, and then get them filled takes some time. The other 58.4 are also very important. We're in the process of taking the next steps in order to fill them as well. So in total, our goal is to have all those positions filled going forward.

But, having said that, as we know, we'll have other vacancies come through retirement. I know my critic knows this very well, as well, is that we're in the baby-boom times. And there's a lot of people that will be retiring that want to do other things than just work for government, that want to seek other retirement plans and have that opportunity to be able to travel and enjoy their life.

So we anticipate we'll continue to have staff turnover, but I also can tell you that I had five retirements been sent in to my department asking to extend their retirement date, so I'm elated that a number of colleagues decided they want to hold off on some of their retirement. So we're certainly happy about that, but we work very hard to achieve the vacant positions to be filled quite soon.

But it does take time.

Mr. Lindsey: So, as a budgetary item, there's a certain number that is included in your calculations that will be vacant year over year. What is that number that's in your budget?

Mr. Eichler: On page 13 of your Estimates books—I think you have it there—if you look at second-last line, allowance for staff turnover is \$2.318 million, which represents 17–seven per cent vacancy rate, is which we were allowing for for Budget '17-18.

Mr. Lindsey: So is that number consistent with what it would have been for last year's budget, or greater, less than, again?

Mr. Eichler: While we're getting at that answer for my critic, I would—in trying to be as efficient as we possibly can, and we know we are going global—but we did bring our staff in from MASC from Portage. So I'm not sure how long you had planned to do Estimates, but if you have MASC questions, if we could maybe try to do those today, that would be helpful.

* (15:40)

But if not, I'm certainly fine with that as well. We're just trying to make sure we save some money, if you have an opportunity to do that, but if you want to hold them over for tomorrow too, we're fine with that as well.

Mr. Lindsey: I believe those questions may get held over until tomorrow. Sorry that it may cause people to have to travel a little more, but—[interjection] Okay. Just while we're getting that answer, can the minister or his department characterize what those vacant positions are?

Mr. Eichler: In response to the overall variance between the previous year and this year, at this point in time, as the member well knows, there's fluctuations from month to month. But, at this point in this month, at this time, is \$140,000 more in vacant positions than last—the year before.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you for that.

So the next question that I'd asked was kind of what those positions that are vacant are.

Mr. Eichler: All the departments are very important to us in the Department of Agriculture, and we couldn't pick one that would be standing out over the other, because they're all very important. But food safety, animal safety is very important to us, whether it be plant protein, animal protein; those are our priorities, if we have to narrow one down more than the other. Certainly, all of them are a priority for us, as we try and fill them as quickly as possible.

Mr. Lindsey: I understand that food safety and animal safety are important, but could you be more

specific as to which positions are presently sitting empty?

Mr. Eichler: We have six positions in food safety. In food processing and meat inspection, we have one. We have food safety officer, another one. Actually, there's three in food safety.

And in the manager of the vet and diagnostic services—is also open, for a total of six.

Mr. Lindsey: Okay, so that talks about six positions that are vacant, but you talked about 88 positions that are vacant. Where are all the rest of those positions?

Mr. Eichler: We'd be happy to read that list off for you, if you want to go down each one. Is that what you like to do?

Mr. Lindsey: Well, I think it'd be interesting to see where the vacancies are, for sure.

Mr. Eichler: Sure, would be happy to read those out and onto the record.

Mr. Lindsey: Perhaps the minister could table that list as well.

* (15:50)

Mr. Eichler: In Administration and Finance, there's 14 in total. In policy and agri-innovation, there's 17. In Agri-Industry Development and Advancement, there's 26.8, and agri-food is 31.6.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you for that.

Are you going to table that list?

Mr. Eichler: Yes, we don't have a copy machine handy, but we'll photocopy it and get it to you. Sure.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable—or, sorry, the member for Flin Flon.

Mr. Lindsey: That's okay. I don't mind being honourable every now and again.

We're talking about food safety and food inspectors. You're already short-handed with food inspectors, is that correct?

Mr. Eichler: Well, every position is important, but we're short six in food safety.

Mr. Lindsey: That's six positions you're short that are budgeted positions.

How many positions in food safety for food inspectors, for example, have been cut from the budget?

Mr. Eichler: Will you repeat the question?

Mr. Lindsey: You talked about there being six positions presently vacant for food inspection, but, in the budget documents, it appears that there's—some positions have been cut. So how many positions have been cut from the budget, and is that on top of the ones that are presently vacant?

Mr. Eichler: There was one managerial position. If you look at page 67—I don't know if that's where you were looking—and it was administration position that we transferred to the small-animal mandate in order to advance that program. So we went from one management position to one small-animal position.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, I was actually looking at page 12 where it talks about the food safety inspection—goes down by one full-time equivalent. The animal health, welfare goes up by one and the Agri-Resource goes down by two, and Industry Advancement goes down by three. Primary Agriculture, it goes down by one; food and agri-processing goes down by one.

So, you—just to go back to the original question, you've cut one manager out of the food inspection department, but there's also a bunch of other cuts within the budget. Is that correct?

Mr. Eichler: On page 12, my critic would see that food safety, that was a managerial position that I talked about, so that was a decrease in one, but we moved it to Animal Health and Welfare on that particular one, unless there's other questions. But it's—that one's actually a wash. It—from administration to small animal care and welfare.

Mr. Lindsey: Could the minister explain what the rationale for moving even one manager from the food inspection to the Animal Health and Welfare?

* (16:00)

Mr. Eichler: I hope this'll help. The food inspection administration position was vacant and we wanted to streamline to a new process which'll allow us to provide front-line service for small animal welfare. So that was a new position in order to allow us to have a person in the small animal welfare department to provide that front-line service.

Mr. Lindsey: So you cut one from the front-line service of food inspection and replaced it with one for animal welfare? Is that what you're saying or did I mishear you?

Mr. Eichler: Yes, this was a managerial vacant position that—it's not an inspector position—and we 'proville'—re-profile that position, that vacant position,

to support growing the demand for small animal welfare which is a large part of our ongoing support, you know, for smaller animals.

Mr. Lindsey: So, without belabouring the point about possible vacant positions and stuff, would the minister agree that food inspection is a relatively important aspect of his department?

Mr. Eichler: The—we certainly agree a hundred per cent with my colleague that food safety is of utmost importance whether it be animal health, plant health, in order to ensure that all those positions do what they're detailed to do and getting the best service in order to make sure that food safety is paramount. It doesn't matter what group I meet with. It's ongoing in order to ensure that we do have the safest, most affordable food in the country, never mind Manitoba. But our producers are very active in ensuring that we do have that policy in place and, you know, the front-line services are the ones that help us make that happen.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank the minister for that.

Seems to me, and maybe I read too much into the headlines, but it seems to me that every couple of days I open the newspaper or hear a news report of some other food product being recalled after the fact because salmonella has been found or some other contaminant.

Would it not better serve the public to do more inspections up front to prevent those products from getting to the consumer shelves, rather than finding out after the fact?

Mr. Eichler: First off, you know, Canada has some of the strictest in safety inspections in food of any country. And, of course, we all want to make sure that responsibility is taken very seriously.

Manitoba Agriculture shares the food safety inspection responsibility for provincially permitted food processing facilities, and Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living is responsible for providing inspection to facilities whose primary business is direct interaction with consumers, such as restaurants, grocery stores, farmer markets, and food service. Manitoba Agriculture is responsible for inspecting facilities that distribute the majority of their product to other permitted 'facilities'.

In 2016, Manitoba Agriculture conducted food safety inspections in 442 food processing and distribution facilities. All product types including

meat, bakery, beverage, and prepared foods are subject to inspection.

Risk-based inspection models are used to determine inspection 'frequencies.' High-risk facilities like meat processors, they receive a number of 'inspections'. The total number of inspections for 2016 was 751; 2015—I know the critic will want to know this—was 739; in 2014 was 675. Routine inspections was 472; re-inspections was 229; requests for inspections was six; complaint-driven was eight; building assessment was 44. And that was the total number of inspections.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you for that.

Could you explain the mythology for developing the risk-based inspection model?

*(16:10)

Mr. Eichler: Manitoba agriculture works with, of course, the Department of Health and CFI, which is a federal component, use a number of science factors to determine risk and, of course, it's a very technical process that requires significant education and training. Our scientists are updating us on a regular basis. Of course, this is critical, as the lives of Manitobans are to be protected and ensure that we have, you know, the safest food and—that we can provide to all our consumers, and, of course, working in partnerships not only with Health but also with the businesses to ensure they have the best business practices in place, as well, in order to ensure that they get a good-quality product that's safe for consumption. And we do, as I said earlier, have some of the strictest requirements in regards to food safety in all of Canada, in fact, of all the world.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank the minister for that.

The reason I ask about the risk-based criteria is I come out of a different world where risk-based health and safety programs—from a worker perspective—left me somewhat wanting, because the scientific formula downgraded the actual potential for harm to workers, and I'm just curious as to how the mythology works in this case and does it potentially through a scientific process downplay some of the risk, and is that why we start to see more recalls of products after the fact.

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

Food safety is paramount not only for the producers. I mean, there—we have farm verifications. We have checks and balances. We track the—our livestock from birth to the plate, if you will, in order

to ensure that we do have the safest food for all our consumers. And once it hits the processors—and I don't know if the member's had an opportunity to tour any of the processing plants, but it's very, very detailed. In fact, I can assure the member that those processes are actually filmed now in order to ensure that the animal is processed in a way that's humane, and also just to make sure that all those checks and balances are being followed.

And, when the member talks about recalls, that means the system's working in order to ensure that those checks and balances are in place, to make sure that they are caught. Prime example—I'm not sure the member's aware of it—but, when Maple Leaf had the listeriosis outbreak a few years ago, Michael McCain stood up in front of all the world and said, look, I take full responsibility in order to ensure that all food is safe for consumption. It not only impacts their livelihood, but the livelihood of the producers, the livelihood of all the people that are working there.

So, when we talk about food safety, it's paramount that each and every day, not only from the processing side of it—for the consumption side, but also on the processing side, you know, for the safety of the workers as well. So safety is utmost important—no matter how we slice, dice it, process it—in order to make sure that we provide the safest food for consumers is a bottom line that we're all focused on.

Mr. Lindsey: Again, I don't want to belabour the point too much, but it just seems to me that—Robin Hood flour, for example—that the list of recall products just keeps growing and growing and growing that somewhere, if there'd have been a different kind of inspection regime up front, that problem would've either been picked up sooner or potentially picked up before it ever got in the bag and in the consumer's hands.

I'm just not sure how running short of food inspectors, even though potentially may have done more inspections, the amount of food processed has also gone up.

So how does that shortage of inspectors tie in with your desire to have the safest food process possible?

Thank you.

*(16:20)

Mr. Eichler: We know that food safety is paramount. We're not short any positions far as

inspections are concerned, and in any food that's processed within the province of Manitoba. You know—as we all know—we have a changing world, so we have products coming in from all over the world. Those are managed through CFIA. There are standards that are being—that are established and inspected by CFIA when they come in.

One of the things that my critic will know, that when stuff comes in everything's dated, everything's bar-coded, everything has an expiration date on it. And I think the system is working quite well, and for those checks and balances that are in place in order to ensure that the food is safe, they check these on a regular basis, and if we see an increase in that number, actually makes me feel more comfortable that the system, in fact, is working in order to ensure that wherever that product would be coming from.

Working with our federal government to ensure that we do have the safest food, gives us an opportunity to make sure that whether it's provincially or federally inspected, that those checks and balances are in place to ensure that consumers are safe, and of course, drive up demand for that product as well because consumers want to know that they're eating the safest food that's possible out there.

Mr. Lindsey: So just on Manitoba having some of the best food safety regulations, and presently—according to the minister's line—some of the safest food in Canada, what impact do you see things like the New West Partnership or maybe other jurisdictions have less stringent requirements, how will that play off with the requirements for food safety in this province?

Will we go down to the lowest common denominator, or will the other jurisdictions come up to our level for a level playing field?

Mr. Eichler: Yes, you know, the CFIA—interprovincial trade is always a responsibility under CFIA.

Yes, there's processing plants that are processing meat products to vegetable products between New West Partnership, but those checks and balances are still in place, whether that comes from Saskatchewan, it comes from Alberta, whether it comes from BC or Ontario, for that matter. So the same standards federally always trump provincial trade in order to ensure that we have the safest food.

Mr. Lindsey: So are you telling me that Manitoba has the most stringent requirements, but the federal

requirements would be the ones that apply for interprovincial trades? So then, in respect, the Manitoba regulations really don't matter?

Mr. Eichler: Yes. The interprovincial trade does have to meet the federal standards for interprovincial trade. It is the—paramount in order to make sure that this food is safe in between one province, whether that be from Saskatchewan, whether it be from Ontario. Those standards are consistent.

Mr. Lindsey: So, when the minister says that Manitoba has the most stringent standards, that doesn't matter if we're bringing in food supplies from somewhere else because they have to comply with federal standards that may not be as stringent as our Manitoba standards. Is that correct?

Mr. Eichler: Yes, trade between provinces is very complicated; trade between other countries is very complicated. But trade when you're a processing plant that's CFI inspected, that's the only ones that are allowed to go outside the country. Some operations—in particular, like Maple Leaf, HyLife, for example—plants in Manitoba—those are too inspected. So those have to meet the federal standards, but there's not one better than the other. But they both are equal depending upon which process the processor wants to follow and what market they want to be able to reach. Now, in a provincial trade is same standard, but it don't meet the standards for export into other countries. That's the difference, for the member.

Mr. Lindsey: So, perhaps, I've misunderstood or I'm missing something. You're telling me that the standards for export of food products are higher than the standards for food products that we consume in this country, in this province?

Mr. Eichler: No, just the inspection from CFI means you actually have to have a CFI staff person on site in order to have those inspections done.

For example, when you see recalls or rejections of a company that's shipping a product to China, they may reject that and send it back for some reason. It wasn't shipped properly, but it was processed properly. But the standards are still the same. It's just that one department the CFI is—has to be on site, which is very expensive. Not all processing plants want to pay that extra cost and they're not interested in trying to meet that demand for the world market. So provincial is only allowed to trade provincial where you have those trade relationships, whether that would be with Saskatchewan, Alberta or BC.

Those that are wanting to export outside of those where there's not trade agreement, then you have to have CFI inspection in order to make sure that product is allowed to go into those other provinces or into other countries.

Mr. Lindsey: So the minister talks about food products being shipped to China, for example, that for whatever reason may not meet the shipping requirements. What kind of requirements are there in place to protect food potentially coming from China to this province—China as an example, not to pick on them exclusively.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, and we have this conversation provincially at our federal-provincial meetings on an ongoing basis in order to make sure we have those checks and balances in place. So we rely on the federal government to establish those standards based upon information from each of us as provinces for our demands in order to ensure that we have those checks and balances in place for our consumers.

* (16:30)

Let's assume there is something coming from China, to the member's example, that has to meet CFI standards in order for that to be accepted into Canada. And then, once it gets there, then it goes through the inspection process through CFI in order to ensure that food does meet the standards of the Canadian consumers.

Mr. Lindsey: It kind of leads me down a little different path here. I—actually, the minister may not believe this, but I have some friends that are farmers. Some of the concerns that they've expressed of late relates to things like honey, that honey produced in this province is 100 per cent pure honey. If you imported honey from China directly, it would have to be the same, but if you send it to Brazil and then import it to Canada, it can be cut with something other than honey without the label changing. Is that correct?

Mr. Eichler: Well, we are an export province; there's no doubt about that. But we also do import product. Any product that's imported from, whether it be States or China or Brazil, there's trade agreements in place with the federal government that has those checks and balances in place. I would prefer for us to consume all our product. I prefer to ensure that our producers get that value added in order for—help us to deliver more revenue for the province of Manitoba.

But to the question that's before us is that that is laid out by the federal government through their trade agreements, not Manitoba's agreements. We're not allowed as a province to make an agreement with another country; it has to be through the federal government and meet those standards. So there is trader partners that I'm sure that would probably do that. I'm not going to try and predict what the government approves and don't approve, but certainly there's people out there will try and deceive the system.

Mr. Lindsey: Apparently, it's a fairly well-known fact that that's taking place, that honey, in particular, that's coming from China via a circuitous route is being cut with high fructose corn syrup and it's adulterated; it's no longer pure honey. But there's no requirement for a label to say anything other than honey.

Does the minister agree that there should be labelling requirements to protect people in this province or to at least inform people in this province what they're actually consuming?

Mr. Eichler: Well, I agree with my critic. We have the best honey in the country. And, of course, we've had some serious issues over the past number of years in regards to making sure we don't have disease in our hives as well. And we tried to get kind of a national policy on that. It hasn't worked in the past. BC has their own unique challenges where bees come from as well.

But we do—any time we hear of these types of things that come forward, we, of course, as provincial ministers, meet on a regular basis with our federal counterparts, and, of course, we try and encourage them to bring policies in that help protect our producers.

And, of course, the bee business is big in Manitoba, even though it's had some serious challenges. But one of the interesting things here I'd like to share with my critic is that it says here: The large inventories imported honey into US from China and other countries have caused the price of bulk honey to drop dramatically, causing western Canadian beekeepers to carry over a larger inventory of unsold honey from 2015-16 for production seasons. The price is expected to recover in 2017 due to the European trade agreement and greater enforcement of the anti-dumping legislation in the US.

So that is kind of where we're at on that, of course, in order to, you know, make sure our producers are getting the best value for them as well. But there is certainly, you know, dumping that goes on of a very—variety of products, whether that be honey or other products. And, you know, with supply management, we're very well protected here. We're very supportive of supply management, and we know that poultry is one of the products that we get into a lot, you know, especially south. You'll see a large farm operation come into place, and they all have—want to dump that somewhere.

So we have checks and balances in place to try and protect our consumers and, of course, the dumping laws, as well, to make sure that we don't receive some of that food that's processed outside of Canada and to sure that we get the best value for our farm families here.

Mr. Lindsey: So will the minister undertake to meet with his federal and other provincial counterparts then to ensure that, as a very minimum, there's proper labelling on honey in particular so that people actually know what they're getting is either pure Manitoba honey or some product that's been adulterated with other substances from a foreign country, which, in the process, undercuts the price that our honey producers can get for their product and provides an inferior-quality product to the consumers?

Mr. Eichler: We have—when I first got sworn in on May 3rd of last year, first thing I did, I wanted to make sure we were listening to producers. And, of course, the honey growers, the beekeepers, are part of that group. Bee producers, all of them, are key to making sure we have the most improved province in all of Canada.

*(16:40)

So we had our first outreach on June the 28th, the second one on July the 3rd. This did not come up, and the beekeepers were there—that don't mean it's not important. But it's certainly part of my outreach. As we prepare for our next fed-prov. meeting in July, we'll have those consultations once again, and I would be happy to invite the critic. I've invited the past critics and they haven't come, from either side, but we'd certainly be happy to have you. We'd buy you lunch. But part of that consultation process is really important for them to evaluate those discussions as we go forward.

I would also encourage the member to reach out to other provinces, as well. We have one vote at the table. I know the conversations that we have. We all lobby for different things from various areas. We're really big on protein, but all issues are important. And we try to get through as much as we possibly can. But that's certainly one that we'd be happy to have that conversation with in our process to bring it forward at our next fed-prov. meeting.

Mr. Lindsey: I think at this point I'll maybe turn the questioning over to my colleague from Fort Garry-Riverview, and I'll pick up this thread again later on.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I thank the minister and deputy minister, and of course the staff and the department for coming here today and for the dialogue that so far have been undertaken.

I'm going to switch gears a little bit in respect of the fact that local food production is a very, very important element in my community. It's—in fact, in my constituency—in fact, it's—I would argue, quite foundational to it.

In looking through the Estimates book, I couldn't see what kind of funding was available for local food production, what kind of supports, what kind of grants, what the overall budget is in relation to Agriculture's budget. So maybe the minister could help me on that, to find just kind—what kind of support the government has provided for local food production.

Mr. Eichler: I thank the member for the question, and this is one I'm very passionate about. I love to talk about the good news stories, especially in Manitoba, where we have a growing sector—of course, the food and agri-food product processing called FAP business development program focuses on increasing business management capacity, leading to Manitoba-made products and renew local, national, and international markets; to developing investment-attraction readiness amongst the food and agri-food processing sectors within Manitoba.

Some of the events is Take the Leap entrepreneurial boot camp, which is training and mentoring; biomass workshop, which is held each year to support biomass processors throughout Manitoba; of course, business development through—and just for the member's information, this is the last year for going forward 2—we're in the process of negotiating the next policy framework, which will take place next year in 2018, which we're hoping to

have some finalizations on what that envelope might look like.

But we work on various projects, of course, in partnerships with the Capital Region, CentrePort, of course, the Chambers of Commerce, the electronic Rural Biz newsletter, six new resources through the Manitoba website—Ag website. And, of course, we provide one-on-one consultation and advice to approximately food entrepreneurs on issues such as business planning, market strategy, product pricing, labelling—to the previous question we went through—of course, packaging is really a large part of that as well.

And then, of course, the Great Manitoba Food Fight, which we're in the 10th edition of, which we've had entrepreneurs compete for product development and, of course, we had that last year. We're just very happy with the results we've seen going forward there, and, of course, we publish 15,000 copies of the 2016 Manitoba produce directory. And, of course, developing surveys, which includes new participants and 'propoting' Manitoba consumer food panel. And, of course, I'd be remiss if we didn't talk about food shows that we have: pavilions which had 15 companies from Manitoba that 'commeted'—committed to go into Vancouver, Toronto, and others around the country.

And, of course, through our Food Development Centre, in Portage, we're the envy of other provinces when it comes to help develop new foods and new techniques in processing and getting new food developed here in Manitoba. And we're the—one of the leaders when it comes to ensuring that we have new models for our entrepreneurs out there to get new products out into the marketplace.

Mr. Allum: Well, I thank the minister for that answer.

I guess I was looking for something more specific, and maybe he can point me to the page in the Estimates book that I'm looking at now, where I would be able to determine what grant or other funding supports there are for local food organizations.

Mr. Eichler: On page 49, you will find the Food Development Centre I was talking about earlier. We have \$2,020,000 for grants and transfer payments to assist folks in order to develop market packaging; those types of things we had talked about earlier. In fact, the Food Development Centre just got back

from California, where they launched a new product down there that we're just very happy about.

* (16:50)

Also, I would be remiss if I didn't talk about working with Flax Council, of which we developed—they developed not we, but they developed a muffin, a flax muffin that was recently released in the city of Winnipeg for the health centres and for senior homes—flax is a very important part of our diet—that is now processing over 2 million flax muffins a year to go into the health-care system, which was developed in the member from St. Boniface, at the research centre there, at the Albrecht centre. I know he'd be very proud of that. There's a number of high-tech researchers there. That is very, very good, and is very tasty as well, by the way. So very proud that that was developed here in Manitoba.

And if the member would also turn to page 105, that would be helpful as well. You will see that we have 26 positions, which is \$2.49 million, and we have \$60,000 in transportation, \$50,000 in communications, supplies and services of 121–27,000, other operating of 261, and grant assistance of \$350,000.

And also, as well, through the Growing Forward 2 programs, we also have a large number—and, of course, this is over and above some of the other things I'll get to in a minute—but supported growth in the local food production 'segment,' funding small food-processing enterprises through Growing Forward 2, through value commercialization and providing technical support services to food processing entrepreneurs and establish an online listing of commercial community kitchens, a small 'cale' food producers can access commercially food produced; to date, 30 community kitchens have been added to this listing. I'm not sure there's any in your particular area. I try not to focus on where they go rather than what's best for the value for those kitchens. I know there's a number of them around the province and in the city where these entrepreneurs are able to go and process that food in order to ensure they have the right facilities, the right place at the right time.

Mr. Allum: I appreciate that answer from the minister.

It's hard for me to determine from all of that where an organization like Sustainable South Osborne Community Co-op, which does a lot of local food production in my constituency, oversees

any number of community gardens that actually produce an enormous amount of food, where in all of that an organization like South Osborne—Sustainable South Osborne would receive funding. Ultimately, I'm trying to establish, I guess, if what those envelopes are for local organizations like the one I've just identified so that they know who to talk to and how to access government funding and whether that funding has changed from last year to this year and going forward as it remains a vital part of my constituency, and I know my constituents would very much want to have this information readily at hand.

Mr. Eichler: To focus specifically on the member's question, we would happily give you this contact phone number off the record. But it's off the Scurfield office. The lady's name is Jilian Einarson, and she's the extension specialist.

Now, they provide a number of services that would help you and help your organization be able to get the best value for the return on their investment. Some of those models—of course, they all change. Every area's a little different depending on the soil conditions and other things as well. But we know now a number of restaurants are growing their own food as well. So those services, a lot of them are being traded through—trained through Red River community college or through the ag diploma program, so there's a number of ideas out there. And, of course, nothing better than going out and be able to pick your own vegetables.

And I know my critic knows how important it is for the North as well for a number of those initiatives through—whether it be through greenhouse growth or whatever. Those—all those initiatives are really important, that we provide those services to—on an ongoing basis to ensure that we have good, safe, affordable food.

Mr. Allum: I thank the minister for that information. And I guess part of me is inclined to say, is this—is local food production, its support financial, administrative, otherwise, a priority of the government going forward? Can we see enhanced funding for urban agriculture going forward, as I think he would recognize as—just in the answer that he gave us, healthy food promotes healthy communities and healthy communities thrive on healthy food.

And so we would like to know what the government's—whether this is a priority for the government and whether this is a direction they can—

they are considering enhancing this year and in years to come.

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

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

* (15:20)

Madam Chairperson (Colleen Mayer): 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 Education and Training.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I do. I am pleased to present the 2017-2018 Manitoba Education and Training Budget Estimates for consideration by this committee. I have an opening statement, and after that I'll take a moment to introduce the staff joining me today.

The Department of Education and Training 2017 Budget makes strategic investments in Manitoba's future that will grow our economy while ensuring responsible recovery that addresses the unfocused and irresponsible spending under the previous administration over the last 10 years.

Budget 2017 invests in programs that will yield better results for Manitobans and repair and expand the services that they depend on.

I touched briefly on a few key priorities for government in Budget 2017. Manitoba Education and Training is making focused investments in the K-to-12 system, including the creation of an Early Years Education Initiative that will give school divisions the flexibility to improve its student outcomes.

The key feature of our approach is that we are working collaboratively with parents, teachers and school divisions to encourage innovation in the classroom that will lead to a measurable improvement in literacy and numeracy results for early-year students. This new initiative will allow school divisions and educators to focus resources on students who need the most support to achieve literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

Madam Chair, parents and educators know that a one-size-fits-all approach wasn't yielding results and did not deliver the outcomes the students deserve, which is why our government planned response to

school divisions' request for increased flexibility to pursue more innovative approaches that would actually yield measurable improvement results for early-year students.

Our government is focused on outcomes and results that are measurable because that is how we can show Manitobans the tax dollars spent on their behalf are well invested and will lead to a bright future for our children in the province as a whole.

Students deserve and want better outcomes. Manitoba Education and Training has taken this opportunity to work in collaboration with school divisions and post-secondary partners utilizing third-party expertise to evaluate the outcomes of Early Years Education Initiative and enable adjustments to be made based on performance results.

After 17 years of declining results in the education system, Manitobans want better results for their dollars they invest in the system. The Early Years Education Initiative and the corresponding third-party evaluation will, for the first time, give Manitobans a clear indication that their investment is in improving outcomes for early-year students.

In the post-secondary education and workforce development area, our government is focussing on improving affordability and accessibility for students facing significant financial barriers to post-secondary education.

Manitoba Education and Training will increase the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative by 38 per cent to a total of \$6.75 million of government funds, together with boosting—with the boost in government funding and very important administrative changes to encourage more private donations, our government will enable more than \$20 million in non-repayable support to be provided directly to students. This is a significant improvement over the \$1.5 million awarded to Manitoba students previously.

Just recently, I was pleased to announce changes to the Manitoba Bursary Program that will better support low-income students with new upfront grants. When combined with the Manitoba student grant, 5,800 low-income Manitoba students will qualify for up to \$5,000 in bursary funds, more than enough to cover the cost of books and tuition in any public degree-granting institution in the province.

* (15:30)

The enhancements made to provide student fiscal assistance programs will enable more than \$35 million in non-repayable support to students this year, an increase of \$15 million over the past year and more than double the direct funding available to students under the previous government.

This record investment in partnership with Manitoba post-secondary institutions and private donors will reduce financial barriers and increase access for low-income students pursuing post-secondary education. Along with a strong post-secondary system, Manitoba needs strong immigration to grow economically as a province. Manitoba Provincial Nominee program, developed by my former PC colleague Bonnie Mitchelson back in 1998, to allow Manitoba to address its unique labour market needs.

When our government took office last year, we inherited a backlog of more than 5,100 applications, some dating as far back as 2013. Thousands of applicants and their families here and overseas have been waiting for years and were getting no answers from the previous government. This situation developed, certainly wasn't fair and not respectful or indicative of the reputation of—as a—Manitoba's reputation as a friendly and welcoming province.

It was clear Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program was in need of renewal. Earlier this month I was pleased to announce the implementation of the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program renewal which included the elimination of the application backlog and a new six-month processing service standard.

MPNP renewal will support Manitoba Education and Training's overall labour market strategy which is focused on filling the more than 170,000 projected job openings across multiple sectors, including manufacturing, finance, services, trades, and transportation, agribusiness and information technology that we expect to develop by 2022.

The retention of Manitoba-trained international students is an important component of the provincial labour market strategy and will help make our province a more attractive destination for prospective students from around the world, further enriching the diversity of our province while strengthening our economy.

The Provincial Nominee Program application fees introduced this year will fund programs for

refugees and refugee claimants approved to work in Canada that will enable these newcomers to Canada to contribute to our economy more quickly. The new Refugee Employment Development Initiative was designed to enhance their skills, develop a culture of safety in the workplace by learning the language of work and give them Canadian job experience in partnership with local employers seeking skilled workers.

We're also partnering with post-secondary institutions like Red River College and Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology to deliver this program and help bridge employment and life gap—and life-skill gaps—sorry—for refugee and refugee claimants who may face—to reach gainful employment.

Earlier this year the Premier (Mr. Pallister) confirmed emergency funding for a variety of organizations dealing with the influx of refugee claimants now projected to reach 1,200 by the end of this year or seven times the 2014 total. Budget 2017 provides funding for Welcome Place to support refugees, for refugee claimants—support services—sorry—for refugee claimants, including paralegal services and safe transportation from Emerson to Winnipeg and the Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations for refugee response co-ordinator position.

Our government has corrected the course within the immigration area and introduced the plan to repair the unfair former process that kept applicants on wait lists for literally years at a time, while investing in refugees and refugee claimants to ensure all newcomers can build their lives in a meaningful way here in Manitoba.

We are focused on better results and improving the services Manitobans rely on. This is why our government has made a significant investment in Manitoba Education and Training with overall increase of \$3.6 billion over last year to a total of \$2.7 billion in total spending.

We have made targeted and focused investments that will lead to better outcomes and will repair services that deteriorated under the previous government. Budget 2014 puts Manitoba on the road to recovery after years of mismanagement.

Thank you. That's the end of my opening statement. I would like to introduce my staff.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Yes, I do.

There's a bigger and bigger distance between what this government campaigned on in the last provincial election and what they're actually doing now that they're in office. You know, to state it simply: nobody in the last election would have voted for dramatic increases in tuition; nobody in the last election would have voted to deregulate course fees at post-secondary institutions; no recent graduate would have voted to pay \$2,500 more in taxes each year; seniors would not have voted to pay higher taxes on their property taxes. And so there's a bigger and bigger difference between what this government said they were going to do, in the last election, and what they're actually doing in this, you know, new regime. And it seems particularly visible in the Department of Education, as many of the most, you know, dramatic moves to, you know, increase the overall tax burden in Manitobans and also to look for cost-saving measures have been carried out in this department and are also being, you know, directed towards students and to the families which help students pay their tuition costs to attend post-secondary.

So of particular concern, setting those issues aside, is also that there hasn't been the necessary investments to keep pace with the growth and, you know, the investments that are needed for future growth in our province. We would have liked to see more schools being announced in terms of the K-to-12 capital side. We've been asking questions about that and are still awaiting some answers. And so that seems to be an area of concern. And also a lack of investment at the post-secondary level when it comes to capital is also of concern.

We were concerned also to see that the, you know, small class size initiative was taken away and replaced with a different program. You know, put simply: if you ask any parent whether or not they want their kid to have more one-on-one time with their teacher, I'm sure that most parents would say, yes, they want more one-on-one time with their teacher. And so that was a program that was beginning to deliver on that and showed steady progress towards having a greater and greater number of classrooms in kindergarten to grade 3, with less than 20—or 20 or less students in the classroom.

And, though the government claims, you know, that there's issues with the measurable outcomes of that, from a logical perspective, that could just as easily argue that you can't evaluate the shortcomings of the program either. So it seems as though it was premature for the government to move away from the small class size initiative, given the importance of guaranteeing more one-on-one time with teachers for people in the earliest years. When we do talk about measurable outcomes and we do talk about evidence, the evidence in the scholarly literature and the academic literature is clear: that, particularly in the early years, having more one-on-one time with a teacher does lead to greater educational outcomes for young people. And those results, those outcomes are particularly pronounced for at-risk youth and for young people who are living through various challenges in their lives. But, of course, we have to keep in mind that these aren't necessarily impacts that we're going to see from year to year. These are, you know, impacts that we'll see over the course of a young person's life. So it may take five years, it may take 10 years, it may take 20 years for us to see the impact that some of these investments in early years education would have on a young person.

We're also concerned, as the opposition, about the de facto cuts to the education funding for the K-to-12 system. In some cases, you know, school divisions received an outright cut; you know, they maybe received 98 per cent of the funding that they got last year.

* (15:40)

In other cases, you know, it was more of a de facto decrease when we measure it in terms of real dollars, because we know that the costs to the education system are rising, some cases, 2, 2.2 per cent, and not—you know, we didn't see the money directed to the K-to-12 system increase at the same rate, and so, therefore, that caused many school divisions in the province to often turn to the property taxpayers and hike property taxes on them, or in other instances, to look at scaling back the front-line services that they provide to people in their divisions.

And so, here in Winnipeg, we saw, you know, Winnipeg School Division, as an example, beginning to revisit the way that they do transportation, and now we're starting to hear from parents that this is going to cause issues with child care, and we're beginning to see those impacts carry out.

But, if we look at other divisions, there's other issues too. So, for instance, St. James-Assiniboia, as

a school division, you know, the enrolment overall may not be increasing, but the enrolment—or, it may not be increasing dramatically, to put a finer point on it, but the increase of the requirement for English language instruction in the division is increasing at a dramatically quick rate.

And so, to just have, like, an across the board, you know, de facto cut ignores some of the realities that some of the specific divisions in our province are facing and some of the unique pressures and challenges that the teachers and students and the parents in those areas are trying to navigate. And so, there's definitely some concerns about the way the K-to-12 system was funded.

On the post-secondary side, students are, you know, upset. Students are, in some cases, very upset over the planned increases to tuition. We know that, you know, if inflation stays around what it is, that tuition will likely rise by about 7 per cent per year under this government's plan, and that does have a real impact on the affordability of post-secondary education for Manitoba students because, you know, it's the 7 per cent or 6 to 7 per cent increases year over year begin to accumulate. You know, it goes from an increase of maybe a few hundred dollars a year for a student paying post-secondary tuition to, by the time they finish a three- or four-year program, potentially seven, eight, nine, maybe even \$1,000 increases in tuition costs versus what they would have been playing—paying had tuition been merely capped at the rate of inflation. And so, that's definitely a concern.

I know that the, you know, minister and this government have announced changes to the MSBI program, and, you know, scholarships and bursaries are great; they do help many students in our province through their post-secondary careers. However, if we're just to look at the University of Manitoba as one example, while a prospective student at University of Manitoba over the next few years might be paying \$200 more, then \$400 more, then close to \$700 and then eventually close to \$1,000 more in tuition increases per year, the amount of additional money for scholarships and bursaries at the University of Manitoba is only \$100 more in year one. And then in year 2, it's \$100 more, and in year 3, it's still \$100; year 4, it's still \$100.

So, even as the amount of tuition paid increases year over year and those impacts are compounded, or will likely be compounded, the amount of money being invested on the MSBI side is not slated to keep

track. And so, you know, there're certainly questions about what additional measures or what future plans the government has to ensure that education remains affordable for post-secondary students in this province.

The tuition rebate is another big affordability impact for post-secondary students. You know, this year, potentially \$2,000 more in a tax bill for a student and then after that, potentially \$2,500 more depending on the amount of tuition paid. And so, that is certainly a very real impact on the pocketbooks of recent graduates and, you know, some students who are further advanced in their studies here in the province of Manitoba.

And so, that is—again, when we're talking about ensuring accessibility to education and to ensure that the greatest number of Manitobans have the ability to, you know, transform their lives through education, that's certainly a concern.

But, you know, that's not to say that I oppose any changes across the board to modernize education, but just that there are serious questions as to what this government's plan is and the impact that it is going to have on Manitoba students.

I didn't know I had a time limit. I was just going to keep going, yes.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

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 16.1.(a), contained in resolution 16.1.

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

Mr. Wishart: I'd ask the staff to please come forward.

I have my deputy, Bram Strain, Deputy Minister of Education and Training.

We have Claude Fortier, executive director, administrative and finance, who will be retiring, unfortunately, after 35 years with the Manitoba government.

We have Rob Santos, senior assistant deputy minister, K-12 Education and Healthy-Child Programs. We have Jean-Vianney Auclair, assistant deputy minister for Education.

Somewhere we have David Yeo—right?—executive director, Policy, Planning and Performance.

We have Jan Forster, assistant deputy minister, Post-Secondary Education and Workforce Development; we have Dino Altieri, acting director, Indigenous Inclusion Directorate, and Rick Dedi, executive director, Public Schools Finance Branch, and they are joining me today.

Welcome.

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

An Honourable Member: Global.

Madam Chairperson: Is that agreed?

Sorry. Honourable member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew).

Mr. Kinew: Global.

Madam Chairperson: Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Kinew: I'm wondering if the minister can tell the committee if he agrees that the tuition rebate for recent graduates helps to retain those recent graduates here in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Wishart: I do not agree with the premise put forward by the opposition critic. Though you want different types of analysis, we do have some that relate to this. I would direct him to direct—to ask questions of the Department of Finance on who receives the money. That, too, I think he will find very enlightening when he gets some information from them as to who was actually claiming this and who the target audience was, but I think what the member really should be paying attention to here is that in terms of interprovincial out-migration, 2007 we had 3,449 people that left the province that were Manitoba born; and in 2016 we had doubled that number to 6,659; and in that time period, we have certain information in terms of the demographics. And of particular interest is that critical 20 to 34 age period, which are the young people that are recent graduates and that was nearly 40 per cent of the total and had risen during that period of time.

So it's difficult to imagine that this was a terribly effective policy tool in terms of getting people to stay in the province, as was the original argument when it was put in place, and we further looked at what other provinces were doing and there had been a number of other provinces that had had this type of program in place. All had found it ineffective and discontinued it.

Mr. Kinew: So what is the plan to retain recent graduates here in Manitoba?

* (15:50)

Mr. Wishart: The plan is to have good jobs for graduates in Manitoba. We are, of course, in particular, making special accommodations under MPNP for foreign students that come to train here in Manitoba; that's a special initiative. But we are, of course, very focused on retaining Manitoba-born and Manitoba-trained grads and the job—having good jobs in place. And, in fact, when you ask the colleges, in particular, who do a much better job on tracking what the—what happens to their grads than universities do, we find that it is, in fact, the No. 1 reason for people choosing to stay or choosing to go some location; it's all about the job. It's not about any tax incentive.

Mr. Kinew: So the minister pointed to the MPNP program, which, I'm sure, we'll get to perhaps later in the Estimates process. But the number that he cited earlier when talking about net out-migration, I don't think would include the impact of immigration on the overall population of the province. So, really, he had raised the prospect of what to happen—what would happen with recent graduates who would, you know, I guess, be Manitoba born and—to use the term of parlance that he had used earlier there.

So, specifically, what is the plan to retain those recent graduates here in the province, and can he please provide more insight other than just good jobs?

Mr. Wishart: And, certainly, that is not a bad plan, to have good jobs for graduates. But we are focusing very much with both our Manitoba-trained and our MPNP, people that are coming to the province to be—to fill the labour market needs and provide—and balance that and make sure that we provide great opportunities in terms of the job market.

So to do—accomplish that, we're working much more closely with the labour market supply information, particularly the sector councils who are probably the best attached to labour market needs

now and into the future. So we, certainly, are focused on making sure that people will not only have those good jobs available, that we can connect them to those good jobs, which is perhaps an area where previous information was very slow in coming and not particularly effective. We want to make sure that Manitobans are offered—Manitoba graduates and people that have come to Manitoba as MPNP immigrants are connected and get in those excellent jobs as quickly as possible and that they are able to find employment that aligns with their skill set. We know that in the past, on MPNP, there have been some issues around that as well, and so the two things fit very nicely together.

So we are very focused on doing that, and, as I mentioned earlier, information from post-secondary institutions, colleges in particular, who do the most effective job in tracking what happens to their graduates and why they went where they did, do say that the No. 1 reason is good jobs. So we are playing to that strength, and I believe that that is a very effective way to do this.

There has been a lot of dollars invested in the rebate program over the years; if you look back over the 10 years it was in place, it would be half a billion dollars that Manitoba has invested in that program. That money has gone to individuals, and we don't really have a lot of follow-up information on those individuals, so we don't know how effective that program was. So it is a bit of a shot in the dark in terms of evaluating that—the effectiveness of that program.

Mr. Kinew: Can the minister tell the committee what consultations the Department of Education has carried out with the sector councils that he made reference to on the labour market supply?

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

We meet very regularly with the many labour markets, and if I remember the number right, there's 16–17, sorry—labour market sector councils. We are, as a matter of fact, looking at perhaps making some changes to realign them as the markets continue to develop. But we meet regularly with them, and in one-on-one meetings with some of the individual ones, but we also have group meetings so that we can compare notes.

We depend fairly heavily on their information because they're very well connected to the marketplace. Really, what they're made up with, though they're—have a certain number of employees,

but they're basically made up of industry. And though we try and be as close to them as possible, not only to work with what their needs are now, but we're always looking to them to predict what their needs will be coming down the road so that we can make sure that the post-secondary institutions and our trades and training aspect are aligned with where we need to be. I liken this a little bit, frankly, to what Gretzky always said: you don't score any goals from being where the puck was; you score goals from being where the puck's going to be. And we're trying to do an assessment on where we need to be in the labour market to be well positioned to meet the labour market needs, both from the employees' point of view, but also from the employers' point of view.

And, in particular, as Manitobans, we really want the industry in Manitoba to succeed, and to do that we have to meet their labour needs now and into the future. So we need to position ourselves very well in terms of training and making sure that we have the right courses in place. It's a little like looking into a foggy crystal ball, but we do have some insights into it and we do depend an awful lot on the sector councils for that bit of information.

Mr. Kinew: Can the minister share with us an example of a sector council that shared some insight with the department and how the department has changed a program or in some way met where the puck is going to be, to use his example? And, you know, what, if any, resources the department had redeployed or perhaps begun to apply so that we could, you know, facilitate that connection between education and the labour market supply?

Mr. Wishart: Well, and while my staff is conferring on a labour market example, I would like to point out to the member that we have done something very similar to this in terms of the need for the refugees and particularly the Syrian refugees with the ready program that we've put in place. What we've done there is, because there was a specific need that applied to them—a lot of them had not been in either in the labour market for a number of years because of the refugee status or had not been in the education system for a number of years—and what we did, working backwards from industry that had shown an interest—and the first one out of the gate was, in fact, painting and drywalling industry—we worked back from an industry employer.

We developed a program in conjunction with Red River where we spent half a day in a classroom learning the language of the workplace and the

language of safety, and then they spent the other half of the day actually working in the workplace learning—and many of these had experience of—individuals had experience in this area, though not specific with our techniques. So we worked to—worked with them to make sure that they had practical experience. And we've done one cohort already, and we're planning another one for late summer, fall. And we are also developing similar types of programs for the hospitality industry, for Ag labour and—what was the other one—*[interjection]*—and ECEs, right, early childhood educators.

And you had an example here—

An Honourable Member: Can I interject with a quick question of clarification?

Mr. Wishart: Right—

Madam Chairperson: Honourable minister, he has a question.

Mr. Wishart: Oh, okay, I'm sorry.

* (16:00)

Mr. Kinew: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. And I appreciate the minister indulging this.

Just a quick clarification. So, when you talk about this hospitality, the ECE, these programs, these are specifically for refugees, or are these other departmental examples of meeting the labour market supply?

Mr. Wishart: Those programs are designed specifically for refugees so that we don't exclude other immigrants that come. So some of the asylum seekers have actually ended up in this program as well. They don't have status completely as of yet. So it's a little unclear for them, but they are also eligible for those types of programs as well—and even PNP people.

Just to conclude that—those programs are specific for refugees and, as I said, and some people from MPNP also bleed over to that. Usually, they're not the principal person that came; they would be family members. We do have very similar programs specifically designed for Manitoba residents. They may not spend as much time in the classroom with basic English, because, of course, most people already have, but it is a very much designed along the same lines where you work backwards from the workplace. And we teach specific skills related to that, including employability and the skill itself.

So we have a number of programs in that area, as well, and those are running parallel.

Specific to your question earlier about other types of programs around this, we work with a sector council called ICTAM, which is the technology group, and help—actually align people into that area. We've created about 6,000 jobs in the last year and a little bit, under that type of program. In that area, working with that particular sector council, about 80 per cent of those would be Manitoba people that were retrained, and about 20 per cent would be immigrants.

Mr. Kinew: Can the minister back up his assertion there that there was 6,000 new jobs created? Can he just explain that for the committee? The minister asserted there was 6,000 new jobs created. Can he back up that claim and explain how he arrived at that for the benefit of the committee?

Mr. Wishart: I misspoke. Six thousand jobs in the economy, not just in that sector.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, so, just to clarify, there was 6,000 new jobs net in Manitoba, and this occurred at the same time?

Mr. Wishart: Yes, it's 6,000 jobs in the Manitoba economy during that period of time, not just in the sector.

Mr. Kinew: Thanks for the clarification. And thank you again, Madam Chair.

So, I guess, just to follow up on a related point, recently the federal government cancelled funding for higher levels of English as a second language programs. I believe it was levels 4 to 8 that had the funding withdrawn for, which are, I guess, roughly the level required for a citizenship test and then a little bit higher than that. What—and these, I guess, were rolled through many different educational settings in the community; for instance, I think MITT, Seven Oaks School Division, even some labour organizations like UFCW, I think, were delivering some of these training programs.

So what is the Department of Education planning in terms of offsetting this withdrawal of federal funds to ensure that there is the necessary English language instructional opportunities for newcomers?

Mr. Wishart: There is—that has happened and continues actually to happen, as the member is aware. We are meeting with the employers that feel that they were impacted by the withdrawal of

services by the federal government related to that, and trying to develop a plan forward to make sure that we meet the shortfall. It's kind of a mixed group that ends up in that—trying to improve their English in that 5-to-8 category in terms of English qualifications. Some of them do have trades already and are—in fact, practise their skill need to raise their level of English to perform in that.

But we are looking at using part of that \$500 fee that relates to MPNP as part of the funding source to do what is necessary in that. We'll work with the partners that have been performing that and the immigration groups that are key in that, so it'll be a partnership, but we're working to develop an alternate plan forward to backfill where our federal government seems to feel that they don't want to continue supplying services.

Mr. Kinew: So, when the minister says he will work with the partners who are delivering these ESL programs, does that mean that, you know, he can say with confidence that every organization that was delivering these programs will continue to be able to deliver these programs in the future? So, for instance, MITT had a program; MITT will continue to offer similar ESL programs. UFCW had one; UFCW will be able to offer a similar program in the future. Is that what is being pursued here?

Mr. Wishart: In—it's driven very much by the partners who want to work with us. Some of the industry players—and we do work very closely with the industry that's also the employer—have expressed needs that certain types of programs work better for them, and that those'll probably be the ones that are the highest priority, and we'll certainly work with the partners to do that.

I know that a few of the post-secondary institutions are—in the case of MITT—had already been transitioning some of those programs over to Red River. That'll probably continue so that we may not have exactly the same programs in the same places that they were before, but I can assure the member that the service will continue to be applied. It may be in a different location within, you know, a reasonable distance, but we will work with the players that wish to continue to perform in this field.

It is, of course, always the post-secondary institution's right to change their priorities in terms of what they do. We don't dictate that to them, as the member knows, and so we will work with the post-secondary institutions to make sure that those

that want to continue providing that service—that we're in a position to help them do that.

Mr. Kinew: So, thanks for that answer, and thank you again, Madam Chair.

So, hearing that the programs may change somewhat, would it be the department's goal that the same number of seats be offered even after these changes? So, for instance, if MITT had, let's say, you know, four or five hundred seats on offer in these levels of the ESL programs, system-wide, would we still have the same capacity in a 400–500 seats, even if some of those may move to a different institution or a different workplace setting?

Mr. Wishart: Thank the member for his patience on this.

And it was always a very variable demand. It varied depending on the year and the—and when you look backwards and on the type of services and the need of industry. We are certainly prepared to work with the partners to try and make sure that the service is available.

* (16:10)

I don't think we can honestly say it'll be absolutely one for one. We—you know, we know that a significant amount of dollars and a significant amount of service was withdrawn when the federal government chose to go the way that they have. We will certainly work with our partners to try and come as close to that—filling that hole as possible, but we will work with our industry partners and the immigration community in particular, the partners there, to make sure that we can fill that need. Some of them, because they're co-located in many cases with adult ed. facilities, there's sort of a built-in synergy there that will definitely help us make sure that it'll be somewhat different than it was before, but we want to provide the services to everybody's advantage to make sure that that service gap is filled.

These people that are in need of that service want to get into the workplace, and as I've said, some of them have training already. They simply need better English levels to be at—they actually perform and function in that trade or that—with that skill, so it's to our advantage; it's to their advantage. In fact, if you look backwards to the country of origin, if they're immigrants, it's to that country's advantage, too, to have the training investment that they have made in those individuals take place.

So we certainly want to do that and we'll make every effort to do that. This is currently happening, so to say we've been successful in this to a point, you know, we're still in the development phase with some of the partners. We are open to working with any partner, especially those that had a history of delivering the service; they would be the ones that we would absolutely focus on, initially trying to make sure of that. UFCW, I think, was the one we worked with in Brandon, in particular. I know that we've been in contact and discussions with them to see what they can do to actually work with us on this.

Mr. Kinew: Can the minister tell the committee what's the dollar value of the federal government funding that was withdrawn for this?

Mr. Wishart: We'll need a few minutes to get an exact amount for that. We hopefully will have that number very shortly.

Mr. Kinew: The minister referenced that the \$500 fee—some people are calling it a head tax—with this \$500 fee on the MPNP program is going to be used to fund some of this.

Could you explain for the committee, like, how the money will flow through the department? Like, which part of the department will be funding these programs? Like, will this be through the post-secondary operating grants or how, exactly, does this money flow to the various organizations delivering the ESL training?

Mr. Wishart: And I thank the member for the question because this is something that we're working at currently, making sure that all of the partners have an opportunity to work with us in regards to this.

It is—it's all within our department and part of the agreement when the \$500 MPNP fee was put in place was that money would be left within our department to help us deal with these types of additional costs. Isn't it funny how we predict the future sometimes because now we already have a need for it because of the withdrawal of additional dollars at the federal level, but we at least have some resources available to help us deal with that and we'll be working with the agencies that are best able to provide the services for us, including the ones that were previously doing it when they so choose to participate with us.

Mr. Kinew: So how much money will be spent in 2017-2018 towards funding these ESL programs?

Mr. Wishart: I hope the member appreciates because of our varying demand, we can never be absolutely certain of the numbers. And the amount generated or anticipate to be generated from the \$500 fee will be somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$2 million. In working with our partners, we'll do what we can to get maximum benefit of—in regards to that.

So we'll be looking to try and meet the need, which is an unknown at this point in time because it does vary, and we'll not even be absolutely sure at this point in time as to which players will choose to participate and which ones will not choose to participate.

So saying an absolute number here would be irresponsible, but I suspect that the vast majority of what we raise will probably going back into this area, though I can't give you an absolute number 'til we—'til the end of the year, I guess.

Mr. Kinew: So how will the minister and the department ensure transparency and accountability on that promise that the money charged to newcomers would be spent on service delivery through the department?

Mr. Wishart: Of course, any revenue that we have coming is available through Public Accounts, and so that'll be shown as part of that; the same with the amount that is expended in terms of contracts that'll—with the service organizations that will be providing that service to it.

We are doing a call for proposal at the moment for some of these services, so that is also a matter of public record. It'll all be very transparent, but to predict exactly how many dollars will be spent in specific courses in specific communities will be an after-the-fact thing. You'll be able to see that number from Public Accounts at the end of the year.

Mr. Kinew: So, given all the, sort of, unknowns that the minister has outlined and that there is this—sorry. I thought I heard bells ringing. Maybe it's from last night. They're still ringing in my head.

But, given the various unknowns and the fact that there is a, you know, a transition going on, there is a certain amount of flux, you know, how is the department tracking people who are supposed to be heading into these ESL programs and ensuring that they're—are not going people falling through the cracks, so to speak, and that they—people who need this training are able to find access for it?

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

And this is—it's a little difficult to track everything. Certainly, those that are refugees and were still working at the 1 through 4 stage, we know where they are; we have very good track of them. Those that actually are beyond that stage and that so-called 5 through 8 stage, we don't absolutely need—and they don't need us either. They may well be on—out there in the workplace in some form or others. But, if they chose to try and improve their ESL skills, they come to one of the many partner organizations. So, actually, every immigrant agency across the province, of which there are many—MANSO and groups like that—are the ones that would be the most aware. And, as we develop our options, of course, we include those groups as part of our partnerships so that they are aware of what services we are prepared to provide and when, and that—so they will be probably in the best position to link to them.

* (16:20)

If someone was a 5 or better, it is possible that they may not choose to participate any longer in that. It's their—certainly, their discretion. They are here and in the process—in most cases, of refugee or immigrant process and they don't need to be engaged with us regarding any English as a second language.

Mr. Kinew: So does the minister agree that this has sort created a—like the fallout from the federal government decision has sort of created this situation where now there's been this sort of shakeup and the result is that people, newcomers, who would need this sort of higher levels of English instruction in order to be successful in their career, they now have to be sort of self selecting in terms of finding this. It's not as much of a conduit up through the ranks as it had been previously? Is this a disruption, I guess, is what I'm asking.

Mr. Wishart: That actually really won't have changed from where it was before. People that were above level 4 and were here either through the refugee process, or PNP, or as federal immigrants did not need to work with us in regards to that if they chose not to, and so that would be very similar to what it was before.

Really, we're—we've been providing, and the federal government has been providing, until they withdrew their services—providing something additional beyond what was absolutely the minimum required. That's a good thing because it certainly

provided a lot of people with greater employment opportunities. We would benefit from that, and as Canadians we also would benefit from that as well. That won't have changed in a significant way.

What we have done, though, is make very good, productive use of the \$500 MPNP fee, much more quickly than we, frankly, anticipated the need to have driven us. And you know, I don't think—when we look backwards, I don't think there'll be many people that say we, you know, we weren't justified in doing this and that we aren't providing a very essential service back to the immigrant and refugee community, one that they need, that helps them and helps us as Manitobans as well.

Mr. Kinew: So again to—you know, I agree that providing these higher levels of instruction is important. It's my understanding that, I guess, you know, level 4 or 5 is what's needed to write the citizenship test, and so again, that might be considered sort of a minimum sort of standard. But then when you get to the higher levels, that's what's needed in order for people to be able to get good jobs and be able to advance through their careers and to take the further steps that can lead to a fulfilling and meaningful life here in Canada and in our province.

So, having taken that point that the minister made, I'm still trying to understand the scope of the changes here. So is the big change in this area then, that the withdrawal of federal government funding means that the burden of paying for this is now just being put onto the applicants and the newcomers themselves, and that's the big change?

Mr. Wishart: Certainly, I mean we're trying to backfill a service that was previously there as efficiently as we can, using dollars that are—is revenue for the province of Manitoba. So we're working with the individuals involved, with the partners, which includes many, many different agencies. So we're providing a service that would probably be lost to these individuals, based on the withdrawal of federal funding for this type of service, so we're doing our best to provide it.

We're not asking them to cover the whole cost. We're covering part of the cost, so we're certainly trying to make best use of it. We don't know the demand, as I outlined here before; it tends to vary from year to year. Perhaps there were many more taking it than actually felt that they really needed it because it was available very reasonably and, in fact, basically free. So, perhaps we'll see a decline in

numbers, but we're not really sure at this point in time.

So, ask us six or nine months down the road, we can probably give you additional details in terms of numbers. But I think the member's got to recognize that we are trying to provide the service because we see a need for it there as well, and I think everyone agrees that we want to provide the services necessary. Once you get beyond the 5, it's really very much at the discretion of the individual, whether they choose to pursue improving their English or whether they just go to the workplace and live with what they've got.

We don't see it to anyone's advantage to not improve their English so that they can make use of their specific skills. There are some professional organizations in particular that require a much higher level than a 5, and I am sure the member's aware of that. And so we—if we have individuals that are in that category, we certainly would want to make it available to them so that they could try and improve themselves. It's to everyone's benefit. So—but they have to come to us because we can't—it's not a force to do anything, a process, they have to voluntarily come to it. You know, as an ex-educator, people will have to want to learn.

Mr. Kinew: Well, I appreciate the minister's invitation to ask again in six to nine months. And I know that he will be very forthcoming and forthright in question period if we are to follow up with these points again at that time in the future. So perhaps we'll revisit that later on.

Does the minister or the department expect to charge new fees to the participants of these programs? Like, will there be, like, a new cost in addition to the money that's charged during the MPNP application process, whether it be, like, some new upfront cost or new upfront fees when people register for these programs?

Mr. Wishart: Okay. Well, I'll start by circling back a bit. You wondered how much the federal cuts had been.

We can't answer that because they've extended all of their programs 'til June and given us no indication as to where they move after that. So we're in flux, as we've repeatedly said, I guess, this whole process. So, but we do know that those programs will come to an end, whether or not there'll be fees associated for individuals. I said once they get beyond 5, our obligation to them is a little different

than it is in the 1 to 5 range, especially if they're a refugee.

So, whether or not there might be fees will depend a bit on what type of relationship, what type of arrangement we can work out with the agency that is supplying the service. So it is very, very much in a state of flux, and continues to evolve. The additional information, frankly, that they're moving 'til June just came to us now. So, you know, we can't give the member a hard and fast.

I'm sure he wants to know what the future holds on this one. I would suggest that we would, too. Maybe he can join us in writing a nice letter to the federal government asking them what their intention's going to be.

* (16:30)

Mr. Kinew: The minister is anticipating some future questions, but I did want to follow up on some points of clarification first.

So he says that the program's funding has been extended to June, so just—maybe just correct me if I'm wrong here, so that means that the money is still flowing directly to the organizations that are delivering these programs until June, which I guess kind of pushes back the—*[interjection]*—yes, so—which just pushes back the date at which I guess the department would have to overtake funding for these programs.

So then does that push back some of the plans that we've already been discussing here? Can the minister just kind of clarify the situation there?

Mr. Wishart: We will continue moving forward with our process in terms of planning to provide the service. It is possible that the federal government will change their mind, especially if they get significant pushback. As the member probably appreciates, over the summer months, these programs aren't particularly the most active anyway. So we'll certainly have a little bit of time to get everything in place because we don't want, you know, a gap in terms of available services to be substantial. You know, perhaps a few weeks would be conceivable, but we certainly want to make it as continuous a flow as possible.

I would—clearly, given the fact that the federal government is obviously feeling some response to their removal of the services that they've—the cut of the programs across Canada, I would encourage the member to maybe—maybe all the members should be

writing letters to that—to the federal government. We certainly have, to express our concern about this withdrawal of services. The more they hear, the more they, like any government, they should be listening.

Mr. Kinew: So, if the federal government does extend the funding or just continue to fund this program, will the department then consider rolling back this \$500 fee on the MPNP applicants?

Mr. Wishart: No, we have made our decision on the \$500 fee, whether or not this particular service is withdrawn or not withdrawn. We had other areas that we were looking at as well as places that we felt it necessary to spend additional dollars on. We made it clear right from the front—right from the get-go on this, that this money would stay in the area of immigration, whether it was beneficiaries of MPNP, whether it was the—beneficiaries would be refugees, or there's also a gap in terms of those that come to this country as temporary foreign workers. They are denied many types of services, and that was another area we were looking at as well.

We feel that the department has many places that we'd like to see additional investment put in place that would benefit people individually in terms of education or access issues, and so we feel very comfortable with using these dollars to help deal with those barriers, removing those barriers to immigrants in Manitoba.

Mr. Kinew: Can the minister tell us what back and forth has gone on with the federal government on this topic? What has the minister, what has the department, communicated to the federal government in terms of concern, or, you know, any sort of ask to have this program reinstated, and what has been the response to date of the federal government?

Mr. Wishart: Initially, there had been no prior consultation on the part of the federal government. We were as surprised as anyone else when this service was withdrawn. Of course, we responded very quickly in regard to that.

There's been a long series of letters, phone calls, emails, with various levels of government officials. I have brought it up at least twice at federal-provincial ministerial phone calls and once at a meeting, face-to-face meeting. We've expressed our concern about the removal of this service and how highly we valued it.

In fact, I would dare say we've been one of the most vocal provinces in regards to this, especially

expressing the need and the value it is to making sure, in particular, our program, MPNP, which, we think, is a very successful program here in Manitoba and want to continue to develop—the extra value in terms of family members in particular, which is one of the areas that this actually backfilled, if you want to look at it that way, to some degree.

So we've been very vocal on this issue, and certainly pushing for the benefit of either the refugees or the new immigrants. It's been a very important issue for us.

Mr. Kinew: Were or are other provinces receiving this ESL funding from the federal government?

Mr. Wishart: Yes, all provinces would be receiving some element of that. I know that in particular, we did hear some support when we brought the issue up at the fed-prov meetings from Newfoundland and Labrador in terms of support, and a little bit was at the bureaucrat's level from Saskatchewan, right? Yes.

Mr. Kinew: So the minister made reference to a call for proposals for the delivery of these services of these ESL programs. Can he table the RFP that was put out there?

Mr. Wishart: The RFP that we're putting out—isn't out yet—is—actually includes an—a wide range of services, which includes also some mental health services for this particular group, trauma counselling services. When it's available, we can certainly make sure that the member receives a copy of it, but it is not out yet.

Mr. Kinew: Can the minister share the timeline of this RFP coming out?

Mr. Wishart: My staff advises me that probably everything will be in order and we'll have it out in June.

Mr. Kinew: And what is the minister's expectation in terms of the federal government's commitment for this ESL funding going forward?

Mr. Wishart: Well, certainly we've had a couple of discussions, and the previous Immigration minister had made a commitment at a fed-prov. meeting that there would be additional funding in this area. We've not seen anything specific other than generalities in terms of what that might constitute. We are going to continue, and we have a ministerial meeting—when is that, fall? Yes, in the fall—and we will certainly be pushing very hard to make sure that that's back on the agenda.

It is a different issue with different provinces. Some provide a lot more services in this area than others. As the member may well know, Quebec, of course, has a separate immigration agreement from the rest of Canada. So they come to the meetings, they monitor what the discussions are, but they never say anything. So we never get a very good feel for what's going on in Quebec as compared to the rest of Canada.

Probably across Canada, it's ourselves, BC, and Ontario that have the most to say regarding the immigration issues and are probably the ones that push the hardest in regards to that. We'll—some of that, of course, as the member probably realizes, we may have some different players by fall. So we'll have to wait and see, I guess, how many allies we have to do that in regards to that. But we do try to go into those meetings having already touched bases with other provinces that have common interests with us to make sure that we have the allies in place to get our message across with the federal government.

Mr. Kinew: What's the dollar value of the ask? Or what's the dollar value that the minister is targeting, that he would like to see the federal government come forward with to support the ESL education?

*(16:40)

Mr. Wishart: On the whole issue of settlement from the federal government, which includes quite a wide range of things, including schools, additional services that—of this—which this is part, it's about \$38 million a year. Only a very 'mall portion of that is actually specific to ESL. So we can't give the member a specific on that.

I know, particularly related to the Syrian refugees, Manitoba took more than its share, if someone would put that forward, and certainly, on a per capita basis, we stepped up and made sure that we provided a good home for a significant number. I think from a year ago it would be about 1,600—was that the final total? *[interjection]* A little over 1,000, sorry—little over 1,000. And that's disproportionate as in regards to other provinces. And we had made the point with the previous Immigration Minister that we had costs associated with this, 'especial' costs, some of which is in this area and some of which was actually in the school system. They had initially provided some dollars specific to the school system. There was a bit of a promise regarding doing more of that. That hasn't taken place. So, between the multiple things we—that we are looking for additional

funding on in that, we haven't put a specific number on it. We just hope that they maintain the funding at the level that it has been.

Mr. Kinew: So, when the minister makes reference to, I guess, impacts with the K-to-12 system, what's the dollar value there? And then how does that translate to the funding for schools and whether there's these federal government decisions that are being made that may adversely impact the amount of funding which flows through to the K-to-12 system here in the province?

Mr. Wishart: Well, and thank the member for the question.

We just actually finished a round table consultation with the school divisions that are most impacted. The amount of dollars that actually went—and it went kind of through a third-party process; it didn't go directly to the school divisions, went through service providers that worked with the school divisions on that—it appears to be in the \$200,000, perhaps a little more, annual range.

But what we finished the consultation on was best practices related to this because there is quite a range of success, and we don't have—in our education system of training of teachers—don't have specific courses that actually train teachers to be good ESL teachers. So it's kind of an after-market learning process in terms of people's experience in terms of success with that type of program. So, having the opportunity to sit down and talk about the best practices and what's working and what's not working, we certainly hope will be a real eye-opener in terms of getting better results in the K-to-12 system.

We certainly are looking for federal commitment to additional funding. The Syrians were kind of an—I mean, we always have a bit of an ongoing issue with ESL, but the Syrians were a very special group in regards to high needs because many of the kids had not been in the education system for a number of years, if at all. So, getting them up to speed and 'acclimated' and working within the education system was an additional burden. And I know that many teachers and the school divisions themselves stepped up in a major way to make that effort. And I think the success has been—we'll perhaps have a little more information following the roundtables that have gone on, but the success has been pretty good. But we're certainly looking for best practices that we can put in place and we will share those best practices, of course, with those schools, and those

school divisions, and those teachers that are in position to have to provide that service.

So we'll—we're going to work together to try and do the best we can with what resources we are given to work with and some—you know, we do hope that the federal government, in their wisdom as they move forward, brings back additional funding to deal with this. It's to no one's advantage to delay getting either students or individuals up to speed as quickly as we can and getting them to fit into Manitoba, whether it's part of our education system, or whether it's part of our workplace in terms of the economy.

So we're certainly prepared to partner with those involved.

Mr. Kinew: The minister talked about service providers that this federal money flows through. Can he tell the committee who these service providers are?

Mr. Wishart: All of those service providers are members of the MANSO group, so it would be through them.

Mr. Kinew: And on the roundtable consultations with the school divisions, can the minister tell the committee which school divisions participated in that and who was at that roundtable?

Mr. Wishart: It's quite extensive in terms of—we had—MANSO, of course, was part of it, and of course they are the service provider. The post-secondaries were invited to participate themselves, as were some of the youth themselves that had been a part of the process. Regional health authority, in terms of trauma and mental health issues, were also part of the consultation department, as were a number of other departments, including Health. And Health—in our case, Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, our staff related to that also participated in that. So it was quite extensive.

Mr. Kinew: And when the minister talks about reporting back for this group, how is that to be carried out? Like, is there going to be a formal report created out of this process and what's the timeline for that?

Mr. Wishart: There is a report that will be brought forward to the deputy, and it will be distributed after, you know, after we have a look at it, back to all of the players so it'll be available. We anticipate that this will be a completed process by the fall.

Mr. Kinew: So switching gears a bit, the Estimates book talks about the training agreement that was entered into with SkipTheDishes.

I was just wondering, you know, if the minister can update the committee what's the status of that especially since, you know, SkipTheDishes was sold. Was there any sort of impact on the training agreement and where do things stand with SkipTheDishes going forward?

* (16:50)

Mr. Wishart: Okay. This is the third year of a three-year agreement that had been entered into by the previous government, and I congratulate the proponents on their sale. They have met all of their contractual obligations in terms of number of employees trained and number of employees that they have working for them.

Regarding the agreement that was in place, this will be the last year of the agreement and we see no reason that we would continue with any additional programs to them at this point in time.

Mr. Kinew: Just, you know, for my benefit, so this is essentially just a grant to the company to carry out certain training programs internally and to carry out professional development for some of their staffers?

Mr. Wishart: And I thank the member for the question. This is just one of a number of agreements that we enter into all the time with industry in the workplace, during which time they can get up to \$6,000 per employee, not specifically \$6,000, but up to \$6,000, and it's based on the training provided and a period of employment. So there are contractual obligations on the part of their—so it's not an open-ended grant. You must perform to get the money, but, yes, they do get a grant after they have done everything that they're supposed to do.

Mr. Kinew: So this is a contribution agreement more so than just a straight awarding of money. Is that the case?

Mr. Wishart: Sorry, Madam Chair. This is one of a number of agreements that we have with a number of different companies on an ongoing basis. This one was multi-year. Very often they're year to year, so this was, perhaps, in some ways a little bit different in regards to that.

But they're contribution agreements in that certain requirements must be met before the contribution is made.

Mr. Kinew: So what's the department's evaluation of this? Is this considered a success or is this, you know, how do we look at this?

Mr. Wishart: Well, it's not actually complete yet. I don't think the department would have a final evaluation. I guess if you look at the big picture, the company's been successful. We certainly have a service available here in Manitoba and, in fact, across a number of places in the country. I would, you know, in general say that it, at least up front, looks like the company's been successful. Whether we feel we got our money's worth or not, I would think I'd reserve my opinion until we have a chance to do the final evaluation, but that'll be completed probably after the end of the year.

Mr. Kinew: Yes. How will this evaluation be carried out, that the minister makes reference to?

Mr. Wishart: We do quite extensive follow-up related to all of these. So far to date with SkipTheDishes, they've actually exceeded their targets in terms of hiring, which is a really good sign from our point of view. We do follow-ups in terms of tax information they have to make available to us, and so it's a very detailed examination to see whether we feel we got good value in terms of the dollars that we put in the program and the results that they have done.

Certainly, it's a big company compared to—most of these tend to be much smaller. And the different nature in terms of multi-year was something that we don't do an awful lot of, but I believe we've done them in the past as well too. But it's—year-to-year is much more common.

Mr. Kinew: So we often hear about, for 17 years, you know, this and that and et cetera. But would it—would the minister agree that this is something that began during that 17-year period that he would call a success?

Mr. Wishart: I know that every government wants to take credit for what it did during—this was an agreement that was entered into three years ago, so certainly occurred during the NDP.

There was some questions that were raised when the business was sold as to whether or not it should still be continued and whether or not they would meet their contractual obligations. They have done so. Business can perform very well, and I see no reason why it hasn't been a great success now and in the past and hopefully into the future. Time will tell.

Mr. Kinew: And so, you know, the company was sold for—I believe it was \$110 million.

What sort of considerations went on, you know, on the minister's behalf or in the department as to whether, you know, would we still continue flowing these public dollars towards a company that was sold for a very high valuation or whether, you know, there was additional considerations there?

Mr. Wishart: We certainly did do a very thorough review at the time of the sale. It certainly raised a few flags; I guess you want to put it that way in terms of whether we were honoured—obliged, sorry, to continue the obligation. It was a very clear contractual obligation that we were committed in the previous two years and had one more year pending, so we met our end of the deal and they have met theirs.

So I think everyone will go away from this program saying that yes, it was successful. And I wish the company all the best in the future. I think they provide a service that clearly Manitobans and Canadians want to have, so—and they've made money in the process, and they've created a significant number of jobs.

Mr. Kinew: So, I actually got a angry email from a constituent about this because there was a—I think it was a few months back, the company went through some negative publicity around maybe one of their staffers behaving inappropriately. And so I guess the constituent was asking what sort of controls or what sort of monitoring was in place on behalf of the province to ensure that public money that's going to a company like this would, you know—whether there's any sort of, like, expectation that the company behave in the same way that we would want, like say, people in the public sphere to behave, whether there's any sort of—

Mr. Wishart: Well, as we do with any of these agreements with private companies, we try and lay out to make sure that all eventualities get covered. You can never predict everything. I think I vaguely remember some of the issues around that, and it was a bit of a social issue in terms of their behaviour. But they have met their contractual obligations with us, and—in terms of the training process, in terms of the number of hirings, so we meet our obligations to them in return.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I can think of it in other industries, they sometimes have something called, like, a

morality clause, if you will, where like, there's certain expectations attached.

Is there anything like that in terms of this contribution agreement?

Mr. Wishart: There was nothing that related to that in this case.

Mr. Kinew: And with respect to the—

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

HEALTH, SENIORS AND ACTIVE LIVING

* (15:20)

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

This section of Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living.

Does the honourable minister have any opening statement?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I do, Mr. Chairperson, and I thank you for that opportunity. I welcome my critic back, along with other members of the Legislature back to the Health Estimates. Last year, of course, we were all relatively new in our positions and that, of course, always makes things both challenging and interesting in terms of a learning experience.

Now, both myself as the minister, the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) and—well, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) probably had both more experience than both of us put together—but we have all sort of settled into our roles as I look forward to both an important and an invigorating Estimates process.

I am pleased to present the 2016-17 financial Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living.

I, as always, would like to thank those who are involved with the planning, the policy, and the decision-making in relation to the proposed budget. It is not an easy thing, as many members of this House know, to put together a budget for any department, and it's particularly challenging to put together a budget for a department that consumes nearly half of the provincial budget.

But recognizing that there is an imperative to ensure that a balance can be struck between ensuring that the services that are necessary for Manitobans are provided while also ensuring the sustainability of the health-care system for generations beyond those that are present in the Legislature today, we certainly did commit to Manitobans that through this budget we'll continue to deliver quality health services, but also in a sustainable manner to patients, clients, and residents. It is important that sustainability be a part of that vision to ensure that we're not just thinking about the decisions today but also recognizing that they'll impact those in the future.

The proposed 2017-18 budget represents the largest investment in health care in our province's history. Mr. Chairperson, I think that's important to acknowledge, that despite much of the discussion around health and the budget and the implications of the budget, that this is the largest investment in health that our province has ever seen under any government, more than \$6.1 billion.

It includes a number of different elements, not the least of which being consistent with other provinces. In hospital spending, Manitoba spends over 70 cents of every dollar in its hospitals on salaries and benefits for the workforce and front-line service providers who deliver the care to Manitoba patients and others each and every day.

In Budget 2017, there are continued investments in other resources, including \$27.5 million in the negotiated wage increases in the health system. And it's important to remind members—and I know that we had some discussion about this last year, that when you see increases in the health-care system, that doesn't always mean that there are more tests or other volume issues being provided. Quite often, that is a result of salary increases and negotiated salaries, and certainly one of the challenges we've had is to ensure that the increases that come into the department of Health aren't simply consumed by salary increases, but really do provide different services to Manitobans in terms of testing and other sorts of things. So it is important to ensure that we have a good handle on where those finances are going in the department of Health.

For 2017-18, the fiscal year, over \$25 million in new funding has been made in support of operating costs and several capital projects. Money, of course, continues to go in terms of the Women's Hospital; that new facility will include public amenities, admitting services, ambulatory care clinics, fetal

assessment unit, family birth place, family-centred mother and doctor units, a neo-natal intensive care unit, a women and surgical centre, in-patient gynecological unit, staff facilities, and research and education spaces.

There is funding within this budget for permanent replacement of the Selkirk and District General Hospital, which will create a new facility for those in that community and in the region, and I am sure that the members opposite will want to support that. There is a continued investment within other facilities, including the Morden Tabor personal-care home and some additional beds that would have been allocated for PCH to that facility. There's operational funding for the various ACCESS centres within the city of Winnipeg.

* (15:30)

Not to be forgotten, and I think should be highlighted, is there is increased funding for capacity for life-saving dialysis treatment. Something, of course, we've spoken about on the national stage, but more generally about the importance of ensuring that there is support for those who are living with end-stage chronic kidney disease, which we know is a significant challenge in the province of Manitoba. So this budget provides more support there along with an additional \$9.4 million in the Provincial Oncology Drug Program. We know that more Manitobans are being diagnosed with cancer, which, of course, impacts them individually, but their families as well, and so this budget will provide additional support for those families and those individuals who are living and fighting, bravely, cancer.

There is continued funding in the neighbourhood of \$1.7 million for The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act, an act that I was very pleased to see come forward in Manitoba, which had its roots in the opposition, when Leanne Rowat, the former member for Minnedosa, I believe, brought forward that private member's bill. And I was pleased to proclaim the act together with her in the last year.

There are additional resources in place for the Canadian Blood Services plasma blood strategy in the amount of more than \$850,000. Certainly, Manitoba, which was the lead for CBS last year, and not currently the lead, but recognizing—is the important issue of a safe and secure blood supply, as well as co-ordinating organ and tissue donation. Something that was highlighted by my colleague from Brandon West earlier today in his private

member's statement, which spoke not only about the announcement that he attended on behalf of the government yesterday, but his own personal experience with his family when it comes to organ donation.

The budget also involves decisions around Manitoba's Health Sustainability and Innovation Review, knowing that there are a number of changes that have to happen in the health-care system, changes that have happened in many cases in other jurisdictions in other provinces but haven't happened in Manitoba as a result of inaction over the past many years.

We know that those changes are difficult and challenging, but also important. And that's recognized in the clinical and preventative services plan, more commonly now known as the Peachey report, here in Manitoba, which was commissioned under the former NDP government with, I'm sure, the intention of providing better service and more efficient service, more in line and with keeping as what's happened in other provinces. And so I'm sure the member will have questions about the Peachey report and its implementation, and I look forward to a discussion on that matter.

So I want to conclude my opening comments by thanking all of those who work within our health-care system. I'll recognize fully that this is a time of change, but I can tell you that from the many letters that I get in my office—and we measure mail in the Health Minister's office not by the number but by the feet, and we typically get a foot and a half of mail, sometimes two feet of mail, each and every day. Many Manitobans write about their concerns with the health-care system and also some of the good things, of course, that are happening in health care, but often people put pen to paper when they want to express a concern. But we know that—

An Honourable Member: You're getting a lot now.

Mr. Goertzen: The vast majority—including the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), apparently—but we know the vast majority of those who are writing are saying that the system needs to change. We may not always agree on exactly how the system would change, but I don't very frequently get correspondence from individuals who are saying absolutely nothing should change in the health-care system, that we shouldn't be looking at doing things in a different or in a better way, Mr. Chairperson.

So I hope that the discussions and—that are happened here around this Estimates process, for however long we are engaged in them, and also in the House more generally, will be framed with that picture: that we know there needs to be change to better the system and we shouldn't be afraid of change. It doesn't mean we shouldn't question change—I welcome the questions by the members opposite on change, they're doing their job—but I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't look for change within the system.

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

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I don't have any prepared comments, but I would just simply like to put on the record how profoundly disappointed I am in this Health Minister and this government in the cuts in my community and beyond, and how betrayed the people in my community and elsewhere feel by this government, who said clearly and plainly to the people of Manitoba that they wouldn't cut the services that they count on, and they find themselves now with the loss of any point of contact in the health-care system in their community. Other communities see a reduction in service, and to this point we have not gotten clear answers from this minister how service will be protected and how front-line staff will be reallocated or increased or enhanced. So I hope this is an opportunity for us to do that.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic for the—of the official opposition for those remarks.

Under the Manitoba practice, debate of the minister's salary is the last item considered for the department in the Committee of Supply. According to—accordingly, we shall now be—defer consideration for line item 21.1.(a) contained in the resolution 21.1.

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

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

Mr. Goertzen: I'm pleased to welcome to the Chamber and to the table here to assist in answering questions for the member for Concordia and other members of the House, three individuals which they may be familiar with: Mr. Milton Sussman is

the president and chief executive officer of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority—I've asked him to attend with the expectations there might be some questions on the changes that are happening within the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority—Mr. Dan Skwarchuk, who is the assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer for Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living, to, of course, help with some of the budgetary questions; and also our esteemed Deputy Minister Karen Herd for the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

The honourable member for Concordia, can you introduce your staff member?

Mr. Wiebe: Sure, this afternoon I have with me Emily Coutts, who is our research co-ordinator with our caucus.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Although I will try to keep my questions focused as I can, I believe a global fashion might allow us to be a little more flexible.

Mr. Goertzen: I know that that's been the tradition of the House, and I don't want to deviate from that tradition. What I might ask the critic, if he's able—not that I'm not an optimist, but I expect that this will not be our last day in Estimates—but given that possibility that this will extend for several days, perhaps weeks, if he could provide for me the best, as he's able to, certain areas of questioning, I can ensure maybe in a better fashion that we have either the right people within the department either present here or maybe more actively engaged in listening to the discussion to get him an answer in the most expedient way possible.

* (15:40)

Mr. Wiebe: I think that's fair and I can endeavour to do that going forward.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, agreed. Thank you.

It's agreed that the questioning for the department will be—proceed with a global manner to also—to identify the—the critic to identify the areas of—if possible.

Oh, it's going to be global discussion based on—it's going to be that as long as the critic provides the

areas of discussion on—so that the minister can be prepared with the staff.

So the—with all the resolutions to be passed once questioning is concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wiebe: When did the minister become aware of the Peachey report that had been commissioned by the WRHA?

Mr. Goertzen: Just for clarification, the Peachey report was not commissioned by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. It was commissioned by the Department of Health under the previous government.

Mr. Wiebe: When did the minister become aware that the Peachey report had been commissioned?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I don't remember the exact date. It was certainly early on after being appointed as Health Minister that I became aware of Dr. Peachey's work, and the expectation of what it would do for the system. So I don't have an exact date for the member not because I'm trying to be difficult, but because I didn't, I suppose, mark the significance of it in the calendar. But it was early, early on when I became Health Minister. I was not aware of it previous to that.

Mr. Wiebe: When did the minister have his first—sorry—when did the minister and/or the deputy have their first meeting with Dr. Peachey regarding his report?

Mr. Goertzen: My first meeting, although it wasn't planned with Dr. Peachey, as I recall was in Toronto during the Health ministers—federal-provincial-territorial, FPT, meeting in October of last year. It wasn't a planned meeting, but he was in Toronto. I believe he was in the hotel doing something different as part of his work and his consulting work, and we spoke briefly at that time about his work. It wasn't a formal briefing, however, he knew that ministers of Health were in the hotel at that time, and so we spoke at that point.

Mr. Wiebe: How many meetings did the minister and/or deputy minister have with Dr. Peachey to discuss the report?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I don't have an exact number for the member; a recollection that would be over 30.

Mr. Wiebe: Would the minister endeavour to be a little more accurate and maybe take that as notice—the question as notice and maybe get me a little more

information on exactly how many meetings, again, whether that was himself and the deputy minister or just the deputy minister and Dr. Peachey and the dates?

Mr. Goertzen: We can endeavour to do that. I don't know if every meeting was diarized in the form and fashion that the member may be looking for. But, you know, certainly we can do our best efforts to provide that information to the member.

Mr. Wiebe: How many drafts of the report did the minister receive?

Mr. Goertzen: I know Dr. Peachey conducted many, many meetings, not only that involved my deputy minister along with others in the department, many of which would have predated both my time as the Minister of Health and also predated our government being sworn into government.

Prior—I understand, prior to us becoming government, Dr. Peachey, for example, met with the medical director of Manitoba Telehealth. He would have met with the dean and vice-provost of the Faculty of Health Sciences. He met with the Faculty of Health Sciences executive committee. He, of course, met with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's executive committee. He met with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority palliative care group; he met with CancerCare Manitoba; he would have met with the WRHA mental health and addictions group; he met with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority women's and child health.

He met with Emergency Medical Services, Manitoba Nurses Union president—this is prior to us becoming government. He met with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority general surgery; he met with Doctors Manitoba senior staff; he met with the First Nations Metis and Inuit associate dean and assistant deputy minister; he met with Diagnostic Services Manitoba; he did meet with the Ministry of Health, Seniors, and Active Living prior to us becoming government. He met with the Grace and Victoria hospital executives, community area directors, Misericordia, Deer Lodge, and Riverview hospital executives. He met with the Physician and Clinical Assistants of Manitoba executives.

Dr. Peachey, prior to us becoming government, met with Health Sciences Centre and St. Boniface hospital executives, Concordia and Seven Oaks hospital executives; he met with the Ministry of Health, Seniors and Active Living human resources prior to us becoming government; he met with the

Ministry of Health, Seniors and Active Living palliative care; he then met with the Manitoba Nurses Union board of directors; he met with the Winnipeg firefighter paramedics; he met with the Ministry of Health, Seniors and Active Living primary care; the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority research and evaluation. This was all prior to us forming government.

Mr. Wiebe: How many meetings did the minister have with Dr. Peachey to discuss the report?

Mr. Goertzen: There are two elements to the member's question, I believe, if I've understood it correctly. So, Dr. Peachey worked together with a sort of project advisory team on the Peachey report; so, he's the author of it, but there was many people on the team. I would have met with the team on different occasions along with Dr. Peachey, sometimes with him, and sometimes in the absence of him, and the team.

*(15:50)

On the—or the project advisory team was the deputy minister, Karen Herd; Beth Beaupre, the assistant deputy minister; Jean Cox, assistant deputy minister; Bernadette Preun, assistant deputy minister; Marcia Thomson, assistant deputy minister; Avis Gray, assistant deputy minister; Dan Skwarchuk, assistant deputy minister; Dr. Michael Rutledge, the chief provincial public health officer at the time; Mr. Milton Sussman; Ron Van Denakker from the Interlake; Helga Bryant from the northern regional health authority; Kathy McPhail from Southern Health-Santé Sud; Penny Gilson who is chief executive officer of Prairie Mountain Health; Jim Slater from Diagnostic Service Manitoba; Dr. Sri Navaratnam from CancerCare Manitoba; Ben Fry from Addictions Foundation of Manitoba; Mr. Robert Cram, the executive director of Doctors Manitoba was also on the advisory committee; Dr. Brian Postl from the college of medicine, the University of Manitoba; Sandy Mowat, president of the Manitoba Nurses Union; the director of health for First Nations and Social Secretariat, Ardell Cochrane; Sheila Carter is the director of wellness from the Manitoba Metis Federation; Rachel Dunton [*phonetic*], the executive director of the Manitoba Inuit Association; Bob Moroz, president of Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals; Pam Smith, the First Nations and Inuit Health branch from Health Canada; Dr. Brock Wright, senior vice-president of clinical services and chief medical

officer; and then of course Dr. David Peachey from Health Intelligence Incorporated.

That was the group that made up the project advisory committee as formed by the former Selinger government. I had the opportunity to meet with them on, certainly, a few occasions—obviously, it's a large group—not always in the presence of Dr. Peachey because there were times when I think that Dr. Peachey felt it would be best that I meet with the group without his presence to ensure that what they were advising wasn't influenced by his presence. But that significant and wide-ranging group representing doctors, nurses, and many others was put together by the former NDP government.

Mr. Wiebe: How many drafts of the report did the minister receive?

Mr. Goertzen: I don't believe I ever saw a draft of the report. I was provided the final report by Dr. Peachey.

I was not involved in the machinations of leading up to the report. Dr. Peachey and his advisory group did their work based on the best evidence that they had and came up with the conclusions as commissioned by the former government.

Mr. Wiebe: Was the draft made available to members of the minister's office?

Mr. Goertzen: Just for certainty, is the member asking if political staff in the ministry received the report, or is he asking if departmental staff like the deputy see a draft report?

Mr. Wiebe: Both or either.

Mr. Goertzen: My understanding is that officials in the department, you know, including deputy ministers and others that would have been involved in that process would have seen a draft or iterations of the report as it was moving to completion.

Mr. Wiebe: And political staff?

Mr. Goertzen: No.

Mr. Wiebe: When would the deputy minister have seen the first draft?

Mr. Goertzen: Just in terms of some of the timelines—and I want to make sure we get this correct—so my understanding is that Dr. Peachey was commissioned by the former NDP Health ministry in fall of 2015. It was, I understand—although we'll get this confirmed, I understand it was a direct award

contract. And so the former government specifically selected Dr. Peachey to do the report, presumably because they had confidence in his work and the result that he would provide.

So, after the former government selected Dr. Peachey and the work began in the fall of 2015, there were a series of interviews—and I think I listed those for the member—that he undertook and then there was what is referred to as an environmental scan, that they came up to government in the mid part—not up to government, came up to the working group, which I've already listed for the member—in the middle to later part of last year.

* (16:00)

We did not, however, as the minister or any political staff, see any draft reports of the Peachey report, although I was aware relatively early on, I think, of his work but only—my first contact with him was in the fall, in October of last year, during the ministerial meeting in Toronto. And that was not a formal meeting, but sort of an incidental or—I won't call it accidental meeting. I think he may have sought me out in the hotel, but it was not a planned meeting anyway.

Mr. Wiebe: I'm confused. I'm pretty sure I asked when the deputy minister—I'll have to go back and check Hansard. Maybe I'll just ask this again, then: when did the deputy minister receive the first draft? And I guess maybe I'll just also ask then: did the deputy minister have input into the final version of the report?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes. The deputy minister was part of that larger advisory committee or steering committee—for lack of a more precise word—that included the nurses' union of Manitoba and Doctors Manitoba and a whole host of other health-care providers, and each of the hospitals—community hospitals and others in the province—or, in the city of Winnipeg, sorry. And so through that process there was an opportunity for each of those—I understand, members of that advisory committee, to provide input.

So yes, the deputy minister would have provided input during that process as part of that larger committee, but she wouldn't have been the only one doing that. All members of the committee that were formed under the former Selinger government would have had the opportunity to provide input as well.

Mr. Wiebe: When did the WRHA receive the final report?

Mr. Goertzen: Just working through the timeline again for the member.

My understanding that—my understanding is that Dr. Peachey's first visit to Manitoba, well, first visit for the context of this report, he may have visited other times that I'm not aware of, but for his visit for the context of the work that he was engaged in by the former Selinger government, would have been October 15th of 2015. At which time he would have begun his work.

He then conducted field work—the interviews, as I mentioned previously—under the former government, the variety of individuals to the health-care system, including doctors and nurses who were part of the steering committee, and then worked towards a broader environmental scan of the work through 2016, which culminated in his report.

So there was a great deal of work done by Dr. Peachey, and, obviously, I imagine that is why the former government chose to not only select him but, I understand, select him on a direct award contract.

I'm advised from officials that Dr. Peachey had done similar work in Nova Scotia and the Yukon, in the Northwest Territories; he'd done some work in Ontario as well, on health, human resource planning. And I imagine, and I'll be frank with the member, I had never heard of Dr. Peachey prior to becoming the Minister of Health. I think I had asked twice to make sure I got the name correct in terms of the individual, but I imagine that the former Selinger government selected him directly and not through a tender process, I understand, because they had great faith and confidence in his work that he had done in other jurisdictions.

So he began that work in October of 2015, had many, many interviews through the context of the early part of 2016 under the former Selinger government and worked towards an environmental scan and the report which has now been made public for the last several months.

Mr. Wiebe: What date did the WRHA receive the final report?

Mr. Goertzen: As I mentioned to the member opposite, Mr. Peachey arrived in Manitoba to begin his work, having been directly selected by Selinger government to conduct that work in October of 2015. He began field work in January of 2016, which involved various interviews of health professions. He would've continued his work on an environmental

scan throughout 2016, would've been having meetings together with the various committee members, including the president of the Manitoba Nurses Union, Sandi Mowat, along with Bobby Cram, the chief executive officer of Doctors Manitoba, in addition to the various executive officers of the regional health authorities. Of course, who conducted interviews throughout that year with the individuals throughout the health-care system, including the community hospitals and tertiary and other hospitals in Winnipeg and produced an environmental scan.

*(16:10)

Then, in 2016, I understand his finalized report went to the advisory committee, including the president of the Manitoba Nurses Union and Mr. Cram on January of last year—I'm sorry, January of this year.

Sorry. The years blend one into the next.

Mr. Wiebe: When did the minister first discuss closing emergency rooms with the WRHA leadership?

Mr. Goertzen: My recollection and, I think, confirmed by trying to look at schedule is that the briefing that I would've had with Dr. Peachey regarding his report and the recommendation that he made on the allocation of resources within the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, he provided that briefing on January 24th, is both our recollection and the demarcation on the calendar.

Mr. Wiebe: When did the minister first discuss closing emergency rooms with Milton Sussman and other WRHA leadership?

Mr. Goertzen: I think maybe the member could find—provide some clarity. I mean, over the last year—and this would have been the experience for previous Health ministers, as well, you know—there's been discussion with Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and other authorities about the best utilization of their resources.

So I don't want to provide the member an incorrect answer, because he'll no doubt raise that as being incorrect at some point now or in the future, but we do have regular meetings with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and also somewhat regular meetings with the other regional health authorities on their resources and how they're being utilized and what's working well and isn't working well.

I can tell the member that very early on as being Health Minister, I asked the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority—and to their credit they provided me regular updates on the wait times overall in the system and asked for different areas of advice that we could glean in terms of bettering the system. That led me, in fact, to visit the Grace Hospital, their ER, and look at their Oculys system, which is beneficial in providing information on the wait times that exist both in the ERs and also how they interact on the wards to ensure that the entire hospital system is well understanding of the pressures that exist throughout a hospital. So over the course of the year that I've been minister, or almost the year that I've been minister, there have been many discussions with regional health authorities on the usage of the resources that they have, resources that work well or don't work well.

If the minister—or the member is asking specifically about when I was advised about Dr. Peachey's recommendations as commissioned under the former NDP government, and the reallocation of resources to strengthen the ER services in Winnipeg, I'm advised—because I wouldn't want to go off of memory, which is less accurate almost by the day—but I'm advised that that was January 24th.

Mr. Wiebe: What did the Health Minister understand Dr. Peachey's mandate to be?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I can say from the meeting—the initial meeting that I had with him—again, which wasn't a formal meeting in Toronto, but rather sort of a happenstance in the hotel where the FPT was happening with Health ministers, he was quite excited to talk to me about the report that had been commissioned by the Selinger government.

At that point, my recollection from that discussion in the hallway of the hotel, he indicated that he believed that the plan he was working on would properly align the system. He indicated that he didn't believe there'd really been a clinical services plan done in Manitoba, and in particular the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, and that we had fallen behind other provinces in Canada.

And so what he indicated to me was that he believed that the recommendations that he would be providing would provide better care for those in the system, that wouldn't necessarily have huge financial implication, but that he believed the system could be better structured to provide care for Manitobans more in accord with what's happened in other

provinces and other similar-sized cities in Canada. So that is what he described to me at that first meeting in terms of what he was working on.

* (16:20)

Obviously, not having met him before—I mean, I was excited to hear him talk about what his vision was for improving care, and you know, obviously, as the new minister with a mandate to reduce wait times and improve patient care and yet make the system more sustainable, there were certainly some very long and early—long nights in the early part of my time as minister, wondering how it was that that could happen, because for many years I've sat, not in this chair, but in a chair not dissimilar to this one, hearing from the former government about how hundreds of millions of dollars were being poured into the system, and yet I saw the results; it didn't improve the outcome for patient care. So, when my mandate was to provide sustainability to the health-care system yet better care, it's not really something that I'd heard a lot about in my time as an MLA because the former government rarely framed things in that regard and never really indicated that that was possible. They always seemed to link directly the amount of money spent with the quality of care an individual receives.

So, when Dr. Peachey spoke to me in the hotel that afternoon or early evening, I was excited to hear him say that you could better patient care in a way that didn't necessarily require hundreds of millions of dollars to do it. It was as though he was speaking a different language than I'd heard before under the former government, although I give credit to the former government for selecting him directly as an individual to perform the reports.

So I understood from him after that first meeting that he was looking for ways to better structure and align the health-care services in Winnipeg, in particular to provide better patient care in a way that was more efficient and effective.

Mr. Wiebe: So, I think we've got an understanding of what the minister thought the mandate was.

What was the mandate that was given to Dr. Peachey? Was it a document in written form that maybe he could table or just maybe communicate exactly what the parameters of the work that Dr. Peachey was to undertake would be?

Mr. Goertzen: My understanding, Mr. Chairperson, is that Mr. Peachey was commissioned by the former NDP government to create the first clinical and

preventative services plan for the province of Manitoba that had ever been done in the province of Manitoba. This is not—while the exercise could be renewed, of course, over time, it had never been done in the province before.

My understanding, as well, is that he believed his mandate to be one that should be focused on evidence-based decisions and that they should be patient centered. In forming that would result in a better way to optimize and configure the health-care system and would also inform health human resources in terms of the personnel configuration to deliver that optimal configuration to a way that is patient centered and evidence based.

To summarize for the member, I believe that he has expressed verbally and otherwise that he believed his mandate was clearly to deliver the first clinical and preventative services plan

So to summarize for the member, I believe that he has expressed, verbally and otherwise, that he believed his mandate was clearly to deliver the first clinical and preventative services plan in the province of Manitoba to ensure that it is evidence-based but also focused on patient-centered care with an eye to optimizing the alignment or configuration of the health-care system with a mind to ensuring that the proper health human resources were in place for that optimization.

Mr. Wiebe: Did the change in government impact the final report that Dr. Peachey submitted?

Mr. Goertzen: No.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, it's clear, and Dr. Peachey says it over and over again, that, in fact, it did, and I'm surprised to hear the minister say that. Dr. Peachey identifies this as an opportunity for him to make these changes because of the new direction in government and the new particular focus of this government. So maybe I'll just leave it at that, but I'm surprised that the minister wouldn't know that that's the words of Dr. Peachey himself.

Maybe I can just ask, did the minister or any of his staff—political staff—have any role in the formulation of the changed or the updated mandate of the report?

Mr. Goertzen: I recognize this is a sensitive issue and I want to be respectful of that, Mr. Chairperson. You know, we have heated debates in the Legislature—there's a place for that. It's not only the seat of democracy but the seat of respectful debate

and disagreement, but I think the member is putting words in the mouth of Dr. Peachey that might not be reflective of his intent.

I've indicated to the member over the last hour or so of questioning that I did not interact with Dr. Peachey in a way that would either influence or alter his report. The member asked whether or not I'd been involved in the drafting process or saw drafts of the Peachey report. I indicated to him I did not.

I've indicated to him that when I was briefed on Dr. Peachey's report in January I did not ask him to change or alter his report in any way. We accepted it as presented. I did not select Dr. Peachey to conduct the report. I'd never heard of Dr. Peachey prior to becoming the Minister of Health. I think that it would be fair to surmise that I was probably as hands-off on a report as a minister could be when it comes to the Peachey report.

* (16:30)

Now, perhaps, not knowing exactly where the member is quoting Dr. Peachey from, it might be that he was indicating that this was a unique opportunity because he didn't believe that the former government would actually implement his report, that they wouldn't have the political will to do it. I don't know if that's what he was referring to or not. If he was referring to that, then I think that might not be a bad discussion to have about his comment, but I didn't see drafts of the report. I didn't write drafts of the report; I didn't alter drafts of the report. It was briefed to me on the date that I indicated to the member. I accepted the report as was presented, and we publicly released the report almost immediately after having it, exactly as was presented. It was put on the Internet for the world to see, almost—not almost—exactly as was briefed to me.

Now I know that there were members, even in the media, who suggested—and I have lots of friends in the media; I respected the job they do—but even in the media had—there were those who said that somehow the government would politically manipulate the report and would implement it in some form or fashion that would benefit them politically. And, in fact, I won't quote exactly what the particular media said, but I think they suggested that the government wouldn't have the tenacity to implement the Peachey report exactly as presented because governments had a history of sort of muddying around politically in issues of health.

And so for the member to suggest that somehow me or my staff influenced this report—again, didn't see the draft, didn't alter the draft, accepted it was presented by Dr. Peachey, put it online and implemented it as was recommended by Dr. Peachey. That might be unique in Canadian history; I don't know because I've not studied the history of clinical services plans in Canada. But I would say that if the member is looking for a demonstration of a government that accepted a plan based on evidence and not on politics, he would have to look no further than this particular example because we accepted it based on the evidence that was presented, not on political ramifications that might flow from it.

Mr. Wiebe: Does the closing of an emergency room constitute a restructuring of a facility?

Mr. Goertzen: I'm not sure if the member is speaking from a legal perspective, or a technical perspective, or of a community observation perspective. I mean obviously, I think that members in a community would see the repurposing of an ER to another kind of facility, or the closure of an ER, as something different than what existed before. But I'm not entirely sure if the member is talking about from a legal perspective or a public perception—perspective, but perhaps he can clarify.

Mr. Wiebe: Well I'm not a lawyer, just a member of the Legislature asking on behalf of the people of Manitoba and thought the question was fairly clear. Is the closing of an emergency room a restructuring of a facility?

Mr. Goertzen: And I appreciate the member asking the question, but I want to restate that, and I said it in question period, and, you know, question period is what it is in terms of the legislative process. And it can get heated and it can get intense, and I've participated in both sides of the House on that intensity, so I'm not being critical of that. And I do want to say to the member that when he asks questions on behalf of his constituents, I respect that. I think that that is an important part of his job, and I know he is doing his job, and I don't begrudge him for a minute that work. And so I want him to know that I entirely respect the work that he needs to perform as a critic, having sat in that chair before.

I mean, I think it would be fair to say that it is—would be considering—it would be—certainly be considered a repurposing of a portion of the system, recognizing that repurposing has happened in different forms and different fashions over the

years. I'm reminded of the concentration of procedures relating to different things that have happened in the health-care system under the former government where they brought into St. Boniface and into Health Sciences Centre other treatments that, prior to that, had been dispersed throughout the city of Winnipeg, and that may have resulted in criticism at the time; frankly, I don't remember. But there's no question that some would look at this as a reconfiguration, certainly, of the hospitals that are impacted.

Mr. Wiebe: When did the WRHA inform each hospital and/or health centre of the ER closures and subsequent service rearrangements? And maybe we'll just start with when did the WRHA inform Concordia of the closures to the emergency room and restructuring of the hospital?

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

And I—when I mentioned earlier that the community hospitals hadn't been involved in the interview process with Dr. Peachey as he was doing his work on the report, after having been selected by the Selinger government to do that work, he would've had discussions and interviews with the various community hospitals and their leadership, as he was doing the work towards the environmental scan and ultimately to the final report.

My understanding is that the nature of—and, of course, it's important to remember, and, I think, that when the report was released publicly by our government and put on the Web for Manitobans to see and to discuss to the extent that it interested them, it indicated, on page 62, that Dr. Peachey had been recommending that there be three full-service ERs within the health-care system and that there be two sub-acute units in the city of Winnipeg—sorry, three ERs in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, two sub-acute units, and that there be specialization as well for transitional care for other facilities.

So there would've been very early on an indication in terms of what the Peachey report recommended, and, obviously, I know that there was discussion among community hospitals at that time about the report. It wouldn't have delineated specifically which would've been the third ER, but, certainly, community hospitals would've been aware that Dr. Peachey had recommended a reconfiguration of the emergency room services in the province very early on, with the release of that report—to the extent that they weren't feeling that, leading up to

the environmental scan and the interviews and discussions that happened for almost a year and a half previous to that, they would've gotten some indication, I would expect, from the Peachey report and the reconfiguration diagram, as outlined on page 62.

Mr. Wiebe: So, when did the minister—or the WRHA, I guess, would be the more accurate question. When did the WRHA actually inform those community hospitals? So let's maybe go to Misericordia. When did the WRHA inform Misericordia that the decision had been made to close their urgent-care centre?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, my—again, my recollection isn't—the report, after it was presented to myself, by Dr. Peachey, it was my feeling that that report should be made public early on. I thought it was important that there be discussion in the health-care system about it, and that's why we moved quickly to put it on the Internet and to put out a release—a news release, that it had been received.

* (16:40)

So, no doubt, those involved in the health-care system and, certainly, the community hospitals and their executives and foundations and others working within those community hospitals would've been anticipating the report, having been part of the long interview process following the appointment of Dr. Peachey by the Selinger government. The—that publication of the report would have, of course, provided a lot of discussion within the community.

The outline in terms of what the emergency services should look like according to Dr. Peachey was well presented in his report. It didn't specify beyond St. Boniface and the Health Sciences Centre, which are the primary tertiary hospitals for Manitoba, which other ER specifically within the diagram would be identified, but did identify that there would be, or should be, two sub-acute facilities beyond the three emergency rooms. And I think some of the surprise, such as it was a surprise and I'm not sure that that's the correct phrasing of it, wasn't so much about the outcome of the report, because we'd placed the report on the Internet, so those who are interested in health care generally or who are working in the system would have had the opportunity to see the recommendations and would have been discussing that among themselves and with their colleagues in the health-care system. I think what some people may have been surprised about is that the recommendations were accepted,

which is, you know, maybe a sort of a sad state of political and government affairs that people are actually surprised that when experts are hired and they do extensive research and they spend months of time interviewing and doing analysis and coming up with evidence-based, patient-centred recommendations that it would actually be a surprise that government would accept those recommendations.

I think that that's unfortunate that anyone would feel that such an undertaking would simply be ignored and maybe be changed for political purposes, and I get a sense from the member's first hour and a half of questions that he had a feeling that somehow government was involved with changing of the report or trying to alter its recommendations. Coming from that, we had, of course, after it was publicly reported, we had media who suggested it would never be adopted in its entirety because it would be politically difficult. So I hope in some ways that we've changed the dialogue a little bit and that those who are undertaking evidence-based, patient-centred research will know that their work will be analyzed and acted upon for the evidence that it provides, not for any political calculations, because I think for too long in Manitoba, but not just in Manitoba, there have been too many decisions that have been made around health care that were based in politics and not in sound policy and that has resulted in a great deal of problems and misalignment in the health-care system in Manitoba. And so I hope that to the extent that either the member or the public or others were surprised that we would actually act on evidence, that it's an indication to those who for many years have wished government would act on evidence that that will continue in the future.

Mr. Wiebe: So, by the minister's timeline, the advisory committee was—received the report in January 2017; the decision was made at some point to which of the hospitals—again, referencing page 62, it's unclear in the report, so it's a political decision now and it's a decision of the minister. He decides which hospitals get closed.

When does he inform Concordia Hospital, Misericordia hospital, Victoria hospital, Seven Oaks, HSC and St. Boniface of the changes that they are to be expecting? Oh, sorry, and the Grace.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I think it's important to be careful in the language that we use. And, again, I very much appreciate that change is difficult, and

yes, it's disruptive. And I don't shy away from that; and officials in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority haven't shied away from that; Dr. Peachey didn't shy away from that. We recognize change is difficult and it can be disruptive. Waiting in an ER for eight hours can be disruptive as well.

But the member talked about us closing hospitals. And it may have just been an accident, and he may have misspoken, but members of his caucus, during question period, have done and said the same thing: that hospitals are closing. I—the member in his caucus has spoken in the past about Seven Oaks being closed. And, you know, I've had members of the community—I had the opportunity to go to McDonald's with the MLA for Burrows, the potential future leader of the party. She hosts a little McDonald's get-together every week, carrying on a long tradition in that riding, in that area, from the previous MLA, so she asked if I would join her and to hear from her constituents, and so I was happy to do that, not to advertise for McDonald's, but I was happy to go and meet with her constituents there. And a couple of the constituents came and said, well, we hear you're closing Seven Oaks. And they'd gotten that information from hearing members of the NDP speak about the closing of a hospital.

And that's a very, very difficult and dangerous thing to say, because the hospital at Seven Oaks, or the other hospitals, are not closing. In fact, I would argue that some of them, and Seven Oaks, in particular, where it will focus on dialysis and transitional care for Concordia, could become stronger parts of the health-care system than they've ever been before and that their future is such that they might—years from now, we might look back and go, they are a stronger part of the Winnipeg health-care system that they've ever been. And so, I think, we need to be very, very careful in the language that we use when it comes to the repurposing, recognizing that it's an emotional issue, recognizing people may have concerns, and they meet—need to express those concerns. I understand all of that, and I respect the work that the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) and others have to do.

But let's be careful in the language that we use, because to suggest to the public that a hospital is closing down, you know, in some ways, can be detrimental to care. And also there's timelines that are involved, even with the reconfiguration that is happening within some of the community hospitals; those timelines aren't—and the member, I'm sure, will ask about timelines yet, but they're not immediate,

and there are other things that have to happen. And, to suggest that something has been closed, let alone a hospital, I think, is—I don't want to say irresponsible, because I don't think it was said in a purposeful way, I think, it was probably an inadvertent comment, and I'll take it as an inadvertent comment, unless I sort of see it published in a different way or repeatedly. But let's not make any mistake: there are not hospitals that are being closed.

In fact, I think, they're open. You know, we could talk about hospitals that were closed by other governments, but we want to be clear that these hospitals are not being closed, and is—fact, I would hope that in the future, we would look back and go, those hospitals have become stronger than they ever were, because they were able to specialize in the things that they're very good at and have already been shown to be very good at, and that they will not become a diminished part of the health-care system, but, in fact, will become a much stronger part of the health-care system.

Now, I know it's hard to think in those terms, because that's a future state and that's down the road a bit, and there are changes that have to happen before that. But my strong hope and my desire is that these hospitals, far from closing, will find themselves stronger parts of the health-care system than they are even today.

* (16:50)

Mr. Wiebe: Can the minister talk us through the decision-making process behind closing the Concordia ER, and maybe just point out a few examples from the Peachey report or areas that Dr. Peachey identified as being the reasons why Concordia emergency room would be closed.

Mr. Goertzen: The member will know from reading the Peachey report that the Peachey report sets out how the system should look, how the system should be designed, so, on page 62, it will provide a diagram of the three EDs—of three EDs, which would be a 24-7. It would have identified, of course, St. Boniface specifically and HSC because they are tertiary hospitals in the province of Manitoba, the largest hospitals in terms of volume in the city of Winnipeg.

It then identified another acute-care community hospital, and then it identified two additional sub-acute hospitals but didn't name them in terms of which hospitals they should be, but clearly set out the system.

Now, I'm sure that the member could talk to some of his colleagues in his caucus and they could have differences of opinions about which ones should have become sub-acute or otherwise. My understanding is that the recollection on the selection of which hospitals would have urgent care centres so it would become sub-acute was based on the volume—was based on volume and geographic distribution.

Mr. Wiebe: Can the minister explain the decision to close the Misericordia Urgent Care Centre?

Mr. Goertzen: My understanding from officials in terms of the recommendation that they made, there was a number of factors, of course. Dr. Peachey identifies in his report the structure of the system and the desire to have two sub-acute or urgent care centres in the city of Winnipeg.

Obviously, geography plays a part in that decision. Having one located in the south part of Winnipeg and having one located in the north part of Winnipeg, of course, is important in terms of geographic distribution and the ability to access care.

I do think that there is some misunderstanding in terms of the usage that currently takes place at Misericordia, at the Urgent Care Centre. There, I think, is a feeling among some members and it arose in question period today that everyone who is attending the Urgent Care Centre at Misericordia is somehow within a walking distance of the Urgent Care Centre at the Mis, and that if they're not able to walk to the Misericordia that they will be walking to one of the ERs that are within the nearest—the distance.

The advice that we received from officials was, of course, (1) about ensuring that, given the design that Dr. Peachey had presented following his work after being commissioned by the NDP to do his work, was that you'd want to have, of course, a sub-acute unit geographically placed in places that it makes sense, and then one in southern Winnipeg and one in northern Winnipeg, I think, intuitively makes sense, recognizing that you have the Grace doing acute work on the west side and then the two tertiary hospitals doing their work.

But the point, more clearly, about the individuals who are presenting to the Misericordia, my understanding from health officials who are able to make a determination about who is presenting at facilities in terms of where they live is that those who are coming to the Misericordia are fairly evenly

distributed in terms of their residence across the city. And so, it's not as though everyone who is going to the Urgent Care Centre at the Mis will—is within a two- or three-block radius of the facility. In fact, we think what is happening, as advised by officials, is that individuals from across the city are identifying the Urgent Care Centre as being a good place to go in terms of the type of care or the quality of care and are self-selecting to go to Misericordia.

Now, the expectation is that with an additional, so two, urgent-care centres located both at the south end of Winnipeg and at the North End of Winnipeg, that instead of individuals who are coming from all over the city to come into the Misericordia, they will select to go to either the northern location at Seven Oaks which is not closing—I want to repeat that—or they'll choose to go to the Vic in the south end of Winnipeg, whichever is closest. But we—my understanding from officials is that the—those who are coming to visit the Misericordia Urgent Care Centre aren't coming specifically from the local community, although, of course, there'll be some of those, but they are actually quite evenly distributed in terms of their residence right across the city.

Mr. Wiebe: What's the current wait time—average wait time at Concordia Hospital?

Mr. Goertzen: Just to—while we're seeking that information for the member, I should also add, in terms of, you know, the selection process, certainly one of the reasons that officials recommended the selection of the Grace emergency room as the third 24-7 ER was of—partly because the emergency room is currently under construction, been proceeded with by the government and that it'll provide additional capacity.

One of the questions that have come up in question period by several members is that there isn't additional capacity being added to the emergency-room system, when that is not correct, and that the Grace Hospital emergency room will be adding capacity. In addition to that, the Grace has an MRI, and one of the things that we saw from the University of Manitoba report from the health policy group at the U of M is that throughput, the ability to have people getting tests and moving through an emergency room, is an important part in emergency-room wait times and that, if you can have the diagnostic services in a facility, an emergency room, that if you can do the diagnostics at the ER, that you are in a better position to not have to move them to another facility and then to clear up those rooms for others who are waiting in the emergency room.

So, the selection of the Grace was partly because of the expansion of the facility, but also because it has an MRI on-site.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Piwniuk): The hour being 5 p.m., the House is now adjourned—*[interjection]* I'm sorry.

The hour being 5 p.m., the House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 25, 2017

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