

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

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Speaker*

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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	Ind.
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	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
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
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, Hon.	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>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 15, 2018

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 229—The Intoxicated Persons Detention Amendment Act

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): I move, seconded by the member for Kewatinook (Ms. Klassen), that Bill 229, The Intoxicated Persons Detention Amendment Act, be read for the first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, today, I'm bringing forward Bill 229, The Intoxicated Persons Detention Amendment Act, and the reason for this is to make communities safer and legislation clearer.

Thank you.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I rise today to table the report to the Legislature, pursuant to section 63.4 of The Financial Administration Act, relating to supplementary loan and guarantee authority, as of March 31, 2018.

Madam Speaker: Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Roman Swiderek

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): I rise today to recognize and honour one of my amazing and talented constituents from Riel. Roman Swiderek is a local, national and internationally renowned artist. Roman was born in Łódź, Poland, and worked as a designer and political artist before immigrating to Canada in 1961.

For over 40 years, Roman has engaged in extensive contributions to the arts, working in a variety of media such as oil, watercolour and fashion design. Roman's work has been

displayed in Poland, across Canada and throughout Manitoba. His artwork has been commissioned by various organizations, including CanWest Global Communications, Cambrian Credit Union, Winnipeg Goldeyes and St. Mary's Academy.

Roman has worked on numerous set designs such as the Rainbow Stage, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, the royal Manitoba theatre company and the CBC. His artwork has been exhibited at a variety of venues, including the Assiniboine conservatory, Eaton's fine-gallery of fine art, Chateau Lake Louise in Alberta and the Centennial Concert Hall.

During the Red River flood of 1997, Roman worked on a series of paintings that raised over \$100,000 for Manitoba flood victims. His paintings were purchased by Wawanesa Mutual Insurance Company and donated to the City of Winnipeg.

These paintings are featured in the Red River valley interpretive centre in Ste. Agathe, Manitoba. The large reproduction of the flood of the century original watercolour paintings capture the spirit of the people who fought so hard to save their communities in 1997.

Roman is best known for his vast collection depicting images of Winnipeg scenes and landscapes. Many of his paintings are available as art cards, which include vignettes about the city in both official languages and are popular with tourists looking to take a piece of Winnipeg back home with them.

I am very pleased to acknowledge and honour Roman Swiderek, a man who shares his immense artistic talent to enhance and enrich Winnipeg culture, and I ask all my colleagues in the Manitoba Legislature to honour Roman Swiderek, who is here with us today.

West End Sweep Off

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): For more than 25 years now, the West End BIZ has partnered with schools in the West End to get a jump on spring cleaning in our community.

On April 26, students and staff from Isaac Brock School and General Wolfe School took to the streets to participate in the annual West End Sweep Off. These students, armed with brooms and bags, were

eager to get at the sand, dirt and garbage along West End streets.

Through the day, hundreds of bags were filled with garbage and recyclables collected from the walkways, boulevards and parks. Kilometres of sidewalks in the area were swept clean, allowing the West End to put forward its best face as one of Manitoba's most diverse, tolerant and dynamic communities.

I want to recognize the role of the West End BIZ, which always does a wonderful job with this event. The West End BIZ brings together sponsors to help with the cost of supplies, T-shirts, lunch and even an honorarium for the grad committees of the participating schools.

I'm a proud supporter of the West End BIZ because the West End BIZ supports the community. This summer I will once again partner with the West End BIZ to help remove graffiti from our neighbourhood.

On May 5, the entire community got involved, as the Spence Neighbourhood Association, Daniel McIntyre-St. Matthews Community Association and great local partners brought together people from across the West End to pitch in and clean up the rest of the community.

Events like the sweep off and the community cleanup are now days that West Enders anticipate. It is truly exciting to see folks of all ages and backgrounds doing their part. Hopefully, it will also send a message to others to change their ways and stop littering.

Colleagues, please join me in congratulating representatives of the West End BIZ, as well as students from Isaac Brock and General Wolfe who've joined us here today.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Minto.

Mr. Swan: Madam Speaker, I'd ask for leave to include the names of our guests in Hansard.

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

West End BIZ Sweep Off participants: Jordan Borromeo, Gloria Cordwell-Heppner, Susan Dang, Nicholas Genaille, Alicia Klimenko, Joseph Kornelsen, Carlos Mota, Tony Nguyen, Paige Ortiz, Erica Zamora

Springfield Minor Hockey Association

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure):

Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to recognize another successful year of the Springfield Minor Hockey Association, with many significant accomplishments this season. They include the atom A1 rural provincial championship, an Eastman Minor Hockey League bantam B league championship plus two Eastman Minor Hockey League atom A and novice C consolation victories.

The Springfield Minor Hockey Association provides a high-quality organized hockey experience for over 340 children and youth. They field 22 teams and ensure a safe and fun experience while developing a physical fitness, teamwork and social skills. With an increased number of female teams this year, Springfield Minor Hockey Association continues to promote the game of hockey to all eligible players within our area.

Of course, these programs and accomplishments are supported by numerous dedicated and hard-working coaches, managers and volunteers. This is specially good because we know that the promotion and development of exercise and sport at a young age encourages an active approach to maintain a healthy lifestyle, not only for our children and youth, but also for the parents who are responsible for setting an example.

Among those who have been highlighted for the outstanding contributions are Cory Nakamura, who was awarded the Don Nixon Coach of the Year Award, and Curtis Boughton, who was awarded the Springfield Minor Hockey Association Volunteer of the Year Award.

Madam Speaker, please join me in recognizing the hockey players of the Springfield Minor Hockey Association and thanking all their volunteers for the dedication to our youth and to our community.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Schuler: Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to have the guests' names placed in Hansard.

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

Springfield Minor Hockey Association members: Clayton Kotzer, president; Gavin Schledewitz, player, peewee division; Lawrence Schledewitz, coach, peewee division.

Outside Looking In

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): I would like to take this moment to highlight 95 of our amazing Kewatinook youth: 27 are from Garden Hill First Nation, 32 from Wasagamack First Nation and 36 from St. Theresa Point First Nation.

For the past eight months, these youth participated in an after-school program called Outside Looking In. OLI is a high school accredited dance program providing the opportunity for indigenous youth and their communities to engage in long-term intensive education through dance. It is a national-based organization that engages youth in regular physical activity and it promotes healthy eating habits. They teach youth about commitment, perseverance and hard work. For the youth that have been in this program since it came four years ago, they have had much success in academic achievement, they have been empowered, they know they can have a prosperous future.

The youth practise dancing twice a week, but the program requires them to excel in academics as well. In their first year of offering, the students learned, first hand, that this was the real deal when some of them were removed from the program for failing to maintain their grades or for non-attendance. Rest assured, when it was offered again in September, those students made sure to excel.

* (13:40)

This will—this all will culminate in a final performance at the Sony Centre in Toronto on May 26. Everyone is welcome.

These 95 youth, plus their chaperones, are already in Toronto on a two-week dance camp preparing for that and are having the experience of a lifetime. True to their call for academics, there is also a teacher with the group to ensure they keep up with their studies.

Let's congratulate those youth for their efforts and wish them the best of luck in Toronto.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Kewatinook.

Ms. Klassen: Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to include the names of the participants and their chaperones into Hansard.

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

Outside Looking In participants. Garden Hill First Nation: Talia Beardy, Cassie Flett, Evan Flett, Marcus Flett, Brett Harper, Calvina Harper, Darlene Harper, Penelope Harper, Tisha Harper, Davis Hudson, Kristen Keno, Kyle Keno, Mark Keno, Mindy Keno, Sunshine Keno, Trenton Linklater, Montanna McPherson, Dray Monias, Gwen Monias, Kara Monias, Kaylin Monias, JP Nattaway, Junior Nattaway, Tommy Nattaway, Kelly Taylor, Linda Taylor, Qaylon Wood; chaperones and supporters: Sandra Hudson, Kurt Mason. Wasagamack First Nation: Adria Day, Chloe Harper, Evan Harper, Harris Harper, Ivory Harper, Joey Harper, Roberta Harper, Sheldon Harper, Bianca Knott, Dorrie Knott, Erwin Knott, Jeremiah Knott, Ethan Little, Quentin Little, Chanel Manoakesick, Chantel Mason, Chris McDougall, Cody McDougall, Ira Mcdougall, Joanny McDougall, Rodney McDougall, Sarah McDougall, Jasmine Monias, Reva Monias, Dawson Rae, Briana Wood, Chasity Wood, Desiree Wood, Harmony Wood, Jade Wood, Latasha Wood, Michael Wood; chaperones and supporters: Nathan Knott, Tashlin Knott, Harriet Wood, Mark Wood, Sarah Wood. St. Theresa Point First Nation: Kendal Evans, Charnelle Flett, Jorin Flett, Kyla Flett, Nadia Flett, Tamara Flett, Justin Harper, Kaidey Harper, Kayden Harper, Kayla Harper, Keyshawn Harper, Olivia Harper, Solomon Harper, Teslee Harper, Amber Knott, Beverly Monias, Cody Monias, Jerrett Monias, Leona Monias, Kateri Manoakesick, Louis Manoakesick, Cristina Mason, Gabriel Mason, Kiiya Mason, Sonny Mason Jr., Tegan Mason, Torri Mason, Zareck Mason, Alden McPherson, Aleesha Wood, Bryce Wood, Darienne Wood, Joshua Wood, Keri Wood, Kyra Wood, Marena Wood; chaperones and supporters: Kirsten Flett, Jonas Flett, Moyra Francis, Christine Harper.

Investment in Public Schools

Mr. Kelly Bindle (Thompson): Madam Speaker, our government has announced that it will be investing \$1.3 billion in Manitoba public school divisions for the 2018-2019 school year. This investment provides strong support for our school divisions with an increase of \$6.6 million. This funding includes a 7.4 per cent increase for Mystery Lake school division in my riding, amounting to a hike of close to \$2.3 million.

After 17 years of mismanagement under the previous NDP government, when Manitoba's high school dropout rate was second highest in Canada and scores in science, reading and math were the

lowest among the provinces, we are carefully steering toward a quality education for all students.

Manitoba is currently the only province where collective bargaining is conducted exclusively at the local level between each school board and its teachers' association. Our government is reducing that to one provincial agreement, instead of 38.

In order for the Province to tackle the massive debt created by the NDP—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bindle: —that doubled over their last six years in office, our government is bringing in the public sector sustainability act to freeze public sector wages for two years, with increases of 0.75 and 1 per cent in the third and fourth years.

Our PC government is also leading by example by declining to accept MLA pay increases for the entire four years of this mandate. Furthermore, 20 per cent of ministerial pay is being withheld and will only be paid out if debt reduction targets are met.

When is an NDP myth not effective, Madam Speaker? When people see through it.

Opposed to the wage freeze, the NDP are deliberately trying to dupe teachers by sharing fake news of lost income, fear mongering about fake pension reductions and by calling the freeze a cut—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bindle: —in hopes of angering them into participating in protests, because, Madam Speaker, a cut sounds way worse than the truth.

The truth is our government is investing more in education than ever before, more than the NDP ever did, and I look forward to hosting the Minister of Education in Thompson later this week to discuss these and other exciting investments in our North.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mental Health and Addictions VIRGO Report Recommendations

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, speaking of delays, Madam Speaker, we know that the VIRGO consulting report was originally due at the end of December. However, it was only released yesterday. Now we know why there was such a delay.

Apparently, the government has been sorting through a series of version control challenges. What the layperson says: having a secret version of the report, and when you find something in that secret version you don't like, you delete it and you release another one and try and hope that none in the media or otherwise know anything about that.

Now, this is happening against a backdrop in our province with an ongoing meth crisis. There's many parents across the province who are worried about their kids who are struggling with mental health issues in schools. They demand better. They want real action from this government.

But how can they have confidence in this government when the Premier is clearly doctoring their VIRGO report? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, accepting none of the premise of the member's assertion opposite—he, after all, did cover up some elements of his own background while seeking this position he now holds.

I would mention to him that the report we made public was the report authored by Dr. Brian Rush, a noted expert in an area of importance to Manitobans, mental health and addictions, and that it is a report that was finalized by the author and it was released to the public.

I can't recall an NDP analysis, in 17 years, of our mental health and addictions challenges, Madam Speaker, but if one was done, I'd encourage the member to make it public, as we have done with this report.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, Madam Speaker, it seems like just yesterday we were in this House when the Premier stood and said that the recommendation to create a safe injection site, and I quote, is not one which is in the VIRGO report. End quote. Now, in fact, that was yesterday. But it turns out the Premier was wrong. It actually was a recommendation in the VIRGO report, and as a result of the political interference of this government, the people of Manitoba—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —are not seeing an accurate representation of what the report's authors intended.

Again, we know that the Premier is opposed to safe injection sites, safe consumption sites, not because of the evidence, because there's clear evidence that they work, not because of expert advice, because the consensus among experts is that they work, including the expert that they commissioned, but, in fact, that he holds a personal ideological objection.

If the Premier is interfering with the findings of this report, how can families in our province have confidence that this government is going to do the right thing on mental health and addictions?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member's comments reveal more about his own cynicism—they do about the actual facts, Madam Speaker. The fact is that the author of the report has stated publicly that he made the decision on the final report, and so the member can't have it both ways. He can't suck and blow at the same time. He is attacking the integrity of the report's author on the one hand and on the other hand suggesting the recommendations the report's author did not make should be enacted. Now, he can't have it both ways.

If he's trying to discredit the author of the report, he's doing an excellent job of it. But we're more concerned about bettering the services for those who need addictions service and mental health in our province. That's why we commissioned the report, and that's why we'll be doing an analysis and determining a course of action going forward.

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

Mr. Kinew: Here's what we know, Madam Speaker. We know that the expert recommended the addition of a safe injection site in Manitoba. That was in the report when it was presented to the Premier, when it was presented to this government, at the end of March. However, at some point between the end of March and when a subsequent version, which was controlled by this government, was released yesterday, we know that that recommendation disappeared.

So what are Manitobans to think about that? Is it that the Premier has interfered? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: Most likely. Is it that the Premier's ideological opposition to this one particular harm-reduction measure has in some way compromised the outcome of this process? That's a

big concern, Madam Speaker, because, again, people in our province are concerned about their loved ones. They're concerned about their kids who are struggling with mental health issues.

When they look to this government, they expect a government that is going to take action and follow on expert advice, but how can they believe that the government is going to follow that expert advice when they're deleting sections of this VIRGO report?

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, Madam Speaker, the member attacks the integrity of the author, who says he did not have enough data to defend it one way or the other in an interview yesterday. He said: I didn't have the data. To me, the release error is unfortunate because of the amount of work that went into the report.

Well, I would agree, Madam Speaker, but I'm more concerned about the report. But the member goes further, attacks my integrity and impugns my integrity by suggesting that somehow I or my minister or government had some role in the final report's construct, which is blatantly false.

Madam Speaker, I have to ask the member, how does his record speak to his ability to openly convey matters of accuracy around his own personal record? And if it doesn't, if it doesn't speak to his integrity—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —I suggest that a member who inhabits a glass house not throw stones.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to proceeding with oral questions, we have some guests that have just joined us in the gallery.

We have seated in the public gallery from St. John's-Ravenscourt School 45 grade 9 students under the direction of Jock Martin. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum).

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

* * *

* (13:50)

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, you know, the Premier does raise an interesting point when he says that the report's author claimed that he did not have enough data, not enough data on the usage of drugs in our communities here in Manitoba, but that only speaks to the poor job that this government did in commissioning this expert.

There's no credibility in a report if the government did not task their researcher to look at the data on drug use when they commissioned a report on addictions in our province. It's very simple.

Yesterday's bungling of the release of the report was bad enough, but when they attempted to clean up the matter we hear that the government did not share information on there being a safe injection site proposal in the province and they did not share information on drug use with the authors of this report on addiction.

Given the mishandling that the Premier and his ministers—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —have had on this topic so far, how can the average family in our province have any confidence that they are going to do the right thing when it comes to mental health and addictions?

Mr. Pallister: Well, let's talk about doing the right thing, Madam Speaker. The member speaks from a pedestal that's crumbling underneath him. Seventeen years in government and not an analysis of mental health or addictions' problems, which were real, which existed, which were worsening in our province—not a word, not a report, not an analysis, and now he speaks about bungling. Madam Speaker, I'd suggest that was bungling.

Commissioning a report to look into something which we consider a serious problem which affects many Manitobans and their families, I think that's a good idea.

As far as the expertise the member alludes to, that in terms of releasing reports the previous government was more expert on covering up reports. I give you, for example, a decade of covering up on the Tiger Dams purchases—untendered, poor quality products, no reason to do it, but they covered up the report for a decade, Madam Speaker. No report at all. They didn't bungle the release of it; they simply covered it up.

We're releasing our reports.

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

Mr. Kinew: Again, Madam Speaker, the Premier can get as angry as he wants but he still can't answer the question.

How are you going to commission a report into addictions in—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —this province and not even ask the report's author to look at the statistics on drug use? It seems so elementary. How are you going to ask for advice on how to pursue a harm-reduction strategy and not share information with the report's author about harm-reduction proposals that are currently in place in the province of Manitoba?

Now, there are numerous asks in this—or, recommendations in this report that have made it past the government's first cut. One is to add additional short-term stabilization beds, but will this Premier deliver? That is the question that families in our province are asking.

So I'd ask the Premier: Will he deliver on the recommendation to add more short-term stabilization beds in this province immediately?

Mr. Pallister: This is a government that's making a habit just in its first two years of delivering on its promises—of overdelivering, Madam Speaker, and underpublicizing, and this is exactly the opposite of the previous government's practice of overpromising and underdelivering.

Madam Speaker, in terms of releasing reports, let's take a look at the record of the previous government: \$600,000 paid in severance to former party supporters was covered up for two years; \$15 million of untendered, sole-sourced Tiger Dam purchases from a party donor was covered up for three years; \$100 million, which was the STARS contract, untendered, harshly criticized by the Auditor General, that was covered up as well, and over \$500 million went to the East Side Road Authority to build less than 50 miles of road.

Madam Speaker, the record of the previous government was abysmal on transparency. We're changing that for the better.

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

Mr. Kinew: Again, Madam Speaker, no answer as to how they could commission a report into mental

health and addictions and not share with the author of the report statistics on drug use in our province. It seems like a necessary first step, a foundational step.

Now, there were many interesting findings in the report. One of them is on the importance of housing towards improving mental health in our province. The report's author argues that there is a strong business case to investing in housing as a social determinant of mental health, and if there are none of those—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —investments in the mental—or in the housing stock in our province, then those dealing with mental health issues will find those conditions exacerbated.

Now, again, there is a specific recommendation, recommendation 2.23, for them to add more housing services for those with complex needs and also for single mothers. We know that this government has not built a single new unit of social housing since they took office.

So I'd ask the Premier: Will he reverse that trend and instead commit today to investing in new social housing units as part of an overall 360 approach to mental health and well-being in our province?

Mr. Pallister: I'm glad to hear the member admit that his government, the previous government, did nothing in respect of these issues. We are. We are addressing these issues.

Actually, the previous government—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —did less than nothing, Madam Speaker, because wait times for these services, these types of services, grew under their watch as they were raising taxes and deficits. So they were going the wrong direction in every respect.

Now the member is flip-flopping and attempting to discredit the author of a report while saying we should adopt the recommendations. Madam Speaker, he has to get himself a fixed position on this issue. If he wishes to be credible in advocating for a topic very important to the people of Manitoba, he needs to find some consistency in his arguments.

Safe Injection Sites VIRGO Report Recommendations

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Yes, well, yesterday, of course, the government released a couple of editions of its doctored, rushed report on mental health and addictions. For months now, we've called on this government to support the opening of a safe injection site to get better outcomes and to save lives, given an increase in intravenous drug units—use. That recommendation was in various drafts of the report, including the most recent draft that was actually released yesterday morning.

Why did this government have the recommendation for a safe injection site removed from the final report?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, it's disturbing that the member would attack somebody as eminent as Dr. Brian Rush. Yesterday, when the media asked Dr. Rush, did you have any discussions with the government about safe injection sites, generally, Mr. Rush said, no. When the media asked, did you have any discussions with the government about removing safe rejection sites, a recommendation, he said, no.

Clearly, Dr. Rush has already answered these questions. But I would say, as the minister, I do take personal responsibility for the release of a report that was his working—one of his working drafts that should not have been released. Dr. Rush is an eminent expert. He's done good work. He's made good recommendations for the Province of Manitoba. And to him, I apologize personally, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: I would just ask for all members to be diligent in listening and—to the questions and answers. We have a number of students in our gallery today too, and I'm sure they're very interested in seeing how democracy plays out in Manitoba. So I would ask for everybody's co-operation, please.

The honourable member for Minto, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Swan: Indeed, it was Dr. Rush who put the proposal for a supervised injection site in his report. And what was really strange yesterday is Dr. Rush told the media that he was not aware of a community proposal to build a safe injection site, even though this had been his report for months and the Main Street Project had been well known to this Minister of Health and this government for months.

I want to know why this minister refused to give Dr. Rush the information needed to back up his recommendation, which he says—Dr. Rush says—he favours supervised injection sites.

Why did this minister prevent him from getting that information?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, the member spent half of the day yesterday accusing me of meeting with Dr. Rush and talking to him, and today he's wondering why I didn't meet with Dr. Rush and talk to him about the Main Street Project. He can't have it both ways.

But I do know, I do understand that Dr. Rush himself did meet, I understand, with the Main Street Project. I wasn't part of their conversations; I don't know what they spoke about. *[interjection]*

* (14:00)

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Minto, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Swan: And yet the minister contradicts himself yet again, because just yesterday, when he came down flustered from his office, after making them wait for 45 minutes, the Minister of Health told media yesterday that there were discussions between his department officials and Dr. Rush about safe injection sites in the lead up to the report's release.

When they asked if officials told the doctor to remove it, the minister just said, not that I'm aware of. Well, this minister tells us he's accountable. This minister tells us he's responsible. The minister should come clean with the House and with Manitobans.

Did the minister direct his staff to make sure that that recommendation was taken out of Dr. Rush's final report?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, Dr. Rush answered unequivocally yesterday that there was no direction from the government, there was no direction from government officials. He was quite complimentary about the fact that the report was released, and I am complimentary for the work that he did.

I know that Chris Adams was on the radio this morning saying that it's common for those who are commissioned to do reports with the government to have back and forth in the drafting of that report. In fact, Mr. Adams said he'd done reports for the previous government, including the School Attendance in Manitoba Report in 2009. Maybe the

member 'opposith'—opposite thinks his government gerrymandered that report, Madam Speaker?

Consultant Reports Government Involvement

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Manitobans are shocked this government scrubbed a recommendation from the VIRGO report on addiction services. It's particularly concerning when we remember the Premier loves expensive reports from out-of-province consultants, spending more than \$8 million on reports since taking office, Madam Speaker.

Yesterday's revelation calls into question other reports the Premier has commissioned and the drafts associated with each of those contracts.

Can the Premier confirm that he did not doctor any other government reports? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): It's extremely unfortunate, Madam Speaker, that the member opposite would resort to that kind of tactic given her record, especially, of non-performance, of not being able to put forward evidence of any work she—was done while cashing cheques for over six years from the people of Manitoba.

Yet her record of false accusations and an unwillingness to stand up significantly and substantively for worthy causes is well understood by Manitobans and certainly by members of this House, including by members of her own caucus.

So, Madam Speaker, I will not choose to respond in any way to false accusations from the member opposite or any of her colleagues in respect of these. I would let the statements of the member—of the person who wrote the report stand on their own, and I would choose to treat that person with integrity and respect, even in spite of the member's refusal to do so in this House.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Some of the Premier's reports have had a massive impact on services that Manitobans rely on. For instance, the Peachey report recommended closing three emergency rooms in Winnipeg, Madam Speaker.

The Premier and his Health minister have used this report as a cover to make massive cuts to Manitoba's health-care system. They admitted to

tampering with the VIRGO report. This government has been caught misleading Manitobans on one report.

Can they stand in the House today and definitively confirm that they have not changed—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —any of the Peachey report?
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, perhaps if the previous government had chosen to reach out and ask for advice, we wouldn't have seen our debt in the province double over a six-year period and perhaps we wouldn't be saddled with an NDP debt service cost today—that will pass this year over \$1 billion. And perhaps we wouldn't be in the situation we're in of cleaning up the mess they've created.
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: Perhaps if they had listened to Manitobans, they wouldn't have jacked up all the significant taxes that disproportionately hurt middle- and low-income families. Perhaps if they had chosen to consult with Manitobans, as we have done, they wouldn't have raised the PST. Perhaps if they had done that listening, they wouldn't have gone to court to try to get permission to take away the right of Manitobans to even speak, let alone be listened to, by the previous 'administry.'

But they did none of those things. They chose to shut out the people of Manitoba. They choose to believe that it's better not to commission expert support and make decisions that are evidence-based, but we don't believe that here, and we'll continue to make great decisions based on creating a stronger province, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. John's, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Fontaine: The KPMG report recommended cutting outpatient physiotherapy and occupational therapy. It really does beg the question: how can we trust that this recommendation actually came from KPMG and not from the Premier himself? If the Premier doctored the VIRGO report, how can we be sure that he didn't doctor the KPMG report as well?

Will the minister or the Premier definitively confirm that they did not direct the—KPMG to recommend cutting physiotherapy?

Mr. Pallister: Well, one thing is certain. In terms of the member's claimed expertise over a half a decade in defending the rights of women in Manitoba, she couldn't have doctored a report because she never produced one. Not a single one. Not a shred of data, not a shred of analysis. Nothing that we could use to further the cause of advancing the rights and the quality of life of women in our province. Zero work, Madam Speaker.

So, now she reflects on the integrity of KPMG. She reflects, by association, on the integrity of—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —other companies and other individuals, like Dr. Peachey. She reflects on the integrity of everyone but herself, Madam Speaker. This isn't helpful in debate.

So, if she has significant objections to recommendations, she's welcome to make them, but reflecting on the integrity of the people who we have consulted with, who have renowned provincial, national and international expertise, and whose advice we value and will act upon, Madam Speaker, is not helpful in these debates. [interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Safe Injection Sites Government Position

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Despite what the Premier says, we know that the evidence for safe injection sites is clear. The Canadian Mental Health Association released a report that says—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: —safe injection sites are highly effective in reducing the harms associated with drug use. The federal government says they are a short-term response to save lives. Even the government's own expert consultant recommends them, at least until this government scrubbed them away.

Will the minister admit that there is evidence that safe injection sites will help Manitoba's addiction crisis?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I'm disappointed in the

member, a relatively new member. Yesterday, we heard from Dr. Rush, who said that he made the decision to not include a supervised injection site as part of his final report. He made that clear yesterday, Madam Speaker.

Dr. Rush has a Ph.D. in epidemiology and biostatistics. He's worked for over 38 years as a mental health substance-use researcher. He's well respected across the country, Madam Speaker. I can't believe that that member would say such a thing against an eminent Canadian.

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

Mrs. Smith: We know that it was recommended and that this government is just trying to cover it up.

There is huge support in the community for these sites. These sites are going to save lives. There's a movement in Manitoba to build this injection site, but they need support from this provincial government. We know that the minister's own expert recommended the provincial government build these sites.

Will the minister honour the real report? Will he greenlight the safe injection site?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, I don't think, by any definition, a draft report would be considered a real report. That's certainly very disrespectful for Dr. Rush, who, of course, released his full and final report yesterday.

* (14:10)

In fact, yesterday morning, when he was asked this question about a supervised injection site, he did express his own personal support for a supervised injection site, but says—but said that in Manitoba there lacked the evidence to show that it was actually something that he could in his heart recommend, Madam Speaker.

Now, they may not want to listen to the expert, they may disagree with the expert. On one hand, they say accept all the recommendations; on the other hand, they try to discredit him. That's the classic NDP. They can't get their stories straight, Madam Speaker.

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

Mrs. Smith: It's too bad that this government continues to hide things that—this would have helped this expert know that this is needed in Manitoba. Our

community members have been calling for this—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith:—even our mayor of Winnipeg has been calling for this, our police and many of our front-line organizations.

Will the minister stop his political games and commit to safe injection sites that'll help keep Manitobans alive?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The member for Minto (Mr. Swan) and former ministers in the previous government accused the former premier of not listening, but they're carrying on with that trait as the—even as the member for Minto speaks in this House, he demonstrates his inability to listen. Madam Speaker, they're—in an attempt—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister:—to discredit the author of the report. This begs the question: Would the prebudget consultations be discredited by the members opposite if they disagreed with the recommendations? Over 10,000 civil servants said they wanted fewer bargaining units; we're acting on that advice. Would the mining protocol development process, which involves dozens of First Nations communities, be disregarded by the members opposite because, well, they want to leave resources in the ground as signators to the Leap Manifesto? Would they attack indigenous elders who recommended that we change the practices of night killing of animals with spotlights? Would they attack them also, Madam Speaker, because they disagree with them?

This is the—this is what's being put on display today in this Chamber, Madam Speaker: an attempt to discredit a credible person, an attempt to attack the integrity of a credible person. There is no validity in these arguments, nor will there be in future.

We are a government that will listen to Manitobans. We will consult with experts. We respect people; we treat them with integrity. Madam Speaker, that is not on display today over there.

VIRGO Report Drug Use Data

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, yesterday this government made a big mistake by removing a recommendation for safe injection sites here in Winnipeg. What is most concerning was the lack of data supplied by this

government to Dr. Rush. In response to the recommendation being removed yesterday, Dr. Rush said, and I quote: I don't have enough to defend it one way or another. I didn't have enough information. I didn't have the data. I didn't have previous proposals. I didn't have background stuff.

Madam Speaker, why was Dr. Rush not supplied with local drug user data?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, I imagine that the doctor didn't have any previous proposals because the NDP never did any previous proposals on supervised injection sites when they were in government, despite now their new-found concern about them.

But the member opposite is wrong when she talks about information. She in fact is lacking information, the information that Dr. Rush—he said yesterday that he decided to remove the recommendation from one of his working drafts because he didn't believe that it was the right thing to recommend given the evidence that he had in Manitoba, Madam Speaker. That was his decision to remove the recommendation.

It's counterintuitive that somebody who is actually personally supportive of supervised injection sites would have felt pressured to remove it.

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

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, yesterday, when Dr. Rush was asked what information he would need to make this recommendation, he stated, and again, I quote: You would want to know the number of drug users that are on the streets. You would want to know the relative balance. Is it cocaine, is it heroin, is it crystal meth? You would want to know what the demand is. You would want to know the support within the user population.

I ask the minister how his department could think that an effective review of our addictions services could be useful without this vital information?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, the member, again, continues to disparage the report.

I would point to a report today from CBC News in which Bonnie Bricker, a frequent advocate on mental health—and, in fact, I believe the former leader of the Liberal Party, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), has often conversed with

Ms. Bricker—says that the report is a very good report, that she's encouraged and optimistic about the recommendations that are coming out of the report.

So while the member who's asking the question might not support the recommendations and the report and might try to disparage the author and the evidence that he used, I hope that the member for River Heights would set her straight on that, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Lamoureux: Dr. Rush stated again and again that he personally supports safe injection sites. He also emphasized how the Harm Reduction Network, which was the focus of his report, also supported safe injection sites.

Madam Speaker, Dr. Rush even went so far to say that he would recommend there be a study done on this.

Will the government just admit that they made a tremendous mistake in not supporting a safe injection site by removing the recommendation?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, I'm—you know, I've been in politics a long time. I'm okay with taking the false allegations against me. But to try to make those allegations against an eminent researcher in Canada—Dr. Rush has almost 40 years of experience when it comes to mental health and addictions.

I believe that the members opposite supported him doing the report. I know that he's talked to more than 3,000 people in Manitoba through consultations, both directly and those who were coming in to the report. And so the member opposite is now saying that Dr. Rush wasn't telling the truth yesterday when he said that he took out the recommendation.

It's a sad day when the Liberal Party, such as it is in Manitoba, has come to that, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba's 150th Anniversary Celebration Committee

Mr. Andrew Smith (Southdale): This weekend, we had the opportunity to celebrate two very important occasions, one, of course, being Mother's Day, and a very happy Mother's Day to everyone here in the Chamber and, of course, all Manitobans.

But I'd like to also say that we had a chance to celebrate Manitoba's 148th anniversary of the Manitoba Act by the Parliament of Canada. This made Manitoba the fifth province to join

Confederation. All across our province, museums and other attractions were hosting great events or were offering free admission to mark this very special occasion.

With Manitoba's 150th anniversary hastily approaching, can the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage please tell the Chamber what our PC government's plans are to celebrate this monumental milestone in our province's great history?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I'd like to thank my colleague from Southdale for the wonderful question.

We have so much to celebrate here in Manitoba, and we want all Manitobans to take part in these wonderful celebrations and excitement as we move towards planning Manitoba's 150th anniversary. We've gathered a group of very dynamic individuals to actually work together on Manitoba's 150th celebration committee.

And we want to hear from all Manitobans—Manitobans from Churchill all the way to Winkler, from Virden all the way to the Whiteshell—and hear the excitement and listen—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Cox: —to them and find suggestions on how we can make this Manitoba's very best anniversary party ever here in Manitoba.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to proceeding with oral questions, we have some more guests that just joined us in the gallery.

Seated in the public gallery from Julie Lindal School, 18 grade 4 to 8 students under the direction of Marguerita Ogilvie, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Thompson (Mr. Bindle). On behalf of all honourable members here, we welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature.

Elmwood Community Resource Centre Mental Health Support Programs

* (14:20)

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, the VIRGO report makes clear that community supports are vital for supporting those with mental health

issues. The community—Elmwood Community Resource Centre knows this. They know this very well. They're an organization that is on the front lines of treating mental health. They did their own research—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —and, in fact, they identified on their own that mental health supports are a priority and, in fact, now started offering community counselling to address that for those in need.

Expanding these services and providing better co-ordination with non-profit organizations is, in fact, a recommendation of the VIRGO report.

So I ask the minister, will this minister invest in these initiatives provided through non-profit organizations like the Elmwood Community Resource Centre?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, I actually commend the member for Concordia for looking at some of the recommendations and giving validity to them. He may want to speak to his leader, the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew), who spent a good part of this question period trying to disparage the report and its author, trying to say that it wasn't a valid report, trying to discredit the entire report. So the member for Concordia, I will give him credit for at least raising a substantive issue when it comes to recommendations, because there is no doubt—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —when it comes to community support, that community support has been lacking, as the VIRGO report indicates, over the last 20 years, primarily under the NDP government.

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

Social Housing Units At-Risk Populations

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, the minister clearly wasn't listening when the member for—the Leader of the Opposition talked about housing, talked about housing being an important investment that could be made.

So we know that part of a comprehensive addictions strategy is closing the gap in housing for vulnerable people. And the most vulnerable people, who are at the greatest risk of addiction, are the

Manitobans with those complex needs and single mothers who are leaving treatment.

The Elmwood Community Resource Centre also identified housing as being one of the main determinants of mental health issues in their own community. And yet this government has failed to build one single, affordable or social housing unit last year.

So will this government change course and invest real money into social housing for vulnerable people in this province?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, of course, there's been significant investment already, and I'm sure that there'll be more.

But I certainly was listening to the Leader of the Opposition, who spent a good part of this question period trying to disparage Dr. Day [*phonetic*] and his good report. In fact, it was the member for Concordia who did the same thing with Dr. Peachey, and tried to say that that report was doctored. And, in fact, it became a national news story when Dr. Peachey had to come out and say that that was a ridiculous assertion from the NDP.

The only thing that we have consistency on when it comes to the NDP is being ridiculous, Madam Speaker, and attacking eminent consultants.

Northern Health Care Patient Transportation Options

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, sometimes the only solution for northern Manitobans seeking mental health or addictions services is to seek treatment in other communities. The VIRGO report calls for an expansion of transportation options, also calls for child care when families are seeking medical care. That's why it's so unfortunate that the Pallister government reduced its commitment to Northern Patient Transportation Program.

Will the minister now reconsider an enhanced support for northern patient transportation?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, in fact, addiction services are important to the North. That's why this government, our government, the Pallister government, was very proud to announce last week the addition of five RAAM clinics to help those who are dealing with addictions, including two in Winnipeg, one in Brandon and two outside. And

one will be in the North, because we know that investment is important.

And while this government stood up and put forward that recommendation and then approved it, Madam Speaker, and put the money behind it, the former government never did anything of the like, and we might've thought that they would've had a conversion on the road to Damascus, but no, because they even voted against the funding for the RAAM clinics.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Tina Fontaine—Public Inquiry

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Tina Fontaine was murdered at the age of 14—or15 years, and her body was found in the Red River on August 17th, 2014.

(2) Tina Fontaine was robbed of her loving family and the Anishinabe community of Sagkeeng First Nation.

(3) Tina Fontaine was failed on multiple systems which did not protect her as they intervened in her life.

(4) Tina Fontaine was further failed by systems meant to seek and pursue justice for her murder.

(5) Tina Fontaine's murder galvanized Canada on the issue of missing and murdered women and girls—indigenous women and girls, MMIWG, as she quickly became our collective daughter and the symbol of MMIWG across Canada.

(6) Manitoba has failed to fully implement the recommendations of numerous reports and recommendations meant to improve and protect the lives of indigenous peoples and children, including the aboriginal—the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Justice to immediately call a public inquiry into the systems that had a role in the life and

the death of Tina Fontaine, as well as the function of the administration of justice after her death.

(2) To urge that the terms of reference of the public inquiry be developed jointly with the caregivers of Tina Fontaine and/or the agents appointed by them.

Signed by Collette Zastre, Arlene Reid, Jamie Johnston and many, many other Manitobans.

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

Vimy Arena

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The residents of St. James and other areas of Manitoba are concerned with the intention expressed by the provincial government to use the arena–Vimy Arena site as a Manitoba Housing project.

(2) The Vimy Arena site is in the middle of a residential area near many schools, churches, community clubs and senior homes, and neither the provincial government nor the City of Winnipeg considered the better suited locations in rural, semi-rural or industrial locations such as the St. Boniface industrial park, the 20,000 acres at centre point–CentrePort or existing properties such as the Shriners Hospital or the old Children's Hospital on Wellington Crescent.

(3) The provincial government is exempt from any zoning requirements that would have existed if the land was owned by the City of Winnipeg. This exemption bypasses the community input and due diligence and ignores better uses for the land which would be consistent with a residential area.

(4) There are no standards that one would expect for a treatment centre. The Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living has stated that the department of Health has no role to play in the land acquisition for this land—for this Manitoba Housing project for use as a drug addiction facility.

(5) Manitoba Housing's project initiated by the provincial government changes the fundamental nature of the community. Including the park and recreation uses, concerns of the residents of St. James and others regarding public safety,

property values and their way of life are not being properly addressed.

(6) The concerns of the residents of St. James are being ignored while obviously other locations in wealthier neighbourhoods, such as Tuxedo and River Heights, have not been considered for this Manitoba Housing project, even though there are hundreds of acres—[interjection]

* (14:30)

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fletcher: —of available land for development at Kapyong Barracks or parks like Heubach Park that share the same zoning as the Vimy Arena site.

(7) The Manitoba Housing project and the operation of the drug treatment centre fall outside the statutory mandate of the Manitoba Housing renewal corporation.

(8) The provincial government does not have a co-ordinated plan for addictions treatment in Manitoba, as it currently underfunds treatment centres which are running far under capacity and potential.

(9) The community has been misled regarding the true intention of the Manitoba Housing, as the land is being transferred for a 50-bed facility even though the project is clearly outside of Manitoba Housing's responsibility.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to take all necessary steps to ensure that the Vimy Arena site is not used for an addiction treatment facility; and

(2) To urge the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure the preservation of public land along Sturgeon Creek for the purposes of parkland and recreational activities for public use, including being an important component of the Sturgeon Creek greenway park—Greenway Trail and the Sturgeon Creek ecosystem under the current designation of PR2 for the 255 Hamilton Ave. location at the Vimy Arena site, and to maintain the land to continue to be designated for parks and recreation active neighbourhood, community.

This petition is signed by John Derksen, Wayne Melnyt [*phonetic*] and Carol Melnyt [*phonetic*] and many, many others, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The petition was not read as printed. Is there leave to accept the petition as printed? [Agreed]

TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA:

The background to this petition is as follows:

1. The residents of St. James and other areas of Manitoba are concerned with the intention expressed by the the Provincial Government to use the Vimy Arena site as a Manitoba Housing project.

2. The Vimy Arena site is in the middle of a residential area near many schools, churches, community clubs and senior homes and neither the Provincial Government nor the City of Winnipeg considered better suited locations in rural, semi-rural or industrial locations such as: the St. Boniface industrial park, the 20,000 acres at Centre Port or existing properties such as the Shriner's Hospital or the old Children's Hospital on Wellington Crescent.

3. The Provincial Government is exempt from any zoning requirements that would have existed if the land was owned by the City of Winnipeg. This exemption bypasses community input and due diligence and ignores better uses for the land which would be consistent with a residential area.

4. There are no standards that one would expect for a treatment centre. The Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living has stated that the department of Health had no role to play in the land acquisition for this Manitoba Housing project for use as a drug addiction facility.

5. The Manitoba Housing project initiated by the Provincial Government changes the fundamental nature of the community. Including park and recreation uses, concerns of the residents of St. James and others regarding public safety, property values, and their way of life are not being properly addressed.

6. The concerns of the residents of St. James are being ignored while obvious other locations in wealthier other neighbourhoods, such as Tuxedo and River Heights, have not been considered for this Manitoba Housing project even though there are hundreds of acres of land available for development at Kapyong Barracks or parks like Heubach Park that share the same zoning as the Vimy Arena site.

7. The Manitoba Housing project and the operation of a drug treatment centre fall outside the statutory

mandate of the Manitoba Housing Renewal Corporation.

8. The Provincial Government does not have a coordinated plan for addiction treatment in Manitoba, as it currently underfunds treatment centres which are running far under capacity and potential.

9. The community has been misled regarding the true intention of Manitoba Housing, as land is being transferred for a 50 bed facility even though the project is clearly outside of Manitoba Housing's responsibility.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

1. To urge the Provincial Government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Vimy Arena site is not used for an addiction treatment facility.

2. To urge the Provincial Government to take the necessary steps to ensure the preservation of public land along Sturgeon Creek for the purposes of park land and recreational activities for public use (including being an important component of the Sturgeon Creek Greenway Trail and the Sturgeon Creek ecosystem) under the current designation of PR2 for the 255 Hamilton Avenue location at the Vimy Arena site, and to maintain the land to continue to be designated for Parks and Recreation Active Neighbourhood/Community.

Medical Laboratory Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Provision of laboratory services to medical clinics and physicians' offices has been historically and continues to be a private sector service.

It is vitally important that there be competition in laboratory services to allow medical clinics to seek solutions from more than one provider to control costs and to improve service for health professionals and patients.

Under the present provincial government, Dynacare, an Ontario-based subsidiary of a U.S. company, has acquired Unicity labs, resulting in a monopoly situation for the provision of laboratory services in medical clinics and physicians' offices.

The creation of this monopoly has resulted in the closure of many laboratories by Dynacare in and around the city of Winnipeg. Since the acquisition of Unicity labs, Dynacare has engaged in anti-competitive activities where it has changed the collection schedules of patients' specimens and charged some medical offices for collection services.

These closures have created a situation where a great number of patients are less well served, having to travel significant distances in some cases, waiting considerable periods of time and sometimes being denied or having to leave without obtaining lab services. This situation is particularly critical for patients requiring fasting blood draws as they may experience complications that could be life-threatening based on their individual health situations.

Furthermore, Dynacare has instructed that all STAT's patients, patients with suspicious internal infections, be directed to its King Edward location. This creates unnecessary obstacles for the patients who are required to travel to that lab, rather than simply completing the test in their doctor's office. This new directive by Dynacare presents a direct risk to patients' health in the interest of higher profits. This has further resulted in patients opting to visit emergency rooms rather than travelling twice, which increases cost to the health-care system.

Medical clinics and physicians' offices service thousands of patients in their communities and have structured their offices to provide a one-stop service, acting as a health-care front line that takes off some of the load from emergency rooms. The creation of this monopoly has been problematic to many medical clinics and physicians, hampering their ability to provide high quality and complete service to their patients due to closures of so many laboratories.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to request Dynacare to reopen the closed laboratories or allow Diagnostic Services of Manitoba to freely open labs in clinics which formerly housed labs that have been shut down by Dynacare.

To urge the provincial government to ensure high quality lab services for patients and a level playing field and competition in the provision of laboratory services to medical offices.

To urge the provincial government to address this matter immediately in the interest of better

patient-focused care and improved support for health professionals.

Signed by Nicole Barber, Cass NicBridhe, Lynn Silver and many others.

Tina Fontaine—Public Inquiry

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Tina Fontaine was murdered at the age of 15 years, and her body was found in the Red River on August 17th, 2014.

(2) Tina Fontaine was robbed of her loving family and the Anishinabe community of Sagkeeng First Nation.

(3) Tina Fontaine was failed by multiple systems which did not protect her as they intervened in her life.

(4) Tina Fontaine was further failed by systems meant to seek and pursue justice for her murder.

(5) Tina Fontaine's murder galvanized Canada on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, MMIWG, as she quickly became our collective daughter and the symbol of MMIWG across Canada.

(6) Manitoba has failed to fully implement the recommendations of numerous reports and recommendations meant to improve and protect the lives of indigenous peoples and children, including the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Justice to immediately call a public inquiry into the systems that had a role in the life and death of Tina Fontaine, as well as the function of the administration of justice after her death.

(2) To urge that the terms of reference of a public inquiry be developed jointly with the caregivers of Tina Fontaine and/or the agent appointed by them.

Signed by Jay Fawley, Maureen Wood and Kyle Wood and many other Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY*(Continued)***GOVERNMENT BUSINESS****House Business****Hon. Cliff Cullen (Government House Leader):**

Pursuant to rule 33(7), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for St. Vital (Mrs. Mayer). The title of the resolution is Celebrating National Indigenous Peoples Day.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that—pursuant to rule 33(7), it has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for St. Vital. The title of the resolution is Celebrating National Indigenous Peoples Day.

OPPOSITION DAY MOTION

Madam Speaker: The House will now consider the Opposition Day motion of the honourable member for Minto.

I will now recognize the honourable member for Minto.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I move, seconded by the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), that the Legislative Assembly condemn the provincial government for misleading the House and Manitobans regarding the recommendations of the VIRGO consulting report.

Motion presented.

* (14:40)

Mr. Swan: You know, every day in this Legislative Building can be an experience, but I have to say that yesterday was truly one of the most bizarre days that I've spent in the Manitoba Legislature, and let me say, that's saying something.

And if I can define yesterday in one short phrase, it was intransigence meets incompetence. And yesterday it was the Minister of Health who finally released the VIRGO report on mental health and addictions. This after delays in providing the report and this after this PC government doing virtually nothing in the last two years, despite what everybody in the community, what the police, what health-care professionals have told us is a dramatic

rise in the use of dangerous drugs like opioids as well as methamphetamine.

And that report that was released, it was released to the media and it was put up online, contained a number of recommendations, and one of those recommendations, which we were actually quite comforted by, was a recommendation that the government allow for a safe injection site and a safe needle exchange to combat Manitoba's growing addiction crisis.

And what a strange afternoon it was when we came to question period and the Leader of the Opposition and I asked the minister and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) about this recommendation, but they both denied that it was included in the report. And as we pointed out in the course of question period, the recommendation was indeed there, and it was there in black and white on page 226 of the report which had been provided to the media and provided to Manitobans, recommendation 2.18 of the VIRGO report.

And despite this, the Premier and the Minister of Health and, indeed, his backbenchers, continued to loudly deny that. And the Premier put on the record and said the recommendation to build the safe injection site, and I quote, is not one which is in the VIRGO report, end quote. And that was from yesterday. And, indeed, members of the House—I wasn't going to name him, but it was the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma) who was pointed out in the Free Press as one of the members loudly heckling that the recommendation was not included in the report. The problem was—and I accept what the member said—it wasn't included in his report that was provided to backbenchers. However, it was included in the report that was made public, put on the website of the government of Manitoba and disseminated to the media for everyone to see.

And just half an hour later, then the poor community—communications staffer had to come down in front of the media who had assembled in the rotunda, who waited 10 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, for the Minister of Health to emerge from his office and come down and explain it. And down came the poor staffer, who I won't name, who got to the microphone and said, you know, there's been an error. There's been a mistake. In fact, this—the recommendation for the safe injection site was included in the report because that was the wrong version and that had accidentally been released by the government. They admitted they'd released a—

what they called a draft version of the report. And then they provided what they now say is the final report, which removed any reference to the safe injection site, not just in the body of the report but in the appendix.

And there are only two possibilities as to how this could possibly have happened. And one, which we believe is the case, is direct political interference with a report written by a non-partisan health-care expert on Manitoba's addictions and mental health systems. That is the one possibility. The other possibility, which I'll get into in a short amount of time, makes no sense at all, that Dr. Rush, who he— who himself says that he favours safe injection sites, on his own put that into various drafts of the report, in fact, put it in the draft of the report that sat on the minister's desk from March 31st through more questioning from the Leader of the Opposition, through more questioning from myself, through questions in Estimates, and the Minister of Health would have us believe that Dr. Rush, of his own volition, quietly, then, removed that from the very, very last draft of the report. That makes no sense at all. It is incredible, and when I say incredible, I don't mean fantastic. I mean the opposite of credible.

Now, what we know is that this government has a fundamental and basic opposition to harm reduction. And I have known that of the Minister of Health—and he and I have known each other a long time. The Minister of Health has never been a proponent of harm reduction. It was not the case when he was the Justice critic. It was not the case when he was the Health critic. And it is not the case now that he is the Minister of Health and has control over the health-care system except, apparently, for those parts of the health-care system which deals with women's reproductive health, which somehow doesn't appear to be within his control.

The Minister of Health and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) refuse to present the real report that their hand-picked consultant had prepared and they didn't like that recommendation. It is abundantly clear. And we know why they interfered: because their opposition to safe injection sites is long-standing; it's continued even as there continues to build a body of evidence demonstrating that safe injection sites are a way to save lives. They're a way to get better outcomes and they can serve as a portal not just to the safe use of drugs, which is something we hope ends at some point, but it becomes a key portal for those individuals to receive supports, to receive counselling, to receive the treatment and

receive the guidance that they need to hopefully stop using those drugs, to get over their addictions and be able to truly rejoin our society.

And it is clear this government doctored a report from an expert consultant to fit their own ideology. And, frankly, Madam Speaker, that is a shame and it is wrong. And it reveals the true priorities of this government not to create a better mental health system or a better system of dealing with those struggling with addictions, but to implement their own ideological agenda. And this resolution this afternoon was brought forward because we think it's appropriate that the Minister of Health and the Premier apologize to the House and to Manitobans for having misled them.

Now we know that the Premier stood in this House and did mislead the House about the content of the VIRGO report. And, frankly, it's disrespectful to the families of those struggling with addictions who, despite what some members opposite may think, do not come from one community, do not come from one part of Winnipeg, but who come from the suburbs, who come from rural areas, who come from the North, who come as well from the inner city. And for those families who have individuals struggling with addictions, they were waiting and waiting and waiting to have relief, to have the government step up and say, here's the report, and here's what we're going to do.

And they didn't even get the main part because this Health Minister has not actually committed to implementing the recommendations which remain in the Rush report. But we know for sure that the recommendation for a safe injection site, which was in the report for many drafts, has now disappeared and will never now form part of this government's plan. And it makes no sense at all, Madam Speaker, why this recommendation for a safe injection site would have sat in many, many drafts of the report as we understand it had been distributed to various stakeholders, including the Main Street Project who, of course, as we know, have had a proposal before this government for months and months and months.

And, in fact, the federal government in an announcement over at the Main Street Project just a couple of days ago—I'm sure with them waiting to see what the VIRGO report would say, because they knew it was going to be contained in it. There was going to be a recommendation for a safe injection site. And there would be the Main Street Project, which, incidentally, has said this is not going to

cost government; we just want the government's permission to be able to do this, to be able to save people's lives, because that's the work that the folks at the Main Street Project do. But, instead, we had a big surprise yesterday and a very, very different situation on the ground.

And it's interesting to see how the government has tried to spin this and has tried to play it. I believe the term version control challenge is now going to join the Manitoba lexicon for as long as the sun rises and the waters continue to flow. But it makes no sense at all.

You know, it's fascinating because the Premier (Mr. Pallister), of course, stands up and tells us at great lengths in his own inimitable style how his government doesn't interfere in reports. But I think we have to wonder how the Premier yesterday had had the chance to read through a 279-page report and was so sure when the Leader of the Opposition got up and asked the question at the start of question period, that somehow the Premier knew that the final—the, quote, final version of the report, which they were relying upon, didn't have a recommendation for a safe injection site in it. And, of course, we were told later that it was the wrong draft that went out and, of course, the final report which magically had this removed did not contain it. We don't understand why media services had a copy of this so-called draft report in a format—a final format they could then send to media. It makes no sense.

The Minister of Health should apologize; the Premier should apologize. Backbench members should actually support this resolution so that they can turn things around and have a better government in this province.

* (14:50)

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I, of course, want to start with the premise of the motion that is before us this afternoon. Members will now know, over the last 24 hours, that there was a mistake that was made and that a draft report, one of the iterations—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —of the report were released.

Now, Dr. Rush himself—and I spoke in question period about his qualifications, and I won't go at great length on repeating all of those qualifications,

but I have seen his CV, and it is literally 50 pages long, Madam Speaker, so let there be no dispute about his ability to author a report and to think independently. If there are people in Canada who don't believe that Dr. Rush is an independent thinker, they only exist in the caucus of the NDP and maybe a few in the—what remains of the Liberal caucus.

Dr. Rush is not only an eminent expert when it comes to this particular field, he is thoughtful, he's a listener. That is borne out by the many consultations that he had across Manitoba. I understand he had consultations with groups like the Main Street Project but not just the Main Street Project. There were hundreds of consultations, I understand, that he had. And, in fact, there were thousands of Manitobans who gave him advice through providing that online and otherwise, Madam Speaker.

And my great regret in this, and I have many regrets in politics—too many to mention, I suppose, not like the Frank Sinatra song. But, certainly, I do regret that this report—which is a tremendous report and which has many significant recommendations in it—that that has been lost, at least in the short term, and I hope, certainly, in the long term, there will be a return to the focus of this.

But I do want to say, again, as I said in question period, Dr. Rush was unequivocal in his comments yesterday to the media that he received no direction from this government on this particular issue, which is the subject of the motion. But, more generally, Madam Speaker, he was clear to the media. So the Leader of the Opposition, my friend from Minto, they don't have to believe me; I won't be heartbroken if they don't. But they should at least believe Dr. Rush. What political motivation exists with him? He simply wanted to do a—*[interjection]* Well, I hear that the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) is now ascribing certain motivations to Dr. Rush, and he may want to put that onto the record, but I, certainly, would never do that for an individual who has the reputation that he has.

And we are grateful for the report that he's brought forward. And I know that there are many in the community looking past, of course, the mistake that was made in terms of sending of reports. There are many in the community—Bonnie Bricker was one that I cited a little bit earlier in question period—but there are many others who are thankful for the work that he has done.

And what, of course, the opposition won't talk about, and the member for Minto won't address, is

that the reason that this report was needed and the reason there are so many glaring problems within the mental health and addictions system when it comes to Manitoba is because of the neglect that happened on this particular file under the NDP government. Yes, there's no question that Dr. Rush spoke about the disproportionate funding between the main Department of Health and mental health and addictions but also a cross-government approach and that this needed to be a whole-of-government solution, Madam Speaker, which points to the fact that did not happen under 17 years of the NDP. And so I wouldn't want to put any particular motive on my friends in the opposition, but I have no doubt that they would have motive to try to suggest that something nefarious happened to try to cover up all the things in the report that point to their neglect in 17 years in government.

Now, it's not just about supervised injection sites, of which the Attorney General says that there were members of this government who had certain views of that when we were in opposition. When he was in government for 17 years, they never did anything on it, Madam Speaker, and it was a topic of discussion many times. They never brought it forward. They never wanted to do it. They never suggested that it was something that they thought would help Manitoba now. It was radio silent from the—or from the now-opposition, the then-government, on this issue at the time. Of course, it's not like there weren't those sites already operating in Canada: Insite, in Vancouver, in East Hastings, I believe, was operating for many years, but the Attorney General never said anything about it at the time. But, suddenly, of course, he's now determined that it is the solution for all that ails Manitoba when it comes to addictions.

And I think what the report thoroughly states—and I give Dr. Rush credit for this—is that Manitoba is a long ways behind other provinces, that we have had a misalliance system for many years, the majority of which the NDP had their hands on the wheel when it comes to controlling government, Madam Speaker, and they didn't act on that.

So now we have a blueprint, a pathway forward, Madam Speaker, in terms of looking to better the system. It didn't exist before, but, again, there is no question that I regret that the error that happened does take away—it shouldn't take away, but I know for today it does and for yesterday it did, takes away from the work that Dr. Rush did.

So, while this motion calls for an apology in terms of statements that were made in the House, there was no error in terms of the statements that were made in the House. Dr. Rush's final report does not recommend a supervised injection site. He clearly stated why he decided to remove the recommendation yesterday, Madam Speaker. He made that unequivocally clear to all who were able to hear his comments, and we shouldn't—and when I say we, I'm going to be a little gracious here because it's really just the NDP and the Liberals who are trying to say that Dr. Rush isn't a credible individual. He is a credible individual and I think it's terrible that not only did they take on Dr. Peachey who also—and of course, they hired Dr. Peachey and then they tried to discredit him and say that he would doctor a report that the former government actually commissioned.

But now they've moved on from Dr. Peachey after their national incident on that particular issue and have moved on to trying to discredit Dr. Rush. I don't know if there's any experts in Canada that they don't want to take on, and they've moved on—well, maybe they haven't moved on from fighting internally, but they've extended the fight to those in other places in Canada.

But, to return to my point, Madam Speaker, when it comes to the issue of apologizing, while there is, of course, no merit to an apology for something that wasn't incorrect, his final report did not recommend a supervised injection site. However, there is a reason for an apology and I'll restate it again now.

Regardless of the circumstances of how an erroneous report was provided, Madam Speaker, I am the minister responsible for the department and I'm accountable as the minister responsible, and so I did apologize to Dr. Rush yesterday. I apologize to the House today, and I apologize to Manitobans because I take very seriously, and I am gravely saddened that the accidental release of a working report took away from the great work of the final report. I am the minister responsible, so I take responsibility and I'll take any repercussions of what happened yesterday. I'll take them personally and accept them.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I was encouraged to hear the minister apologize, and I thought he was going to start apologizing for all of the problems that he's created with regards to this report because, certainly, he's now apologizing for letting Manitobans know part of what Dr. Rush was ready

to recommend by releasing an earlier draft, but it's, in fact, his handling of this that has called into question the entire report and having Manitobans ask themselves how can they trust anything that this government has told them about this report or other reports and about their real commitment to mental health in this province, and that's what we really want to be talking about is the mental health and addictions crisis in our community.

Now this government knew that it was—this was a top-of-mind issue for Manitobans, so much so that in the last election, you know, amongst the three other things that they talked about while trying not to trip on their shoelaces, they talked about mental health as being one of their No. 1 priorities, and they said the day that we become government in this province, we will come forward and we will get to work on mental health issues.

* (15:00)

Well, that day came and that day went. And then they came out later that summer and said, well, you know, give us 100 days. Give us 100 days on this. It is a priority, but give us 100 days. Governing is hard. Let us get down to the work that you want us to do, that you told us was a priority. It's going to take us at least 100 days.

So 100 days came and went, and members of this Chamber asked, where was the report? Where was the strategy on mental health?

Meanwhile, the federal government stepped up. They started giving money to the provinces, started flowing money, saying mental health and addictions is a priority, is something that government should be paying attention to. In Manitoba, you have a crisis. You have several issues, several addictions issues that have come to the forefront. You have mental health concerns that need to be addressed. You need to step up and you need to get some action on that.

And yet, nothing from this government, not a word, not a peep from this government. And then all of a sudden, out of the blue, we hear, well, we have a consultant. We are going to get an outside consultant. That's what they told us. They said, an outside consultant.

And I think they said, well, just wait 'til December. December came and went—nothing. Then they said, just wait until the new year. The new year came and went. Then they said, what about wait until March, and March came and went, and still nothing

from this government. No public word from this government.

And it was this member from Minto who stood up in this House and asked the minister, will you release this report before the House rises? And I know that the minister didn't want to commit to this, but he did it. He stood up and he said, sure. We'll give it to Manitobans. We'll let them see. We'll let them peek behind the curtains and see the report that we've had in our hands for months now. We'll let them see it before session ends.

Well, that brings us to yesterday, Madam Speaker. A report that, as I said, all Manitobans were waiting for, that we said was a priority to get to work on mental health, that across the province—I mean, in fact, it was this government that had said it was such a priority.

And yet when the old—when the 2011 strategy on mental health expired, which was commissioned by the previous government—you know, despite this government's words to the contrary, the previous government did have a five-year strategy on mental health and addictions in this province—and when that report expired, this government had no answer at all for it.

So, finally, we get the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) getting the Minister of Health to actually put on the record, yes, we're going to release this before the end of session. The minister stands up, and what does he do? He accidentally—what it—what was the phrasing? This is a version control challenge, is how it was put, Madam Speaker.

Well, you know what, I think this issue, Madam Speaker, is too important to worry about version control and spin and politicization. And I think this issue is much too important to ignore the important recommendations of Dr. Rush and others, who have said that a safe injection site is a priority, is something that could have real effect in Manitoba, could reduce the harm to certain individuals in our province, those who are most in need, those who are most at the margins. That is what Dr. Rush said in his report.

Despite the version control issue that the minister's had and the scrubbing that was done by the Premier (Mr. Pallister), that is what he said and that is what he continues to say, in fact, in the media when I heard him talk yesterday. He said that this is a priority of his. He said that this is something that can make a difference and save lives. And instead,

it's this government who has made the decision that this is ideologically off limits, that this is not something that they're going to—a challenge they're going to meet head on.

And, in fact, it was them who decided that that shouldn't be in the report. They wouldn't provide the information to Dr. Rush. They wouldn't entertain that as a solution.

Well, we've been very unequivocal on this side of the House, Madam Speaker, that harm reduction is the—is a viable option for those who are most in need. It is something that we stand behind because it saves lives and it makes a difference.

And it isn't a solution across the board. There is much more work to be done, and that is why the VIRGO report is something that sheds some light on some of these issues. There's lots to work with in this report, lots to work with that it requires a real investment.

You know, this is the other thing the minister wouldn't go on record to say. You know, Dr. Rush says there needs to be more investment in mental health; you know, money needs to flow to ensure that these programs that are in place or could be in place are properly funded. This minister won't acknowledge that part. He wants to throw—he wants to cast aspersions on the previous government; he wants to blame everything on the previous government instead of tackling these issues head on, investing them in a real way and actually making a difference upstream when it comes to mental health and how that affects our overall health-care system.

So he's not willing to admit that, and now, because of the bungling of this minister and the bungling of the Premier (Mr. Pallister), the scrubbing that they've done on this report, now we don't even know what is supposed to be in this report or what Dr. Rush really would have recommended if he was given the opportunity because everything has been called into question. As I said, Madam Speaker, everything in this report and previous reports when this government has their version-control challenges and instead focuses on the spin, on the political spin, rather than the—on the best path forward.

I—you know, I talk about all of this because it is so pressing in our communities. It is something that every single member in this Chamber, I'm sure, could fill up an hour talking about the challenges they've seen in their own constituencies, in some

cases the challenges that they've experienced in their own family. I've shared earlier in this Chamber, Madam Speaker, that last year my cousin passed away from addiction challenges.

This is something that touches every single member, and I talked about the Elmwood Community Resource Centre today in question period because I've met with them, I've seen the work that they're doing. It is a small piece of the overall mental health challenge that is out there and—but they are doing that work. They are taking their small piece within our community; they are making a difference. And I believe that they are saving lives.

You know, when I look through their research—and you know, granted, compared to the work that Dr. Rush or others have done, it is a very modest study that they were able to undertake, but it shows right in our own community the challenges with youth around issues like suicide, issues around depression. It talked about housing; it talked about income insecurity and the impact that that has on mental health. And their solution or their, again, contribution to dealing with this is a very small program where they can just offer drop-in counselling to allow people to just come in, access a counsellor which they've probably never done, skip the waiting lists at other places and come in and get that service.

It's one piece that I think we should be focusing on. It's one piece that I think every member in this Chamber could share something similar, and if we focus on those things, instead of version control, instead of spin, instead of politicization, I think we'd be better off.

But that all has now been called into question because of this minister's actions. He started—I started by talking about his apology. He apologized; I think he needs to go further. He needs to apologize for undermining this report and not going far enough on health care.

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard (Fort Richmond): Our mental health system difficulties did not arise overnight, and they will not be solved overnight. We are committed to working as a team and a government with clinical experts and service providers in order to implement the short- and long-term recommendations made in the VIRGO report.

Madam Speaker, as someone who has navigated through both the youth and the adult mental health

system, I feel an obligation to make sure that the focus of discussions surrounding this VIRGO report is on the steps that are needed to fix a broken and ineffective way of doing things. It is typical of the opposition to think that there's a simple solution that exists to address a very complex issue.

Our government has already demonstrated that we won't shy away from hard decisions, even if it means more work. Our ultimate focus in health care has been providing care at the right place and the right time for the patients who are in need of it. Doing what is right is not always easy, Madam Speaker, but it is always right.

* (15:10)

I want to take a moment to thank each and every person who participated in the development and creation of this report, including the families, health-care providers and community leaders, as well as its author, Dr. Rush. Their voices and experiences shaped the recommendations and their input will be key as our government begins the process of doing what is right for the people of Manitoba.

The Manitoba Mental Health and Addictions Strategy found that there is a high need for both mental health and addictions treatment in Manitoba. Long wait times to access services, limited availability of services in rural and northern communities, gaps in the continuum from acute to primary care and an imbalance in how past investments has been directed between acute services and those based in the community, were identified as major challenges.

I'd like to share a personal journey that I had gone through—in fact, my family has gone through. When one of my children was traumatized in a school setting and we were completely unprepared and did not have the tools to address what we were seeing, the change in our child, who started to have suicidal thoughts, who thought that ending his life was the best solution, as opposed to working through some of the thoughts and feelings that he was going through. Madam Speaker, it was the scariest experience that my husband and I had to deal with, as well as the siblings in that family, navigating a system, trying to seek, where do we enter, who is there to help us, is it the emergency room that we go to, when, you know, these thoughts are expressed. Is it our primary-care physician? We didn't have these answers. We were told, when we first connected with our primary-care doctor, that it could be up to three months before we were to even see a psychiatrist to

begin the process of assessment to see how we could help our child. Three months is a long time to worry and lose sleep and, in fact, not sleep at all, for families and those who are caring for their children.

We happen to have a number of supportive people within our family who had connections within the health-care system, that were able to help guide us to navigate quicker access, because we were in crisis, the whole family was in crisis. Madam Speaker, we were able to be seen, and in the course of my child's treatment, he was bounced from three different psychiatrists because the process is not a simple blood test to find out what's going on, what is the cause of some of the stressors? It is a matter of assessing and watching for symptoms. A lot of therapy, a lot of talk. It's a long-term assessment process that can turn anyone away, especially when you're frustrated and afraid and unsure and not well-educated. And it certainly was an educational process for our family, our entire family, including the siblings, to learn how to be supportive, to learn what is necessary through the acute stage, because not everyone stays in the acute stage. And, thankfully, we were able to get the resources necessary to survive that acute stage when many families have to grieve the loss and not get past that acute stage.

But then, following up on that, is the diagnosis. It was over 18 months of watching for symptoms and therapy and learning about our child before he finally received a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which, Madam Speaker, is a life-long condition to deal with. He is now in remission. And that's just something that we had to learn is that, you don't necessarily get cured. You can heal and you can become strong, you can become an advocate, but not every condition you get over. And you can be prone to triggers and you can be prone—life long—to the anxiety that stays with you, based on your life experience.

Madam Speaker, I'm sharing this experience that our family has gone through, that we have lived through—and there is much more that I could share and sometimes it's hard to go back to those dark days.

We certainly have been shown hope and have a bright future for our—for all of our children—but this is the experience of a family who had multiple supports. And I was a stay-at-home mom at the time and could devote a lot of time to support my child through this mental health crisis and issue. Many

families don't have those options. And it breaks my heart to know that they would probably be a lot more lost than even our family was within this system. It just speaks to—it's time for a change. We are far overdue for that change.

And I think that the more personal experience—and each of us can relate to someone in our family, potentially, who has addictions issues, or friends—we all can connect back to the need that there needs to be more resources. And it needs to be clearly accessible. You speak to someone who has an addiction issue, who seeks help, their window of opportunity for gaining that help is very short. They can't wait the three weeks before a bed opens up if they need to detox. They can't wait the three months to see psychiatric care if they're dealing with a mental illness that has led to addictions. Madam Speaker, our government recognizes this, and this report reveals this, and there is so much in this report and the recommendations that is important that we focus on implementing those recommendations that can immediately help those who are afflicted and not focus on a one solution or what's not in the report. That takes the attention away from what's truly important, and that is getting the help for those who are in need of the help.

I am encouraged to see many of the difficulties that our family experienced are reflected in the areas that we need to do better in in this report. The recent announcement of the rapid access medical clinics, or RAAM clinics, will go a long way to reduce the confusion and frustrations that families face when trying to access the care that is so desperately needed.

Countless stakeholders mention the problems created by mental health and addictions working separately, which ultimately led to delays in proper care. These new rapid access clinics are designed to guide people through the system, beginning at one point and connecting them to the services that best suit their acute, as well as their long-term needs, in the mental health system. These difficulties in the mental health system didn't arise overnight, Madam Speaker, and they won't be fixed overnight. Money alone cannot solve the real issues of access, although funding from many levels of government will be necessary as the long-term changes are implemented and available. Included in that necessity is for all of us to work together regardless of our political views. It's time for all of us to take off the partisan glasses and work on behalf of our most vulnerable. This report is good news, and those who depend on our

government to be courageous in these changes, they don't need fear mongering or distractions based on partisan points.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I want to acknowledge the experience that our colleague from Fort Richmond just shared, and I do think that our starting point for these discussions, when it comes to mental health and addictions, it has to be an understanding of those in our society who need help. There are many people who are dealing with mental health issues themselves, but there's also many parents whose children are dealing with mental health issues, and there are many parents in this province too, who have kids in a classroom where some of the other kids are dealing with mental health issues and therefore their families are affected as well. And so there's many people in our province who are affected by those concerns.

We also know that the scourge of addictions has touched so many people across our province and across every community, across every level of socio-economic standing. In my own life, I've dealt with addictions myself, and I am lucky to have emerged on the other side of that with a second chance at life. I also know that I've watched, in different parts of the city, many of my friends having to deal with addictions. And the—in many of these discussions, we often focus on, you know, the core area and certain surrounding neighbourhoods. I also know that there was a lot of good friends that I had in suburban Winnipeg, both, you know, indigenous, but also non-indigenous young people, young people who grew up in good homes, good homes with two parents, whose parents were working, were providing a suburban lifestyle and, you know, fighting for their kids to get a good education and all that stuff, and yet that was still not enough to prevent addiction from coming home to roost and from affecting their loved one.

And I expect to see some of my colleagues later this week at the TJ's Gift dinner, where a family who has been very much affected by addiction and the, I guess, spinoff harms that the drug trade can have, will mark another occasion, will mark another step in their journey towards trying to help clear drug use and drug abuse out of our society.

* (15:20)

But my concern over what we've seen over the past 24 hours from this government is that for all

those people who I just outlined, whether it's the parents of the young person dealing with a mental health issue, whether it's the parents of the other children in their classroom, whether it's the person who is dealing with mental health issues themselves, whether it's the young person who is battling addiction and trying to find a way out, whether it is the person who has had a lifelong journey through addiction, whether it's the people who are harmed watching their loved ones suffer. All those people, I think, would be right to be concerned over the government's actions over the past 24 hours.

Again, the VIRGO report has a lot of interesting proposals in it, and they name checked, I think, a lot of proposals in that document that I think are worthy of examination, of follow-up and action. However, we have seen that this government interfered with the findings of this report, and, in particular, they struck out a recommendation which we have been discussing in this House for many months now. And that is a concern, because if the government has interfered with this report, a report which commands this government to act based on the evidence, to listen to the experts, then how can the average parent, how can the average Manitoban have confidence that this government is actually doing that, is actually listening to the evidence, is actually listening to the experts, because there has been that interference?

And, you know, I listened to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and to the Minister of Health in question period today try and offer up different play-by-play scenarios under which, you know, it wasn't their fault, but I recognize that they're parsing their words very carefully when they made those statements.

But it is clear that there was interference. We know that the timeline suggests that there was interference, that the doctor submitted his report at the end of March, and that included a recommendation for a safe injection site, and yet the version of the report that was released publicly yesterday—well, the second version released publicly yesterday had that recommendation removed.

We also know that because of the comments of Dr. Rush yesterday and the comments of the Minister of Health and the Premier yesterday and today that there are serious issues with information sharing between the government and this researcher and the other researchers he worked with. For instance, we

now know that the doctor was not provided with information on drug use in Manitoba.

It's inconceivable to me that you could commission a study which has part of its purview, addictions, and you would not provide information on drug use in our province to that researcher examining the issue of addictions.

We also know that this report deals extensively with harm-reduction approaches, has a section which talks about all the advantages that come to public health when we use harm-reduction approaches. And yet the government did not share information about harm-reduction proposals, including a safe consumption site here in Winnipeg—a proposal for one, anyways, with that researcher.

So, again, it seems though—as though there was deliberate concealment of information that was germane, that was relevant and that, I would argue, are even fundamental to the task of examining addictions and mental health in our province.

We know that the minister just a short time ago acknowledged that there was a back and forth between the government and the researcher. Another government official yesterday indicated that the safe consumption site recommendation being deleted was not the only change that was made by the government to this document. So, again, they're parsing the words very carefully, and yet the truth of the situation, that there was political interference here, seems to be coming out nonetheless.

And I think that looming in the background of all of this is the fact that every argument this government has tried to use to argue against safe consumption sites has been taken away from them. First, they argued that there was no evidence to support it. And then media went out, and they said, no, there's clear evidence that safe consumption sites work. Then this government said, well, we haven't heard recommendations from experts that this would work, and then numerous experts came forward and—you know, including the Canadian Mental Health Association, and said safe consumption sites will work. And then, finally, the government said, well, we've got to wait for the VIRGO report before we can take any action. And then, lo and behold, we discover yesterday that the VIRGO report recommended a safe consumption site for here in Winnipeg.

Now, a safe consumption site is not a silver bullet. It will not solve drug abuse problems in our

city overnight, but it should be used as part of an overall approach to public health and to addictions treatment based in harm reduction.

We know that a safe consumption site saves lives. In the safe consumption site in Vancouver, nobody has ever died of an overdose, and yet we see overdoses in too many of our communities. We also know that it reduces harm, because if somebody uses drugs in a safe consumption site, people who are very likely already going to be—or, who are, in fact, already going to be using anyways, that we can reduce the transmission of blood-borne illnesses and we can also reduce soft tissue damage and many other, I guess, positive public health benefits that are actually outlined in the VIRGO report.

But, perhaps most importantly, when we're thinking about those parents, we're thinking about those other people in our province who are concerned about this government's actions when it comes to mental health, it's the fact that if there is a safe consumption site in Winnipeg where drug users would go, that means that there will be less drug use in our communities. There will be less communities—community centres like River Osborne in my constituency, where people find syringes not far from an area where children play. There will be less than there are in the constituency of saint—or of Point Douglas, rather, where a Bear Clan Patrol leader was actually poked with a syringe needle that he cleaned up, that there will be less signs of visible drug use in the community—in a seat like St. Boniface where people in those not-for-profit organizations are telling us that we need harm reduction and we need harm reduction now.

So, again, the evidence is clear. The recommendation existed in this government's report before they interfered, and the version control challenge that this government has cited as the reason for their mismanagement of this topic has a very serious repercussion for the families in our province affected by this issue. And, again, it does cut across all levels and all communities and all members of our society. And so it is important for us to condemn the government's actions on this front in the last 24 hours. It would be a gesture of good faith and could perhaps presage the sharing of information on drug use and on harm-reduction strategies with Dr. Rush who could then deliberate on those and return more findings, more credible findings, in the future that had not been interfered with by this government.

And so that's why we have brought forward this motion today. I'm grateful for my colleague from Minto for doing so. I'm speaking in favour of it. And I would close, just once again, by acknowledging the toll that mental illness has on so many people in our province and on so many members of our families.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): We are here debating and discussing Dr. Rush's report and the approach that the government has taken to that report. I think that we are now more than two years of this current government, and so it has taken them two years to get to this point. That is a slow pace, all things considered, and shows that there's not been as much priority as there should have been to mental and brain health and addictions. It certainly could have been done more quickly.

Indeed, interestingly, Liberals produced in nine months a report on brain health which was produced before the current government even had hired Dr. Rush. There could have been a lot more quick action out of the gate when this government was elected.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

What this report does say, first of all, is that there are clearly a lot of shortcomings and gaps in the service of mental and brain health and addictions. Just to list a few of these, page 89: specific gaps in the continuum of services included services for children and adolescents, including transition-age youth; psychiatry; psychosocial counselling; in-patient treatment beds; addiction, co-occurring substance use addictions, mental health services; prevention, early detection; crisis services; services for individuals with intellectual and behavioural 'trallenges;' services for low-to-moderate mental health concerns; follow-up supports; family supports; housing, psychology; diagnostic, assessment; WMS; intake, screening; services for the elderly; services for individuals with eating disorders.

* (15:30)

It 'certainly' shows a system which is in disarray currently. That's after two years of the current government and many years of the previous NDP government. So, clearly, given the timeline, both the Pallister government and the former NDP government must share the blame for the system which is currently in disarray—some said crisis—and I think that's not an unreasonable description of how poorly the system is organized and put together.

There are many other gaps and many other shortcomings which are mentioned and particularly with regard to indigenous health, mental health and addictions, and brain health. So that needs to be laid out and made clear right from the start.

The report clearly has within its boundaries a variety of worthwhile observations and some good recommendations. There are clearly also areas which were not sufficiently addressed. There is such a wide-ranging look at brain and mental health that the first reaction is, in a sense, where do you start. And clearly, one of the things that would have been useful had it been in this report was a clearer—what would be step 1, step 2, step 3 in a sense of organizing how one would rearrange, reorganize the whole system.

There is clearly a major shortcoming, as we've heard, in a lack of data. Dr. Rush himself said when he was talking about the injection sites, I didn't have enough information. I didn't have the data. I didn't have previous proposals. I didn't have background stuff. What I did have was support from the Harm Reduction Network.

Clearly, it is very disappointing that there was not the data there, and one can argue whether that was the fault of the previous NDP government or the current PC Pallister government, but, clearly, in two years, there was plenty of opportunity—that this government has been in power, the two years—for much data to have been collected.

Dr. Rush continues, and I quote, you would want to know the number of drug users that are on the streets. You would want to know the relative balance—is it cocaine, is it heroin, is it crystal meth? You would want to know what the demand is. You would want to know the support within the user population. In fact, there are some statistics showing rapid increases in meth users. There are observations from people like Marion Willis at Morberg House, who has identified that the vast majority of people who come in who are homeless are dealing with meth addiction rather than opioid addiction.

And so one of the areas which clearly is a shortcoming is not only the lack of data, but the lack of an adequate attempt to gather the data which was so critically needed. There is a recommendation from Dr. Rush that there be a study in the area of injection sites. Many would argue that there's plenty of evidence already that injection sites in harm reduction are effective approaches. I would say much of the work has been done with opioid addiction, and that clearly is an area where, in fact, the government

can be credited with making a step forward and making greater availability of Suboxone. Suboxone, as I recall, was already in the textbooks of addictions about eight years ago, and so it clearly was a slow step for Manitoba to move in that direction. But it is good that that move is occurring.

I believe that in some of the areas in this report—support for community hubs, building services into the community, community mobilization lists, links to existing resources—that there is an emphasis here on building supports and building on existing supports and activities in the community and, in part, trying to link these together. There are good recommendations which talk to emphasis on peer support and psychologists and more provincial-shared database. It's not entirely clear whether this is a shared electronic record or exactly what. There's attention to unfilled positions, a whole variety of things which clearly need to be addressed and moved forward on.

The changes which happened in the—from yesterday morning when a report was delivered which included support for harm reduction and injection sites and later in the morning when that support had been completely erased has certainly raised significant questions about the behaviour of this government. You know, as has been put forward by many observers, that, based in part on some things which have happened in the past, based on the behaviour of this government to date, there are many who see, in spite of the denials, that there likely was some level of government manipulation and interference, but it may never be possible to say exactly what happened just because of the nature of this government covering things up.

Nevertheless, Dr. Rush himself clearly states that he is a supporter of harm reduction and injection sites, and one is to hope that at the very least this government will move forward with the study that has been proposed by Dr. Rush. Even though the study was not in the report, it was certainly in his verbal report at the time of the release of his report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): I'd like to thank the opposition for allowing me the opportunity to speak and for bringing forward this motion. The issue of mental health and addictions is obviously at the top of many people's minds. It's touched probably almost every family in Manitoba.

On the specific issue of the apparent leak of a earlier version of the report, it is either because it

was deliberate, the opposition suggests it was political—or the—at least the final version was political due to deletions. This is what I would say to that, having been in government for nine years and in a Cabinet role one way or the other during those nine years as a Cabinet minister or on Treasury Board, as a parliamentary secretary, and that is: these things happen. Reports are leaked; previous versions are leaked. And that is a problem because when it is leaked, people say, well, why that version and not the one that was finally published. And that's a fair question, and the Leader of the Opposition and the opposition and the government will have to sort that out.

* (15:40)

But, to reflect on the minister, I say I think I would be willing to give the minister the benefit of the doubt for sure, and, more than that, the record of the minister is one, I think, is probably among the best of the government and certainly respected by everyone.

However, there's a larger issue, and that is mental health and addiction. When I was a federal MP, I was fortunate enough to be the opposition Health critic back in the day, in 2004, 2005 to the '06 election and, at that time, I brought forward a motion that, among other things including a national cancer strategy, included a national mental health strategy. Now this was in about '05, and it was apparently the first time mental health made it onto the floor of the House of Commons in this context, which is amazing, because it's well into the 21st century. But that's how stigmatized the issue of mental health was even at that time.

We've come a long way, and Stephen Harper was very progressive, and I am serious about this. He allowed me to bring that motion forward, and then he incorporated it. He listened to me and he—and Canadians—and he incorporated it into the platform where we—2006 election, and allowed me to ensure the government follow through when I was parliamentary secretary for Health, and we created the Canadian mental health commission.

And the stigma has been—I don't know if there is—certainly is a stigma, but it's not as big as it used to be, and the Health minister of the day, Tony Clement, was also very progressive on the issue of mental health.

This—I was very honoured that the Canadian Mental Health Association recognized my

efforts, but it's really the efforts of many, and I could not have accepted their accolades without acknowledging Prime Minister Harper and Minister Clement and the entire federal caucus and the other caucuses.

There was even, I think, the member for—this was so long ago, I think the member from Elmwood-Transcona may have been there, or may have been even before he got there, so there's a shot blast from the past.

Our—the—so that's mental health, and there's the other side—addictions. The government decided to put—follow what was called the Bruce Oake Foundation, who models their treatment on Fresh Start based in Calgary, and they want to create a facility to treat people with opioid addictions, okay. That sounds pretty good, but how the government has gone about this is not very good, and the misinformation, the underhanded tactics, the shady land deals, the total disregard for taxpayer money undermines public confidence and public support for the very issue the government claims that they're trying to deal with.

Selling a property for millions of dollars for a buck—and that's park and recreation property. It's ridiculous, and that was initiated by the Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding). The City of Winnipeg got railroaded into it.

The—so we find out that the Minister of Health, or the Health Department has nothing to do with this so-called addiction, opioid addictions facility. We find out it's a Manitoba health project, under Manitoba Housing. And then we find out that it's—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fletcher: —there's no health—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind the member that the topic that he's talking right now is irrelevant to what the actual—the—when it comes to the actual grievance—the motion. The motion today.

So the honourable member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher), if you can keep—

Mr. Fletcher: Okay, so—and thank you, Mr. Speaker. The connection is this: the report that is released yesterday by Dr. Rush and company does not deal with the opioid issue. In fact, my preliminary scans show opioids aren't even mentioned. It seems that crystal meth is the real issue of addiction, and why is Manitoba health even getting involved in addiction issues—or Manitoba

Families getting involved in addiction issues? It should be Manitoba Health. Where's the plan? There is no plan, provincially. And the more you dig, the worse it gets.

So this report is very timely. And it reveals a massive shortcoming in how we deal with mental health and addictions. Doesn't mention opioids. The people of my riding are concerned about why there isn't licensing, policing, their property values—all these questions, because the government didn't do its due diligence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Thanks to my caucus colleagues and our staff for, on very quick timelines, capturing a very clear essence of this issue and raising the profile, as much as we possibly can, from over here on the opposition benches. All of this, of course, only started yesterday, with the truly bizarre release of this long-awaited report. Not the first time this government has chosen to sit on a report for an unreasonable amount of time. And, remarkably, when they released it, it was not the report itself that was the most controversial part. It was the fact that, quite clearly, there had been some level of political interference that changed the content of this report. And I think the severity of that needs to be called out. And hence our motion here today as one of only a few Opposition Day motions that we are able to bring forward. I think this one, certainly, merits that, not just because of the specifics of this case, bad as they are, but because this fits, tragically, with a pattern of behaviour that we have seen from this government and from this Premier (Mr. Pallister), in particular, from pretty much day one of this government.

The basic facts of the matter are that this report was released by the government yesterday morning, and it included a recommendation for a safe injection site as an important pillar of what this Province's response to the addictions epidemic that our province is now facing. That was one of the key recommendations, and yet, when the question was raised in question period, remarkably, the Premier said there was no such recommendation in the report.

* (15:50)

Lo and behold, our hard-working Health critic pulled reference to the 'specific' report, provided the specific page number, page 226, and the specific

recommendation number, No. 218, and said, there it is, Mr. Premier. Here's the recommendation from the consultant that you hired to do this work to give the best advice possible to our Province on how we can better wrestle with a tragic epidemic that is affecting thousands of people and their families across the province.

And, lo and behold, what does the government do? They claimed, well, that's an earlier version of this report. We didn't like that particular recommendation. And somehow it got removed. And that's where it gets even murkier. No one from the government benches has had sufficient clarity to remember giving direction to anyone making that change to the document. It's as if it just sort of magically happened. Government got a report, there was something in there that someone didn't like, and, you know, the House elves emerged late in the evening to take that line out and package it all back up again.

It's truly political interference of the—of a blatant nature. And for the Premier to state that the report didn't contain a recommendation which it clearly did means he misled the House. Like, there's just no other conclusion that can be drawn here.

And an additional tragedy in this sordid tale is that the substance of the recommendation, that a safe injection site should be established in Manitoba, has been completely overshadowed by the shenanigans of this Premier and his government.

Why is it that they do not feel that a safe injection site would actually make a positive difference in the lives of people struggling with addictions and in the lives of those struggling to support people living with addictions? This technique has long been opposed by other Conservative governments. I remember the huge fight that the federal Harper government launched against the British Columbia safe injection site in the lower mainland in Vancouver's eastside there.

I, myself, have never understood where that opposition stems from, what are the core values or beliefs that Conservatives find so offensive to safe injection sites or to a harm-reduction approach in general. It has been proven time and time and time and time again to save lives, to reduce costs and to lead to healthier people and healthier communities. I don't know why Conservatives would be opposed to that. I don't know why anybody would be opposed to that, but clearly they are.

And, clearly, this Premier's so opposed to it that there was one line in a 200-and-some-page report, almost 300-page report, but, no, no, that one line, he had the specific attention to demand that it be removed. And he hasn't admitted it as much that it came from him. Ultimately, the Premier is responsible for this mess. His Health Minister has not admitted doing it. Somehow the House elves were informed and went about their business while everyone in government slept and, lo and behold, with—between the six hours of the morning release of the report and the afternoon question period, the House elves had prepared a new version.

That's about as far as the honesty and accountability of this government has gone on this issue. And lost, as I said, completely, in the—in this behaviour has been any mention of why it is that the government feels that a safe injection site is something that they should oppose rather than support. And we can't—we cannot get anyone from the government to give us any reason, same as usual. And, you know, for one individual to exhibit, you know, behaviour that suggests they don't really want to be held accountable is one thing, but for this to now have this kind of an impact on a very important government report speaks volumes to the nature of how this government is operating and this Premier (Mr. Pallister). And you can't help but assume that members of the government are taking their lead from the Premier, who we have on record, on multiple occasions, playing a little loose with the facts about how things are happening and even where he's been.

You know, there was the whole question of his financial holdings. He said he didn't even have to provide those to the independent commissioner when, quite clearly, he does. He's, you know, claimed that he was out of town during a very important crisis in Manitoba, a flood. Said he was out of town at a wedding, and that's not entirely accurate; he was in Costa Rica where there was no wedding so far as we know. Maybe the House elves are working on that bit of revisionist history as well; there could've been a Costa Rican wedding that has now suddenly popped up, retroactively, in the Premier's schedule.

He has, you know, claimed lots of different things that have turned out to just not be true. And the additional crisis of confidence that this leaves the public with is how many of the other reports that this government has commissioned have actually been doctored in this manner so that the millions of

dollars—what is it? Seven or eight million dollars now—\$8 million and counting that we're up to, and those are just the reports, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we know about that this government has asked for. How much of those recommendations have actually been scrubbed by this government, which wanted to sanitize it so that the reports only fit with their own world view, which they do not see fit to have to even defend with any reason?

So, for all of these logical arguments, I fully support our—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Logan): Past noon today, I heard on CBC Radio a news clip of Winnipeg Mayor Bowman stating that he agrees a safe-injection site facility is needed in Winnipeg. Much earlier in the morning, also on CBC Radio, Manitoba's eminent non-partisan political scientist, Dr. Paul Thomas, said that a change to mental health report will likely cause distrust, in quote, arouse suspicion, unquote. Furthermore, Professor Thomas stated that, I quote, the spectre of political interference can influence public perception, unquote.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we know, the Pallister government commissioned Dr. Brian Rush to undertake a study, and, on Monday, that was yesterday, he presented his report to the media, the Manitoba Health—the Manitoba Mental Health and Addictions Strategy—Improving Access and Coordination of Mental Health and Addiction Services. There were two versions of the report. Interestingly, CBC News and other media received a draft report where there is a recommendation for a safe-injection site, and then, hours later, that recommendation was missing from the final copy. The two copies, draft and the final copy, were basically the same in total, except, in the final report, the recommendation for a safe-injection site in the draft report given to the media was removed in the final report of Dr. Rush.

* (16:00)

It is in this context that professor emeritus of political studies, Dr. Paul Thomas, said that, quote, whatever the reason for the change, it's likely many people will distrust the official government explanation, unquote. He added that we live in an era of suspicion and cynicism about politicians and that—and the way they want to manipulate the news.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Health Minister confirmed that Dr. Brian Rush has intimated to him that he supports a safe injection site. However, in the media conference, he stated that there was not—Dr. Rush stated that there was not enough evidence in Manitoba to make the specific recommendation for a safe injection site.

If that were so, what was that—why was that recommendation found its way into the draft report? And for a copy of that report find its way to the Minister of Health's office and to the regional health authority's office, and then forwarded to the media, only to be rescinded later on, makes one think something is not right here. If indeed there was lack of enough evidence to make that recommendation, how did that recommendation found its way in the draft report in the first place, the draft report that went to the media?

Professor Thomas said in his career, he has encountered political interference before reports were publicly presented. He added that the spectre of political interference, whether or not it happens in a particular case, can influence report authors as well as the public's perception of their findings. He further quipped that many people will take the Minister of Health's denial that there was political interference and say: Ah, I don't believe him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I mention this TV program, it will show my age. I grew up watching Inspector Gadget. I thought he was a man who brought justice to his TV character by coming up with brilliant ways of solving a mystery.

Safe injection sites—there are now three federally supervised sites in British Columbia I believe has provided other jurisdictions like Manitoba the medical, scientific and social evidence for the value of this program. There is no more mystery to be solved here. Safe injection sites save lives.

And Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all can agree: addiction is considered an illness or disease. Here in Canada, people with illnesses and diseases can access universally accessible health care. Safe injection sites are places where this kind of illness, this addiction—being a disease—can be cured.

It may not work for everyone affected by this illness, just as our hospitals and clinics are not able to save everyone seeking treatment for diseases, but certainly, there are hard statistics of drug addicts who evaded sure death from drug overdose on—or contaminated needles, became rehabilitated and

turned their lives around. Hard facts and evidence should trump ideology.

In this side of the House, we believe people can turn their life around if they muster inner strength and resolve to rehabilitate themselves, mend their ways, with the help of the government, the community and society; with supports like housing, employment, education and training, including the arts.

Vancouver's Insite, the first publicly funded and supervised injection site, opened in 2003. Since then, it had met stiff political opposition from many fronts. Eventually, the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed and unanimously determined that it should remain open to protect public health. Since then, two more other safe injection sites were opened in British Columbia.

We believe that a safe injection site should be provided to people with mental illnesses or people afflicted with this addiction disease.

I—it was in 2007, and I attended a conference, and I think our—the Manitoba Legislative Assembly was co-sponsor to this conference, and a presentation was made by one of the MLAs in British Columbia. And she had with her volumes of not just literature but studies and reports made from four years of InSite's operation. I don't have that study right now. I didn't realize I'll be speaking on this Opposition Day motion. And, by the way, I thank my colleague, the member from Minto, for bringing up this motion. That member from British Columbia, that MLA from British Columbia, had brought with her hard copies of reports about the effects of InSite, how many people attended or used the facility, how many people received care, were supervised when they were doing their injection and how many people were able to leave that facility and moved on to live drug-free lives for that time that the report was made. I don't have that figure right now with me but I would love to check those. I—in this age of Internet, I'm sure they're available online.

So, with this, I would like to implore my colleagues from the other side of the House to accept this—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I—it's unfortunate that we have to stand here today and speak about this motion. It's really too bad that we now have to question not just this report but other reports. I guess

part of the question that should be being asked is, how many versions of this report were there? What other things may have been removed that the government didn't like or didn't want out there so that they wouldn't have to implement it because, oh, the expert didn't recommend that? So now we're left to wonder, with so many reports—because, as we well know, this government loves to hire experts and loves to spend government money commissioning reports—but now we're left to wonder, what kind of value do they actually get for that money? Is it only to reinforce their ideological beliefs? Do they have other things removed from other reports? Is there other things removed from this report?

You know, we can spend a lot of time debating the merits of safe injection sites, and certainly there's people that agree and there's people that disagree. It would appear that the majority of experts agree that safe injection sites are the way to go. But really, that's not what this afternoon is about, is it? No, what this afternoon is about is having faith in the government that's elected to represent the people of Manitoba to actually release the correct factual information.

* (16:10)

It seems incredulous to me to believe that they've hired an expert—someone they've called an expert, don't know the man myself, could be an expert, probably is—but they would have us believe that the expert they hired included something in a report and then magically decided, gee, I better take that out, even though what's in there is something that he later on said that he actually supports.

So how did it get in there in the first place? Well, now the minister—or, the expert, I guess, says, well, he didn't really have any facts. The government didn't give him any of that information. So now we're to believe that the government hires an expert to look into addictions in this province and—to help them chart a path forward, but that—they'd have us believe that—well, we asked him to look into that, but we didn't give him the information that he required to actually do a thorough investigation.

So they would have us believe that—a couple of scenarios. One is that, well, he didn't really mean to put it in there in the first place, so he took it out. The other is, well, it was in there, but they never gave him the information to actually come up with a true recommendation on addictions and abuse—addictions—substance abuse. So then it throws into question the whole report.

Now, there are some good things that I've seen in the report, and certainly there's things that we'll be pushing this government to look at. I mean, one of the things that's in this VIRGO report is—talks about some of the issues that people in the North have, which are some of the very same things that I've been challenging the Minister of Health on previously about transportation, about the costs of transportation, about the lack of transportation, about how do people in the North actually access the similar level of health care to people in the south. Well, quite frankly, they don't, and this report actually does talk about that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It talks about the challenges of people in the North and how they have to have transportation because they don't have the same resources in every community.

Now, one of the things that this report talks about is, somebody goes for mental health treatment, assistance, consultation with a doctor, with a—psychiatric assistance not in their home community. And then they get sent back home. Well, guess what? There are no mental health services in any of those communities, so now what? You know, some of the things that I heard when we had our public forum in Flin Flon about health care—and mental health was certainly top of some people's minds—is you get eight visits and you better be all cured by then because you're not getting nine.

So there's many things that get talked about in this report that probably and definitely will go towards making mental health and addictions services more widely available. I mean, it—the minister stands up and talks about, well, one of these clinics is going to open in the North. Like somebody in Flin Flon can get to Thompson. Like somebody in Lynn Lake just walks down the street to Thompson. Maybe somebody in The Pas magically gets to Thompson.

Clearly, this government is blind when it comes to the realities of life in the North because there has to be a means to get from point A to point B that clearly isn't there. And, well, I guess you could fly from Flin Flon to Winnipeg and then fly from Winnipeg to Thompson to get access to this mental health service, this clinic that the minister is so proud of is going to open somewhere in the North, which will be a real benefit to people in whichever community this government chooses to put it in. It will be of absolutely no benefit to most other people in the North, because it's not like the city of Winnipeg where you can just take a cab and get there. And I did take a cab, actually, one day, from

The Pas to Flin Flon, when the plane let me off in The Pas because of bad weather. Three hundred and fifty dollars later, I arrived at my destination.

Now, imagine people in the North that are already struggling with poverty and addictions. How will they get to this wondrous clinic the minister talks about opening? Well, they don't have \$350, so they're clearly not taking a cab. So they're clearly just not getting there.

So I do commend the author of the report on recognizing some of the issues, certainly, some of the issues that we've talked about previously and haven't got good answers to. So, I mean, never mind the fact that this government may or may not have tampered with the report and taken things out. What's the plan going to be for some of the things that they didn't take out? Will they actually implement some of those things, or will they just turn a blind eye to some of those things and leave us, once again, in the North struggling to access services that people in the south take for granted, even though there's not enough of them in the south either.

So, you know, we look at this report, and we'll end up questioning the government's—really, I guess, honesty is not the right word to use, so I won't use it, but we'll end up questioning reports commissioned by this government to see what things have been taken out and what things—maybe they've added things to a report that somebody's been commissioned to write. So it, really, calls into question the whole point of this government's ongoing desire to hire outside experts so that supposedly they're free and lily white and pure of any decisions that get made. But, clearly, that's not the case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they can call this whatever they want, version control challenge. How many other versions of this report are out there? How many versions of other reports are out there that they've got their hands, their fingerprints all over, that they've changed to suit their own ideological needs? That's really what this debate today is about, is being able to really believe that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

The honourable member for Tyndall Park. *[interjection]* Order.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): It's a rare occasion that I stand up at this time, because this is usually my nap time, but the—we—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Marcelino: —I chose to speak at this time and wake up from a dream. This dream was really good and wholesome. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Marcelino: But then the nightmare that is upon us, which is the Pallister government, is really a little bit more pronounced. I take it that the VIRGO report was supposed to have been within the hands of this government for so long, since March, was it? *[interjection]* December. I have been corrected by the honourable member from Minto. Since December. And copies of this report must have been circulating within the political staff of the office of the Premier (Mr. Pallister), the office of the Health Minister, the office of the Minister for Growth, Enterprise and Trade and, of course, the office of the member from Kildonan. Not.

* (16:20)

My real concern is that, when it was released, it was released somewhat in some form of, in the legalese, obfuscation. There were seven words that were hit with the delete button, and those seven words refer to the safe injection site. And if you are to compare the draft—that's in quotes—report and the report that was supposed to be the real report—that was supposed to be the one that will be handed in—there were only seven words that were changed.

And, if you don't believe that, even the format of the reports would not have changed, because if you just hit the delete button on your computer and then delete seven words, it won't change even the indentation; it won't change the format, and it won't change the font.

And I'm not an expert in computers, but forensically, the problem that we have is that, under whose orders were those seven words deleted? Because I believe that there had been some of the problems of this Pallister government in deleting so many things. Jobs. They deleted jobs at Hydro and in the public service and at St. Boniface and at Seven Oaks and at Concordia and at Misericordia. And it's hurting a lot of people.

The delete button should be erased from the computer keyboard, especially when it's in the keyboards of the PC government. The delete button should be put under lapel. And the lapel should always say, we made a mistake.

The problem that I'm having with all of this is that—I'm taking it with a sense of humour because to

take it seriously is to drive me nuts. Why would something that the government of Manitoba, the people of Manitoba, paid for that report from the consultant and still be changed at the whim and caprice and pleasure of somebody?

I don't know—even know when the final payment was made, when the final cheque was cut for the consultant, but was it coterminous, or was it dated at the same day that that delete button that hit those seven words was pushed by somebody? Was it somebody from the political staff? Or was it from the deputy minister's office? Or was it from the minister's office? And if it was, then somebody should explain why the draft report in the first place was released. Was it because the draft report itself was the one that was supposed to be released?

And it's amazing how sometimes, you know, when you are trying to think this through—this is a mistake. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) or the Minister of Health could just say, I'm sorry; we made a mistake. But never have I heard the word s-o-r-r-y in this Chamber from the Premier, or the words I a-p-o-l-o-g-i-z-e. I never heard that.

And I don't want to make too much of it, except that, when this happens, when this—I won't call it bungling—but, okay, I'll call it bungling. When this mess was foisted—that's f-o-i-s-t-e-d—foisted upon us, by a government that's supposed to be perfect in its goals and mandate, from a government that prides itself with being open and transparent, not in practice. It is just that: lip service is always cheap. Very, very cheap. It does not cost anything. But, when a recommendation to build a safe injection site is something that has to be taken into account considering the lives that it will save.

A safe injection site will save lives. And it is amazing, for me, that somebody would even try to demean that idea, that it is not really needed in the province. Yes, it is. Have you been to Main Street, sir? Have you been to my part of town, Logan? Have you been to Weston? Which part have you been to? And, if you really have been there, you would have seen the scourge of drugs—the scourge of drugs. I am helping out somebody who's into it—meth, crystal meth. And it is just abominable how it destroys the human spirit and just how hurtful those drugs really are. And a safe injection site will save them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): So I just want to put on a couple of words in respect of the member from Minto's Opposition Day motion in respect of

this House. The members sitting here, who, I am sure that we can all agree, we are some of the most privileged people in Manitoba. Not only right now, but in history in Manitoba. Our names will go down as being the very, very, few, lucky Manitobans to actually be sitting in this Chamber and to be working on behalf of all Manitobans.

So the member for Minto's (Mr. Swan) Opposition Day motion that we, in this House, us—all of us privileged folks—condemn the provincial government for misleading the House and, more importantly, Manitobans, regarding the recommendations of the VIRGO consulting report. I will only—I will keep my comments brief. I think that I want to acknowledge each and every one of my colleagues who have stood up today to talk about, really, the importance of why this opposition motion—Opposition Day motion is so important. It's important to get it on the official record that this government, this Premier, the Minister of Health, misled Manitobans when they had a report that they commissioned, that they paid our taxpayers' dollars with, that they misled Manitobans and actually failed Manitobans. I would suggest, Deputy Speaker, that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and the Health Minister failed Manitobans when they very methodically and very strategically deleted a recommendation by—who, I believe, we all in this room agree is an expert.

* (16:30)

I know that the Minister of Health, who is probably one of the most talented speakers in this Chamber in respect of spinning, you know, said that we were criticizing Dr. Rush. That is in no way, shape or form what we were doing on this side of the House. We are actually—our criticism is for the Premier and for the Minister of Health for, again, methodically and strategically deleting a recommendation in respect of the need for or the support for a safe injection site or a safe consumption site.

I have to say, you know, shame on the Premier and shame on the Minister of Health for not, you know, for all of they—for all of the nonsense that they tout about this government being transparent and accountable, this is a flagrant example of them not being transparent in the sense that you would delete such a critical recommendation in the lives of Manitobans of which we all in this House have a responsibility for.

And, you know, I—you know, if I were to take my MLA hat off for a couple of minutes, I find, as

the daughter of a mother who suffered for well over 14 years of being addicted to heroin, and who I've shared many, many times in this House lost her life ultimately back in '95. At the time, my mother, as I said, was living on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. She was sexually exploited on those streets. She got her drugs from those streets. And, at the time in '95 what was going around the community was called China White, and it was a purest heroin, and it was laced with fentanyl, and my poor mom, who suffered her whole life, who suffered the results of colonization, who suffered the results of residential school, who was sexually abused, who was raped at 12, who was put on the streets at the age of 13, who had no supports, who was so completely lost and divorced from her culture, ultimately lost her life in the bathroom stall of a SkyTrain, and when I often think about that, I think about, you know, my poor mom probably just collapsing where everybody goes pee, and there was my mom's last moments.

And, you know, I find it particularly offensive that this government and members in this House laugh. They think it's a big joke that their Premier (Mr. Pallister) and their minister took out a recommendation that can actually save lives. *[interjection]*

My mother never had the opportunity, and I would ask the members—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —to stop blabbing while I'm talking—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —and just listen for a moment—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: That recommendation saves lives. It has the opportunity to save lives. My mother never got to meet her grandchildren. My sons have never been able to have the love and comfort of a grandmother. I mothered my children alone. I don't have a father. I don't have a mom. And, when I think that my mom could have had an opportunity to be able to use in a safe place, that had she overdosed—like many, many people at that time, my mom was not the only person to lose her life—she could have been revived and she could have maybe eventually

dealt with her addictions and she could have maybe been alive and maybe she could have seen me standing in this Chamber.

So I just want to again reiterate how offensive it is that members laugh about people's lives and, you know, the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino) says, you know, do you go down on Main Street. I'm there every day. And what do I see? I see my people. And what do I see? I see my mom in the very same people that are struggling right now. And this Chamber laughs at those people. And, certainly, as the most privileged in Manitoba right now, sitting in this Chamber, and for history, we can do better in this province for the most marginalized that are struggling.

Miigwech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The question before the House is the Opposition Day motion in the name of the honourable member for Minto (Mr. Swan).

Do the members want the motion read?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Opposition Day motion: That the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba condemn the provincial government for misleading the House and Manitobans regarding the recommendations of the VIRGO consulting report.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

I declare the motion—oh, the honourable Opposition House Leader.

Recorded Vote

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): A recorded vote, please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A recorded vote has been requested.

Call in the members.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

* (17:00)

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

The question before the House is the Opposition Day motion. *[interjection]* We've had a technical glitch, so we will have to start again, our apologies to the House.

The question before the House is the opposition day motion.

Order.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Allum, Altemeyer, Fontaine, Gerrard, Kinew, Klassen, Lamoureux, Lindsey, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Saran, Smith (Point Douglas), Swan, Wiebe.

Nays

Bindle, Clarke, Cox, Cullen, Curry, Eichler, Ewasko, Fielding, Friesen, Guillemard, Helwer, Isleifson, Johnson, Johnston, Lagassé, Lagimodiere, Martin, Mayer, Michaleski, Micklefield, Morley-Lecomte, Nesbitt, Pallister, Pedersen, Piwniuk, Reyes, Schuler, Smith (Southdale), Smook, Squires, Teitsma, Wharton, Wishart, Wowchuk, Yakimoski.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Yeas 15, Nays 35.

Madam Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

* * *

Madam Speaker: The hour being past 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 15, 2018

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Introduction of Bills		Manitoba's 150th Anniversary	
		A. Smith	2305
		Cox	2306
Bill 229—The Intoxicated Persons Detention Amendment Act		Elmwood Community Resource Centre	
Lamoureux	2295	Wiebe	2306
		Goertzen	2306
Tabling of Reports		Social Housing Units	
Friesen	2295	Wiebe	2306
		Goertzen	2307
Members' Statements		Northern Health Care	
Roman Swiderek		Lindsey	2307
Squires	2295	Goertzen	2307
West End Sweep Off		Petitions	
Swan	2295	Tina Fontaine—Public Inquiry	
		B. Smith	2307
Springfield Minor Hockey Association		Vimy Arena	
Schuler	2296	Fletcher	2308
Outside Looking In		Medical Laboratory Services	
Klassen	2297	Gerrard	2309
Investment in Public Schools		Tina Fontaine—Public Inquiry	
Bindle	2297	Fontaine	2310
Oral Questions			
Mental Health and Addictions		ORDERS OF THE DAY	
Kinew	2298	<i>(Continued)</i>	
Pallister	2298	GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
Safe Injection Sites		Opposition Day Motion	
Swan	2301	Swan	2311
Goertzen	2301	Goertzen	2313
Consultant Reports		Wiebe	2314
Fontaine	2302	Guillemard	2316
Pallister	2302	Kinew	2318
Safe Injection Sites		Gerrard	2320
B. Smith	2303	Fletcher	2321
Goertzen	2303	Altemeyer	2323
Pallister	2304	F. Marcelino	2324
VIRGO Report		Lindsey	2325
Lamoureux	2304	T. Marcelino	2327
Goertzen	2305	Fontaine	2328

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>