

Fourth Session – Forty-Second 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-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 9, 2022

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

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

Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 37—The International Child Support and Family Maintenance (Hague Convention) Act

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires), that Bill 37, The International Child Support and Family Maintenance (Hague Convention) Act, be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: The bill will improve access to justice by providing Manitoba families with additional avenues for establishing, varying and enforcing child and spousal support where one party lives outside of Canada, by enabling Manitoba to implement the 2007 Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance.

This is the second province in Canada to bring forward this implementation bill. If implemented, the

convention will expand the number of foreign jurisdictions with which Manitoba has child and spousal support reciprocity, including France, Italy, Brazil and the Philippines.

I look forward to all parties' support of this important piece of legislation.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): In accordance with step 1 of the financial procedure, I am tabling a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor regarding supplementary Estimates for the 2022-2023 financial year and supporting documents. Thank you.

And it is my pleasure to rise today in the Assembly to table the errata to the Estimates of Expenditure pages 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 68, 70, 128 and 130. Thank you.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

National Nursing Week

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Today I would like to acknowledge all nurses for their hard work and dedication.

Today is the beginning of National Nursing Week. It provides the perfect opportunity for all Canadians to take a moment and reflect on the incredible work nurses do for all of us.

This year's theme, Madam Speaker, for National Nursing Week is We Answer the Call, and Manitoba's nurses time and time again have proven this statement to be true. Nurses have always been the backbone of our health-care system, and without them we would not be where we are today.

Manitoba nurses have always led by example by providing exceptional care for their patients. They have been the smiling faces who greet us at hospitals and clinics, and they're also the ones who hold our hands while we receive the worst health news possible.

For the past two years, they have led Manitobans through COVID and ensured a high quality of care for all their patients.

Nurses have demonstrated time and time again their strength, knowledge and courage by putting Manitobans first. Their commitment and dedication has been an inspiration to all.

I would like to especially take a moment to thank the over 500 nurses that were redeployed, over the past two years, away from their program areas to ICUs to provide critical care during the pandemic. They have now, many of them, returned to their program areas and are settling in. Thank you on—from the bottom of my heart on behalf of all Manitobans.

Also, the work of retired nurses who came back to the health system after being retired for many, many years. I thank them, as well as the hundreds of others who worked on the vaccination efforts to help decrease the impact of Omicron and put Manitoba in a place where we can start to feel normal again.

In addition, they have helped inspire and mentor the next generation of nurses, helping them develop into the health-care superheroes they are.

And, Madam Speaker, I was so pleased to join the graduating class last October for the faculty of nursing, where we saw 115 new nurses graduate from the Rady Faculty of Health Sciences, and I welcome them to our health system. And we have many more nurses graduating this coming spring who will ensure that patient care is always top of mind.

Thank you to all the nurses for their continued hard work and commitment to our health-care system.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, I am always pleased to speak about the amazing nurses working in our province, and to thank them for going above and beyond to provide the best care possible for patients and our communities.

Manitoba nurses are at the bedside and on the front lines as people face serious health challenges and injuries, and they're there to witness the big moments in people's lives, whether it be the new birth joining a family or at the end of life with families and loved ones. They do this, and—always providing

patients with the best care possible and dignity as many are going through some of the most difficult and uncertain moments of their lives.

The pandemic has demonstrated even more just how courageous and committed our nurses are. This year's theme for National Nursing Week is We Answer the Call, and I believe it's very fitting because our nurses have truly gone above and beyond in the fight against COVID and is stabilizing our health-care system.

* (13:40)

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the same is not true of this government. While Manitoba nurses have worked almost 1 million hours of overtime last year, this government's cuts have created enormous—sorry—enormous nurse vacancy rates across the province.

At Winnipeg's Grace Hospital one of three positions in the ER is currently vacant, and at Victoria Hospital ER patients will be placed in hallways and staff lounges because there's not enough space and staff to care for them. Rural and northern nurses face these challenges and often many more.

Overworking and understaffing nurses is exacerbating the immense stress and exhaustion nurses are already experiencing due to years of mismanagement of our health-care system by this government. Manitoba Nurses Union has been sounding the alarm on the nursing shortage for five years, and it's currently the worst it's ever been.

I call on this government to step up and listen to our health-care professionals and advocates. There are many things—so many things—this government can do to address the crisis, like prioritizing and 'streamlining'—streamlining the process for licensing internationally educated nurses and creating strategies for keeping nurses and recent graduates in Manitoba, strategies we so desperately need here.

It's not enough, Madam Speaker, to recognize the indispensable work of our nurses and that they do every single day, but our nurses need much more from this government. Quite frankly, what they need is real action to be taken.

Thank you.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I begin my comments on National Nurses Week with a big thank you to all nurses in Manitoba. What you have done during the COVID pandemic has been and is absolutely extraordinary, and has often been at great personal and family sacrifice.

In spite of many of you having had to switch positions or locations as a result of the Conservative government's reorganization in the 2016 to twenty-nine period, and in spite of the fact that much of the Conservative government's reorganization has made life and the delivery of health care more difficult, you have continued to work and to help others in a way that has been outstanding.

Even when the Conservative government closed down emergency rooms or urgent care centres or QuickCare clinics where you were working, you have put every effort into continuing to provide care for Manitobans.

Even when the Conservative government failed to listen to recommendations from various knowledgeable sources to ensure adequate staffing of long-term care facilities, including personal-care homes, you have done everything possible under very difficult circumstances to help seniors and elders in our province.

Even when the Conservative government failed miserably in filling staffing positions, to the extent that many, many areas of nursing care in Manitoba were understaffed by 10 to 30 per cent or more, you still came to work and you did everything you possibly could to help Manitobans.

Even when the Conservative government so botched the organization of our provincial health-care system that emergency rooms and urgent-care centres have wait times of 10 to 12 hours, and even when those who have had to wait a long time got frustrated and angry and took their anger out on you, you did not hesitate to continue working and giving everything you have to help Manitobans who are sick and who were having a lot of difficulty.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Merci. Miigwech. Dyakuyu.

Madam Speaker: Further ministerial statements?

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

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

Flooding Update

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I would like to take a minute and—to update my colleagues in this Chamber and the public at home regarding the ongoing flooding happening in our province of Manitoba.

This past Friday the Red River water levels at Emerson peaked. Our hydraulic forecasting team expects that—the Red River to peak in Winnipeg later this week.

Flooding continues in the Interlake, Red River Valley and many other portions of the central and southern Manitoba.

The flood watch has been issued for streams in the Parkland regions draining from the—off the escarpment, causing the melting snow at higher elevations.

Our hydrological forecasting team is actively monitoring the upcoming rain events, and I will continue to update the House as we receive more information.

There are 26 states of local emergencies but from 'greencipalities' evacuations totalled about 351 evacuees from about 146 households. Evacuees are from six RMs, including Montcalm, Ritchot, Morris, Dufferin, Rhineland and Emerson-Franklin. Additionally, the First Nations of Long Plains and Roseau River has recently declared local states of emergency, joining Peguis and Fisher River First Nations.

Several communities throughout the province continue to experience loss of road access, flood properties—flooded properties and drinking water concerns.

The Canadian Red Cross has registered around 1,500 evacuees from Peguis First Nation and continues to operate reception centres to—for impacted residents. The federal government remains the primary support for Peguis, but our government, through our emergency measures staff, is continuing to assist whenever possible.

The water levels began to decline in some areas of the province; communities are beginning to assess ongoing impacts and determine next steps for recovery.

Much of last week, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and I travelled throughout the province to assess the extent of damage first-hand. In some cases, these damages are significant, and our government is ready to support communities in their rebuilding efforts.

Just this afternoon, I announced our government's plans to issue a disaster financial assistance program. However, our government is still very much in the state of response, so DFA specifics will be limited until damages can be properly assessed. Please 'visit' our government website for more information in the days to come and weeks to come.

Lastly, I want to extend the deepest thanks to all the government and municipal staff, as well as Manitobans across the province, for their continued flood-fighting efforts and resiliency throughout the challenging times. And I want to thank my staff, who have been out there continuously for many hours, doing assessments and working with the public; and they've—I've—they've been so grateful to have them in the area and making sure that communities come through this.

From record-level snowfalls to recorded levels of precipitation, this winter and spring have been tough. Our government is ready, willing, and able to 'persevere' through challenging situations, and will continue to do so, for the benefit of all Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): As rain continues to pour outside the Legislature and across our province, this House reiterates our gratitude for all those labouring to protect Manitoba lives and property, and our commitment to support all those impacted by these conditions.

There's no corner of our province now left unaffected by flooding. As of this morning, roads are closed as far south as the North Dakota-Gretna border crossing and as far north as Tadoule Lake, including portions of Highway 6, as far west as Pukatawagan and as far east as Shamattawa. We need to remain cognizant of all the ways in which these closures will impact our communities even when they're not directly threatened by flood waters themselves. We also need to hear the concerns of those producers and farmers who are worried about how the flooding and water saturation will delay and hinder crop growing this summer.

But first and foremost, our thoughts are with those who were evacuated from their communities this past

weekend, especially the mothers who had to spend Mother's Day away from home.

But amid all this devastation and suffering, we also reiterate our thanks to all those who are stepping up and working tirelessly to protect and care for their neighbours, their communities and our province. We thank volunteers like Emma and Damian Bird, for example, who spent last Friday sandbagging homes around Peguis First Nation; and officials like Chris Ewen, the mayor of Ritchot, who is overseeing evacuation efforts in his municipality as nearby highways close down.

As always, all members of this House, along with our NDP team, stand with all Manitobans during this trying time.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I ask leave to speak to the ministerial statement.

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

Leave has been granted.

Mr. Lamont: We welcome the declaration of disaster financial assistance today, which will help Manitobans in need.

There have been some challenges getting information from this government over the pandemic and the flood has been no different.

* (13:50)

We did have to request a briefing, and when we asked specifically about the threat of flooding in the Interlake and Peguis First Nation in particular, we were told that it was a federal problem. Two days later, Peguis was evacuating 900 people in some of the worst floods they've ever experienced, and they were still being left off flood bulletins, which I understand is an error that is now being corrected.

There are multiple concerns we would love—once again like to highlight. At an individual level, this government should restore help for homeowners looking to keep their basements dry; that after another year of frozen funding for municipalities, municipalities need relief and guaranteed multi-year funding, including increases to deal with an infrastructure backlog that is now in the billions, and the government should consider exploring dipping into the rainy day fund.

We are, after all, facing rains of 400 per cent to 600 per cent above normal in some areas, multiple more Colorado lows, massive costs for municipalities who faced years of flat-lined funding, all as we come out of a pandemic. If that isn't a rainy day, I don't know what is.

This is actually an opportunity, as well, once the flood waters receded, to invest our way out of the pandemic and deal with future crises, but I don't see a plan for that.

We are deeply thankful and we want to ensure that, to everyone who's working so hard to keep their homes and communities safe, that they have all the support they need.

I do want to say, for the record, that when it comes to megaprojects like the Lake St. Martin diversion, the government did not do the basic work they needed to before submitting their application to the federal government. As one example, the Province's Lake St. Martin submission did not include a map of Lake St. Martin.

I sat with the Interlake regional tribal council and chiefs from SCO, who detailed the complete lack of consultation with First Nations, which was, I believe, in February 2020. One official said that oil companies routinely do better and more respectful consultation than was done by this government on a \$500-million project.

There are plenty of reasons for First Nations to be sensitive on this issue since there are people who are still homeless from the deliberate decision to sacrifice and flood First Nations over a decade ago, and there are still unanswered questions on—about community environmental impacts, including flooding graveyards where people's loved ones are buried, or the possible destruction of wilderness habitat, which has been routinely inflicted on First Nations without compensation, especially with hydro projects.

Of all the emergencies we face as a province, floods are among the most common. We should have a protocol—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: —down for handling them, and that ensures that all Manitobans—all Manitobans—are informed, engaged, empowered and protected.

Thank you. Merci.

* * *

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I'm just canvassing the House to see if there is leave to revert to tabling of reports at this time.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to revert to tabling of reports? *[Agreed]*

TABLING OF REPORTS

(Continued)

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, just a clarification. There is not a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor to the supplemental Estimates for this year.

Rather, I would be pleased to table the Supplement to Estimates of Expenditure for the Department of Finance for the fiscal year 2022-2023.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Steinbach's Reach for the Top Champions

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, we all want to reach for the top when it comes to our students. We want them to succeed. Many of my colleagues will be familiar with the Reach for the Top trivia competition that features high-school students from around the province.

Around 1985, I was part of a team at the Steinbach Regional Secondary School, the SRSS, preparing for this competition. I have no idea what my contribution to this team would have been, other than the coach said that if there were trivia questions about the Winnipeg Blue Bombers or Winnipeg Jets, they were relying on me.

That year the TV version was cancelled and my sports trivia knowledge was never utilized, and my Reach for the Top dreams died.

But Reach for the Top has carried on in subsequent years, as it has for almost 55 years, away from TV, with schools competing against each other across the province for an opportunity to go to the national competition.

This year, on April 27th, for the first time in school history, the Steinbach Regional Secondary School reached the top and won the provincial title. After going undefeated in the tournament, they beat Fort Richmond 360 to 270. They now prepare to participate in the national championships and carry the Manitoba banner to compete against schools from across the country.

All of us should be proud of the young people who participated in this annual competition, as well as their coaches who have invested the hours to prepare and support them. And we are especially proud of the SRSS championship Reach for the Top Manitoba team.

Colleagues, please join me in congratulating and welcoming to the Manitoba Legislature this year's Reach for the Top provincial champions: Kyle Jeffers, Garrett Hurst, Elena Knight, Brenden Kootstra and their coaches: Andrew Unger, who joins us, and Neal Rohne and Chris Yorke.

Brar Family Acknowledgements

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I'm honoured to rise in the House today and welcome my parents, Mangal Singh Brar and Amarjeet Kaur, and my younger brother Gurreet to the Manitoba Legislature for the first time.

Given the importance of this moment, I would like to take a moment to share the story of our family, similar to the experiences of many other Manitobans.

Throughout my childhood, I witnessed my parents work hard to give my brother and I a good life. My parents are retired educators who served mostly in rural schools of Punjab all their lives. They raised us with limited resources, but they never complained and put me and my brother through college.

Because of their grit and dedication, my brother and I were able to achieve university educations. I completed my masters in agriculture in India and my brother received his Ph.D. in horticulture from the University of Florida. He is now an assistant professor at California State University, the true academic of our family.

Immigrant families sacrifice a lot, especially time spent together. My parents have missed seeing their grandchildren grow up. My parents couldn't join me at my swearing-in ceremony in 2019 and my heart is full seeing my family here today.

Last week, my brother landed in Winnipeg and I took him home to surprise my parents. It takes enormous sacrifice to immigrate, and our family paid the steep price of over a decade of separation before finally being united just last week, where we were able to sit together at the dinner table after 15 years.

From humble origins, you both have taught Gurreet and I the true value of education and have instilled in me a strength and drive to fight for others. Thank you for always putting us first, for allowing us

to leave home in the search of a better life, not knowing when you would see us next.

I'd like to ask all members to join me in welcoming my parents and brother to the Manitoba Legislature and to appreciate the sacrifices all immigrant families make to make Manitoba better.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Child and Youth Mental Health Day

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): Madam Speaker, this past Friday, youth and mental health advocates were invited to this Legislature to join in publicly proclaiming Friday, May 6th, as child and youth mental health day in Manitoba.

Kidthink, represented at the event by Rosanna Acacio, had asked the minister of mental health and wellness to officially proclaim—and community wellness to officially proclaim this day, and so offer all of us the chance to celebrate the incredible work by organizations, service providers and educators across this province who support the mental health of children and youth, while also giving hope to those who are struggling.

Staff and board members from Kidthink, including founder Carmyn Aleshka, were on hand for the event, along with representatives from Project 11, northwest youth hub, Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba and Huddle. Even our esteemed Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (Mr. Ewasko) headed over to the Rotunda to mark the event.

And as a special surprise, when they arrived they found themselves surrounded by art—poems, paintings, videos, sketches—along with the student artists themselves in person.

Students from Argyle Alternative High School had spent time creating works of art depicting addictions and the impact addictions have had on themselves, on their families, on their friends and their communities. They entered their art in a contest organized by Winnipeg School Division addictions counsellor Rosetta Troia. Rosetta was also in attendance at the event, together with several of her colleagues from Argyle Alternative High School and the Winnipeg School Division.

It's important to reduce the stigma of mental illness and to encourage youth to speak about their feelings with parents, teachers, peers and loved ones. By exhibiting their pieces of art inspired by addictions

for all of us, these students played a part in reducing the stigma of discussing mental health.

Special thanks also to the media that were on hand for spending significant time interviewing these students and giving them the opportunity to tell their stories. The artwork is still on display in the rotunda, and I encourage everyone to take a few minutes to have a look.

* (14:00)

All Manitoba children and youth need to hear that they are loved, that they are valued, and that they matter. So join me in thanking the students, Rosetta Troia, Kidthink, the minister of mental health and wellness and everyone else who are helping to improve mental health for children and youth in our province.

Jane Couch

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize an esteemed educator and leader within my community, Jane Couch.

Jane was recently recognized by her colleagues as the 2022 Canadian Distinguished Principal of the Year, a national-level award given to a principal who's demonstrated excellence in leadership.

She's been a teacher for over 28 years and the principal at Stevenson-Britannia school for over a decade. Her passion in education is in learning about the strengths of students and staff and creating the conditions for them to share their strengths with others.

Jane's approach to education is founded on the belief that the role of educators is to help children become the best they can be. Learning from mistakes and celebrating everything are key to accomplishing this. She teaches that our differences are special and make us all better, and she makes it a focus to celebrate the cultures of all families attending her school.

There is no doubt that Jane works tirelessly alongside her team to create the best possible learning environment for her students. She is committed to reconciliation and is a strong proponent of implementing the truth and reconciliation Calls to Action in the classroom and beyond.

Jane, your work is invaluable. You, along with your team, change lives every day and make our province a better place, one student at a time, one day at a time.

Madam Speaker, I ask all members to join me in thanking Jane for her commitment to helping kids in St. James become the best that they can be.

Morgan Grace Ginther

Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): Madam Speaker, Métis fiddle playing is medicine; it pulls you in; it connects your soul to the culture and roots of the Métis voyagers who played the fiddle to keep the rhythm while paddling. Métis fiddle music is a unique blend of First Nations rhythm and beats and European melodies.

Joining us here today is a very gifted 15-year-old Métis fiddle player from the Lord Selkirk Regional Comprehensive Secondary School in Selkirk.

Ms. Morgan Ginther—or Morgan Grace, as she is known—is a proud Red River Métis and a grade 10 honour-roll student. She grew up surrounded by music and was first introduced to the fiddle at a young age. By age four, Morgan received her first fiddle. She would quickly learn that she was a left-handed fiddle player, a rarity in the musical field of violin and fiddle playing.

Morgan is known nationally and internationally for her commitment to progressing in her musical career and for her tenacity.

Morgan loves the sound of the Métis fiddle. She was—has embraced her Métis roots and takes great joy in bringing the culture and heritage of the Red River Métis to many others through music.

Morgan thanks her family, friends, Red River Métis, and the many teachers and musicians she has encountered along the way for her success.

Because of Morgan's unique style and commitment to her culture and heritage, she is an endorsed musician from the gigla violins, a violin handcrafted from Romania.

Morgan has played in front of many crowds at different events, bringing joy, a lot of toe-tapping and the jigging wherever she goes.

She has played the national anthem at the Winnipeg Goldeyes game and performed in front of Winnipeg Jets and the Manitoba Moose fans.

In the next big step to her musical career, Morgan will launch her first CD later this month at the human rights museum on May 28th at 7 p.m. Mark that date in your calendar as you are all invited to attend.

I would like to ask my colleagues in the Chamber to please join me in celebrating Morgan Grace on her current success and sending her best wishes for a bright, rewarding musical career.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Minimum Wage Increase Request

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, over 23,000 Manitoba families worked for minimum wage last year. That's tens of thousands of families, of parents who are working hard just to get by, to put a roof over their head. But, come this October, Manitoba will have the lowest minimum wage of anywhere in Canada.

Making sure Manitobans have a paycheque they can live on is a priority for us on this side of the House. We know Manitobans who put in a hard day's work deserve a living wage.

Will the Premier commit to ensuring the same?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): The Leader of the Opposition will know that it was our government that indexed the minimum wage, Madam Speaker, and we will continue to move forward to make life more affordable for Manitobans.

He will also know that there is a shortage of labour out there, Madam Speaker. And so, in order—it's a supply and demand issue. And to explain it to the Leader of the Opposition, if he will listen, what that means is that, if people want to attract high-quality workers, that they are going to have to pay a little bit more. And that is exactly what is happening right now in the event that we have a shortage of labour.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, growing up, we're all taught that if you work hard, you'll get ahead. But unfortunately, that's just not true in Manitoba right now under this government. You can work full time in Manitoba on minimum wage and still live in poverty. That's just not right.

That's why a future NDP government, should we get the great honour to serve, would immediately make the minimum wage \$15 an hour, and then we'll make it a living wage after that.

Will the Premier increase the minimum wage in Manitoba to \$15 an hour? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, this is about making life more affordable for Manitobans, and that's exactly what we are doing in this budget.

We are increasing the education property tax rebate to 50 per cent by next year, Madam Speaker. There's all sorts of other things—we're creating a Residential Renter's Tax Credit, saving Manitoba renters up to \$525 per year.

That is steps towards making life more affordable for Manitobans. That is what Budget 2022 does, Madam Speaker, and we will continue to work with Manitobans to make life more affordable.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, can the Premier or somebody on the PC side of the House tell me why they think it's okay for someone to work full time and live in poverty? It's just not right. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Kinew: There's no defence to the minimum wage policy that this government is enacting.

I hear the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) heckling. Of course, we know that he received a huge cash handout from this government, something that minimum wage workers just can't rely on.

I'm no fan of Doug Ford or Scott Moe, Madam Speaker, but they are doing better than this Premier when it comes to the minimum wage.

Will the Premier stand in her place today and explain why she thinks it's okay for somebody who works full time to still live in poverty?

Mrs. Stefanson: I will remind the member opposite that it was an NDP government where Manitoba was the child poverty capital of Canada. We certainly don't want to go back to those dark days of the previous NDP government, Madam Speaker.

What I will say to the Leader of the Opposition: While he may talk about \$15, Madam Speaker, he will also put together policies that will tax that money away at a lower rate. And so, I think what it is, is that we want to ensure that we make life more affordable for Manitobans. That's what Manitobans have asked us to do, and that's what we will deliver on.

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

Health System Consolidation Staffing Level Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, there is an absolute crisis in the emergency rooms in our health-care system right now.

Brian Pallister, he caused a lot of a damage with the cuts that he ordered the members for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) and Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) and Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen) to carry out during their terms as Health minister. But now we see the Premier carrying out this situation.

It was already a crisis when she took office and now it's so much worse. We see patients being cared for in hallways, Madam Speaker. We were supposed to have ended hallway medicine when Gary Filmon left office. Now we see that it only increases.

* (14:10)

Will the Premier acknowledge the crisis in our hospitals and stop her plan for hallway medicine today?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, what I remember, Madam Speaker, is an NDP government that got elected on fixing health care and doing away with hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million. That was never fixed back then, and what I will say today is the litany of false accusations continues by the Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, \$7.2 billion invested in health care in this budget. It's the largest investment in health care in the history of our province.

We are committed to ensuring that Manitobans get the health care that they need when they need it.

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

Mr. Kinew: For all the announcements this government makes, what do we actually see in hospitals today? More people in the hallways; we see staff shortages; we see paramedics; we hear about public health nurses being called in to try and address the staffing crisis that is entirely the creation of this government.

They were warned multiple times that the cuts that they made to emergency rooms, to ICUs, to beds in our health-care system would create a staffing crisis. They decided to proceed in spite of those warnings and chose to ignore them. Now it's the patients in the hallways of ERs at the Grace, at Victoria General,

the urgent care, who are the ones left to shoulder that burden.

Will the Premier stop putting patients in hallways at the Vic, at the Grace and at so many other hospitals?

Mrs. Stefanson: I know the Leader of the Opposition would like to erase the fact that there was a worldwide pandemic, Madam Speaker, and the challenges that that has created not just for our health-care system here in Manitoba but, indeed, across the country and around the world.

We recognize that there's a nursing shortage, Madam Speaker. There was a nursing shortage back when the previous NDP government was there. They didn't fix it then.

Madam Speaker, we are committed to more—400 more nursing seats and we will ensure that we get more nurses working the front lines.

What's very interesting is that we have a plan and a vision for the future of health care, Madam Speaker.

I wonder if the NDP has a plan, or is it just somewhat of a hidden agenda.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the PC plan is to care for seniors in the hallway. There's no dignity in that approach to health care. The PC plan is to send people who need surgeries not just out of province, but out of the country.

Madam Speaker, they cannot hide behind the cuts that they made and try and point the finger at the pandemic because the St. Boniface emergency room was already on diversion in 2019. It was a direct result of their closures of emergency rooms at the Concordia, Seven Oaks and Victoria General.

Emergency doctors and nurses raised the alarm immediately. They continued to make cuts, and now the situation—which we already knew was a crisis—continues to get worse and worse and worse.

We know that what's required is a partnership with those on the front lines and serious investments in health-care capacity.

Will the Premier start to support our efforts to repair health care in Manitoba by stopping the cuts and starting to work with the front lines?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has no efforts because he has no plan or

vision for the future of Manitoba when it comes to health care. We've seen that time and time again.

It's easy to stand up and criticize, Madam Speaker, but at some point he's going to have to put forward a plan and a vision for the future of the province.

We are still waiting. Manitobans are still waiting from the Leader of the Opposition to come up with that plan. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Where is it? When will Manitobans know what his plan is, or is his plan simply more of a hidden agenda? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Health System Consolidation Hospital Bed Capacity

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, a leaked memo from Victoria General Hospital refers to a bed crisis. Patients are being transferred to, and I quote, non-traditional locations. These include staff lounges and overflowing medical rooms.

It's hallway medicine, Madam Speaker. It was a mistake to close 124 beds across Winnipeg, but it was a decision that this government made.

Why won't the minister restore the beds that they cut and ensure that patients aren't forced to sit in hallways?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I thank the member for Union Station for raising this matter in the Chamber today.

I want to first start by thanking all the health-care leaders and all the health-care staff at the grassroots, in hospitals and clinics, for the incredible work that they've been doing over the past two years to ensure Manitobans receive the health-care services that they need.

And the time—we are not out of a very difficult pandemic, Madam Speaker, and I just want to thank those individuals again—National Nursing Week—I thank all of you for the incredible work that you're doing and I stand in awe of what you are doing to help Manitobans during this time.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, the memo at Victoria General says, and I quote: At all sites across the region this will mean pulling more patients out of the emergency rooms to wherever patient-care space can be created, in some case, in non-traditional locations. End quote.

These spaces, Madam Speaker include hallways, staff lounges and overflow rooms.

The decision to close 124 beds across Winnipeg was a mistake this government made.

Why won't the minister end hallway medicine and restore these beds to ensure that patients are actually able to get the care they need and deserve?

Ms. Gordon: It's my understanding, from speaking with the health-care leadership, that there are several sites that are experiencing a surge in patient demand, and we are committed—our government as well as the health-care leadership—working hand-in-hand to address those issues. And I'd want to commend the leadership—and many of these ideas came forward right from the hospital floor: initiatives to level transport arrivals across all sites, improving the timelines for individuals to receive lab tests such as COVID.

Madam Speaker, some temporary measures have been made. Patients who are moved, contrary to what the member for Union Station says, are being discharged within 24 to 48 hours. They're low-acuity patients. And we want to address this issue as soon as possible.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, the chief medical officer of Victoria Hospital is referring to this as a bed crisis. Winnipeg hospitals have run out of capacity. Patients brought by ambulance are being diverted away from emergency rooms. Nearly a quarter of all patients at Health Sciences Centre are leaving without ever even being seen.

This government closed clinics, urgent care centres and emergency rooms. They closed 124 hospital beds.

Madam Speaker, health-care providers need more than empty thank yous from this minister.

Why won't the minister end hallway medicine and restore the beds to ensure that patients get the care they deserve when they need it?

Ms. Gordon: It's really shameful today to hear the member for Union Station stand in this Chamber—someone who worked in the health system, but I guess now that they are no longer in the health system, it's not okay to thank the health-care workers.

But I'm going to continue to thank them, Madam Speaker. Our health-care facilities are experiencing a surge and I want to assure patients that the system is balancing available staff and patient needs to continue to provide safe patient care.

Women's Reproductive Rights Access to Services

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Women and gender-diverse folks continue to face attacks on their body autonomy and their reproductive rights. A recent leaked US Supreme Court draft shows that they intend to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, removing legal protections to access abortions.

* (14:20)

Madam Speaker, this is wrong on so many levels, and in Canada we're not immune to these attacks by anti-choice. We need to do more to protect and provide essential reproductive rights and to increase access to these services.

Will the Minister of Health commit to doing so today?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Our government cannot speculate on matters before the United States of America courts. And it's very disturbing to me that the member for St. Johns is fear mongering and bringing this issue forward to bring fear into the hearts of Manitoba women.

But, unlike members opposite, we don't play politics with women's health, Madam Speaker. Abortion services are health services.

And while our hearts go out to our—to women and our allies in the US, we are organizing to defend their rights. This American court decision will not change access in Manitoba.

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

Abortion Protest Buffer Zone Request for Support for Bill 203

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): We know that removing legal access to abortions doesn't reduce the number of abortions, Madam Speaker; it only reduces the number of safe abortions.

Abortion is essential health care and it must be treated as such. Currently, many people seeking abortions face harassment and intimidation from anti-abortion protestors.

That's why I've introduced Bill 203 four times already in this House. This would create buffer zones around essential health-care services providing abortions. Twice, members opposite have stood in this House and voted against it.

Will they do the right thing and finally support this bill?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I don't think any member of this province should be blocked at any time from entering a health-care facility.

I know the member for St. Johns doesn't mind blocking railway lines, and that's okay. But I will say that we will not support anyone who wants to harass or threaten our health-care staff or any individual seeking care in a health-care facility in this province.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Now more than ever, it's important to stand up and protect abortion access and abortion rights.

Currently, people seeking reproductive health services can face harassment, intimidation and persuasion from anti-choice Manitobans. This deters people from seeking the services that they need.

Bill 203 would create a protest buffer zone that would protect citizens who are accessing abortion services. This government should do the right thing and support this bill.

Will they finally do so today?

Ms. Gordon: Again, I rise in the House to say that our government does not support any action that is taken to block a health-care worker from entering their place of work, a Manitoban from accessing health-care services, and anyone who does that is wrong. That should not happen, Madam Speaker. And that applies to all health-care services in this province.

We will continue to stand on the side of access, Madam Speaker.

DeFehr Furniture Production Facility Closure Concerns for Manitoba's Economy

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Madam Speaker, DeFehr Furniture is closing its Winnipeg production facility; 224 workers are losing their jobs.

And we know that's just the beginning. Manitoba's momentum has stalled, employment actually declined over the last two months. Thousands of jobs are being lost in northern Manitoba, and hundreds more are lost like we're seeing at DeFehr.

Why is the minister ignoring the needs of Manitoba business, and why is he refusing to address the problems in Manitoba's economy?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Acting Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade): I would like to say that our government has been working actively—the Minister for Economic Development, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) in her new role of leading the economic committee of Cabinet—and that work has been very, very robust.

As a matter of fact, just last week we saw New Flyer Industries sign a new bus contract with the City of Toronto for—to liver more than 500 new electric vehicles. All over this province, there is hope. There are some cases, like the one at Palliser Furniture, where there's been some changes—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —but clearly, Madam Speaker, this is a government that continues to say we are open for business, and the results are very widespread that business is feeling good about this budget and about the future.

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

Mr. Wasyliw: Not one mention about DeFehr, Madam Speaker, in that response. Not one mention of 224 workers losing their jobs.

Madam Speaker, 80 per cent—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —of businesses in Manitoba disprove of this PC government's performance. That is the worst approval rating since 2017.

It's no surprise. This government has abandoned business in Manitoba and they have failed to support business through the pandemic. Now, 224 manufacturing jobs—family-supporting jobs—are disappearing in Manitoba.

In the past—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —our province contracted with agencies to help support workers when they were in a situation like this. This minister is silent.

So why is the minister not responding to the needs of Manitoba—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development): Making sure that Manitobans are employed is a real priority for our government.

In fact, we've got a plan, Madam Speaker. It's a plan that's going to attract businesses by lowering payroll taxes; having a competitive tax environment; having venture capital worth \$50 million amassed by people in the business community for a long period of time; less red tape; as well as a number of tax credits that we think will grow Manitoba's businesses.

We want to make sure we work with companies and people that have been impacted by this, and we think a competitive tax environment is something that can bring jobs to Manitoba.

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

Mr. Wasyliw: Madam Speaker, we've seen this government's plan when it comes to the economy, and what it looks like is not pretty. It means filling the pockets of the member of Fort Whyte—hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayer dollars—while those who are not friends of this political party get no support—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —when they're struggling.

Madam Speaker, 224 workers are losing their jobs, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: Manitoba is running behind the Canadian average and employment in Manitoba has declined over the last two months.

Why is the minister not responding to the closure at DeFehr and the needs of both workers and businesses in Manitoba?

Mr. Fielding: We know what the NDP's plan for this is: they don't have a plan. And that's the history of the NDP, Madam Speaker. We have a plan to be more competitive, to drive and attract businesses to Manitoba.

In fact, over the last number of years we've had the highest increase in investments in Manitoba, in

terms of things like manufacturing, other sectors. We think a plan that consists of lower taxes, having tax credits to have businesses here, ensuring venture capital and less red tape is going to attract more businesses.

That's our plan. Where's the NDP's plan?

International Student Health Care Request to Reinstate Coverage

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, many international students are being forced to pay massive bills for health care in Manitoba. We've heard stories of students having to pay tens of thousands of dollars wait-'saking' treatment for mental health, COVID-19 and more.

The PC government cut health services for international students back in 2018. That was simply a mistake.

Will the minister do the right thing and reinstate health-care services for international students today?

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): I was pleased to recently meet with the Manitoba Alliance of Post-Secondary Students, representing those from the University of Manitoba, the University of Manitoba Graduate Students' Association, Assiniboine Community College, University of Winnipeg and Red River College Polytech, who advocate for all post-secondary students, including international students across Manitoba.

* (14:30)

Our government is listening to students, including international students, on ways to remove barriers and find solutions to student success, graduation and labour market success. International students continue to play an important role at post-secondary institutions and we value our international students who study and stay while contributing to a better life in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to fight on behalf of international students while this minister does—takes no action. We have heard terrible stories of students owing tens, if not even hundreds of thousands of dollars when it comes to their health care right here in Manitoba.

We know that we can have devastating impacts when we force international students to pay their own health care, and it costs them opportunities right here in Manitoba. This simply needs to change. This government can easily solve this problem by reinstating health care for international students.

Will the minister make this commitment today?

Mr. Reyes: Madam Speaker, we on this side of the House know that international students are valued members of our community and are extremely important to Manitoba's growing economy.

That is why we are making record investments of—in the post-secondary sector, so our students, including international students, can access world-class post-secondary education in Manitoba.

The member opposite has routinely brought up specific individual cases as pawns, ignoring the fact that all international students in Manitoba must have health coverage, either arranged by their school as part of the annual tuition—in fact, all jurisdictions in Canada require students to have some form of health coverage, including British Columbia, the only NDP-governed province in Manitoba—or in Canada.

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, Manitoba needs to be a welcoming place for newcomers. Many international students will choose to apply for residency here in Manitoba and call this their home.

But Manitoba's no longer welcome with this PC government. Many international students have to pay out of pocket for their health-care services. These students will end up owing for—a fortune just to get their health-care services.

Will this government do the right thing, reinstate health-care services and welcome international students to Manitoba, and will the minister choose to do so today?

Mr. Reyes: Madam Speaker, unlike the member opposite—to our—who's trying to politicize this issue, I want to assure our international students that you have health-care coverage in Manitoba as soon as you arrive in our wonderful province to study.

Our province is the home of hope, and we are better with each new family that chooses Manitoba.

Our government introduced the Immigration Advisory Council to redesign the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program based on the labour market needs

for newcomers, including international students, to get good employment and stay permanently in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, unlike the top–all–talk–no–action NDP, we have a plan for our students, as you want them to study and stay in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

COVID-19 Deaths Case Numbers

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I know this government wants to pretend the pandemic is over, and we—apparently, we've moved to a new phase—denial—because our hospital beds are still full of COVID cases.

Hospitalizations since March have been worse than the entire second wave, but equally of concern is that the data keeps changing.

I table the government's own figures for severe outcomes of COVID-19: at first, for the week—for week 16, which is April 17th to the 23rd, the government said 13 people had died; the next week, they revised the figures to say 26 had.

Can the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) explain why the government initially understated COVID deaths for week 16 by half?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I want to thank—I know this will not be pleasing to the ears of the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara)—but I want to thank all the individuals who worked so hard on our COVID response; the public health system; Brent Roussin, our Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, for the incredible work that they did over the past two years, and continue to do to keep Manitobans safe.

And I just want to highlight again for Manitobans what is in Budget 2022 for Health: \$7.2 billion total for health-care budget. That is the most significant health-care investment in the history of our province. It's over \$1 billion more than the previous government ever—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

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

Health-Care Workers with Long COVID Workers Compensation Coverage

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We're also incredibly concerned about this government's indifference to long COVID, a cluster of long-lasting and debilitating physical and mental symptoms.

I recently read a quote we should all keep in mind about the long-term effects of long COVID: Everything that you know—you think you know about polio is long polio, everything you think you know about MS is long mono and AIDS is long HIV.

It's estimated that Manitoba has had one of the worst COVID infection rates in Canada, and that means more long COVID. And I heard from a nurse recently, who contracted COVID at work in the second wave and is now being denied WC benefits.

Will this government ensure that health-care workers who get long COVID at work—in National Nursing Week—will be covered for this workplace injury?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I once again want to recognize the incredible work that has been done by many, many professions throughout our health system over the past two years to keep Manitobans safe.

Again, I want to reinforce what our chief public health officer has said many times: Practice the fundamentals; if you're sick, stay home; social distance; wear a mask; wash your hands; keep yourself, your family, your loved ones safe.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Peguis First Nation Flood Preparation Provincial Flood Projections

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, Thursday, April 28th, the Manitoba caucus was given a briefing on the flood—which I thank the minister.

During the briefing, I asked specifically about concerns for the Peguis First Nation. There were no immediate concerns raised. Two days later, Peguis was in the middle of a very severe flood and Glenn Hudson, chief at Peguis, was expressing concerns that they had not received sufficient warning from the Province of the potential for such severe flooding.

Why was there such a drastic failure to provide an early warning to the Peguis First Nation so they'd have more time to prepare, and what measures will be taken

to ensure such a terrible failure in the Province's projections does not occur in the future?

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Thank you for the—I want to thank the member for the question.

When we had a briefing, the thing that was—when it came to Peguis First Nation, the thing was there was concerns about the amount of snow and the rain that was coming. We did mention it to the member.

And the thing is, when it comes to First Nation communities, it's Indigenous Services Canada that is actually the one that looks and works with the First Nations Communities, along with the Red Cross.

And the thing is, Madam Speaker, we—our EMO staff are out there all the time. Our—when it came to our Transportation and Infrastructure staff, when it comes to culverts, our staff are out there working on it, making sure that the—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Piwniuk: —water flows—as much of it. And then myself and the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) were out there.

I didn't see any signs of the opposition or the Liberals out there, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Municipal Road Maintenance Funding Announcement

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): Madam Speaker, this has been a springtime for the history books. From April blizzards to May rain showers, weather this season has been unpredictable, to say the least.

Anyone who has driven lately has seen the state of roads across this province, as well, and recognized the impact that the weather has had on the roads and that those roads have subsequently had on Manitobans. Like, I even saw someone setting up a fishing pole to demonstrate the absurdity of the situation.

So my question is for the Minister of Municipal Relations: Would she please share with this House what the Province is doing to help our municipal partners fix their roads and improve the lives of Manitobans?

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Municipal Relations): I want to thank the member for Radisson for such an uplifting question.

This morning, I was proud to stand with our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) as well as municipal—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Clarke: —partners to announce \$15 million to be distributed to municipalities for road maintenance. This fund will be distributed based on population, which amounts to \$8.8 million for Winnipeg, \$605,000 for Brandon, \$210,000 for Steinbach and millions more to all municipalities across our province.

Members opposite may be opposed to this, just like they voted against \$25 million in funding for our communities in budget '22 for building sustainable communities, but our government is absolutely committed to working with our municipal partners, in interests of safety, through investments such as this.

* (14:40)

North Perimeter Access Point Closures Upgrades and Investments Needed

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, this government has an obligation to make travelling on our highways safer, and that includes the North Perimeter. But arbitrarily closing access points has created a whole host of new problems.

We heard from a resident on Sturgeon Road who saw an ambulance he called pass right by as they couldn't find an access point to reach him. Meanwhile, his wife was struggling to breathe.

Now, luckily, she made a full recovery, but others may not be so fortunate.

Will the minister commit to resolving and investing in this issue?

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I just want to thank the member for the question, but the member has to realize that, you know, the Perimeter Highway is becoming a very busy highway. As the city of Winnipeg grow—continues to grow close to a 'milling' people, we're going to be looking at investing in the Perimeter Highway.

Any other major city in North America actually has a freeway system, and that's what we're focusing on is trying to make Manitobans who are on that Perimeter Highway safe and—get home and to do so, so they're not—I have been out many times where I have had close calls when it comes to collisions on that North Perimeter. I saw a person who wanted to

turn on to the median lane. That's not safe, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, minutes matter when people's lives are at stake. Any time wasted on finding an access point is too much. If safety truly is the main concern of this government, it cannot come at the cost of emergency response times.

Investments in upgrades, not closures, need to happen before something tragic happens.

Will the minister commit with working with residents to find a solution today?

Mr. Piwniuk: Madam Speaker, when it comes to first responding—let's say, ambulances, paramedics—you know what? The thing is every place in Manitoba has roads and stuff like that when we have to identify the locations.

And we've been, actually, in the Perimeter Highway, when it comes to—they should have access when it comes to knowing which to turn off. And when it comes to north—again, the Perimeter Highway, we want to make sure that people who are on that highway are going to be safe. And that is why we've actually closed some of these access—because there's many—too many close calls, too many accidents, and we want to make sure that people are safe and not because—we want—we don't want a responder coming to an accident where there is major fatalities.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, 750 residents signed a petition asking this provincial government to reconsider removing local access on the Perimeter.

Now, several months later, after I read those petitions here in the House, we're seeing the results of removing that access. Those residents on Sturgeon Road consider themselves fortunate, but many others may not be quite so lucky. And residents want some action to be taken before it gets that far.

Will the minister commit to the upgrades and investments that have been asked for by residents and that are needed to ensure true safety for the residents and for people travelling on the North Perimeter Highway?

Mr. Piwniuk: Madam Speaker, I just wanted to let the member know, too, that, you know, we invested over \$1.5 billion for the next three years when it comes to our infrastructure. And the thing is, the Perimeter Highway is one of them.

We are going to be—invest to making sure that there's access points. When it comes to intersections, we're going to make sure that we have—when it comes to the St. Mary interchange, we're going to do that—McGillivray.

And we're looking at places in north—we're doing a study right now on North Perimeter, and we're going to make sure that there's access points and service roads. We're going to invest in service roads, making sure that people can—riding along the Perimeter Highway and get to these destinations, especially when it comes to EMS.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Lead Contamination in Soil Report Consultations

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, parents like me want to ensure that our children aren't being exposed to lead.

The Province's recently released lead-in-soil report is a welcome step. However, advocates are wondering why there was no community consultation for this report. They're wondering why no university researchers, environmentalists or community groups were involved with this report. They're also wondering why active industries that are contributing to lead contamination in Point Douglas and in St. Boniface weren't examined. And they want to know where these 2,100 examined sites are.

Can the minister provide this information today?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks): We certainly know the record of the NDP when it comes to reports, Madam Speaker. They hid the reports for lead from Manitobans.

We're—we are the most transparent—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wharton: —government. Madam Speaker—*[interjection]* Madam Speaker, if the member—if the Leader of the Opposition would want to listen, we can certainly answer the question from the member from Notre Dame.

I was pleased to meet with the member from Notre Dame and the member from Wolseley two

weeks ago in my office to do a review, and actually talk about partisan ways we can move forward to ensure Manitobans, particularly our children in playgrounds, will remain safe. That's exactly what we're going to do, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Petitions?

There being no petitions, I have been notified that a member wishes to bring forward a matter of urgent public importance.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): I move, seconded by the member from The Pas-Kameesak, that the regular business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the impact on the lives and livelihoods of Manitobans due to the flooding in and around Peguis First Nation, all through the Interlake, Red River Valley and other regions of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable member for Kameesak—or, for Keewatinook, I should remind all members that, under rule 39(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other recognized parties in the House are allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately.

As stated in Beauchesne's citation 390, urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion. In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there is urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interests will not suffer.

Mr. Bushie: Flooding. The flooding situation in Manitoba we've had over the last number of years, number of decades, in fact, different tragedies, different levels of flood, whether it be in southern Manitoba, whether it be in Interlake, whether it be in northern Manitoba.

And we're sitting here today with unprecedented levels in the Peguis First Nation. Over 1,500—as of this morning—Manitoba evacuees that have been forced to leave their homes; their homes, mind you, Madam Speaker. Not cottage country, not a place that they go and visit, but their homes. And some just had a matter

of minutes notice and hours notice—no days, no weeks, no planning. It's something that came about as a direct result of flooding in the area.

And, Madam Speaker, in particular, and specifically in dealing with the Peguis First Nation and the on-reserve complement of evacuees that had to come from there, it's very disheartening that, on behalf of this government, they seem to think that the responsibility for this tragedy and for this devastation ends at the border.

The question was asked just a little while ago, Madam Speaker, about Peguis First Nation's flooding situation. And the minister got up to speak about Indigenous Services Canada.

So the importance of this happening today really needs to have that approach and really needs to bring this government to the table to the urgency that comes about here.

This doesn't stop at the border, Madam Speaker. So the Province has a responsibility, and there is a responsibility to deal with this on a level that doesn't differentiate where you are in a community or where your community's located. And just simply a matter of fact that this is, quote unquote, on reserve land, so that federal—so that responsibility falls to somebody else.

This needs to take an all-of-government approach, meaning provincial and federal government responsibility to be able to come and bring this to the table.

We've dealt with this over years and years, Madam Speaker. And you've seen the deflection on behalf of this government to deal with this public importance and this emergency preparedness on provincial versus federal responsibility.

It—there was a call for the military from Peguis. There was a call to say, let's get military assistance here to assist our evacuees, to assist our flooding situation, to assist with the devastation that's going to happen. And we knew that it was going to happen.

*(14:50)

And, Madam Speaker, the simple ask of asking for the federal government's responsibility to call in the military was simply a matter of no. No, because the Province needs to first exhaust all their resources to be able to do this, and the fact of the matter is, that is not happening.

The Province has not exhausted all of their resources to assist the community of Peguis. In fact,

rather than exhausting any—or, deploying any kind of resources, they're trying to offload that responsibility to the federal government. And that's just simply unacceptable.

Where in Manitoba other than on-reserve would this be acceptable? It's not. If this is happening in southern Manitoba, we are, in fact, dealing with a public emergency; but because this is happening on-reserve in Peguis, it doesn't seem to be an emergency, it doesn't seem to be any kind of urgent matter from this provincial government to deal with.

The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, the water does not stop at the border. The devastation does not stop at the reserve line. It, in fact, is flowing through the community, within the community, all around the community and displacing residents of the community.

And, Madam Speaker, there's been a long history—and I realize, maybe, perhaps this is not the debate to raise that issue—but these communities have been displaced time and time again for generations. So now being displaced into a flood-prone territory—this government has to bear that responsibility and bear that acceptance to be able to say, we need to do what we need to do there. Not a matter of trying to check a box and deflect away from that responsibility, but that responsibility clearly falls on this government.

But instead, Madam Speaker, the urgency from this government just simply isn't there. We're sitting—and you've heard the term, oh, we're in a 100-years flood. We've been in 100 years of this. This—these kind of events haven't happened for generations.

Madam Speaker, within the last calendar year, we've had COVID. Again, COVID does not recognize that reserve boundary, does not recognize where you live in Manitoba. It affects everybody. The fire season we had, again, affected everybody no matter where you were. The extreme snow that we got this past winter didn't affect where we were. So, the importance of being able to deal with this emergency—so now we're dealing with the floodwater that's coming in there.

Madam Speaker, those four events have all happened in the last calendar year. So are we dealing with an urgent emergency? Absolutely. So now this emergency is now becoming the norm. It's not becoming the exception; it's becoming the norm, and it's something that needs to be dealt with across all of government. Not a simple of—matter of we're going to take

it up to there. There's more to flooding besides the Red River and the Assiniboine, even those other tragedies that are happening today.

In dealing with the watershed in the Interlake, Madam Speaker, that's something that has to be a priority for this government also. And it just simply is not. And it's a matter of dealing with the residents—1,500—and that number is growing.

The minister had talked about being—going up in the community and not seeing hide or hair of anybody in the community. The fact of the matter is, members on this side of the Chamber have been in the community, Madam Speaker. Are we out there publicly, say, oh, you know, we're going out there, promoting the fact that we're visiting a community? No, let's get in there boots on the ground. Let's get in there and assist wherever we can.

Madam Speaker, we're at unprecedented levels here. Unprecedented. You get into the community of Peguis and you go on the highway—and the highway is now marked just simply with stakes in the ground. And they're not little—short little stakes. They're long stakes to be able to see where the road is, just to be able to access and get in and out.

And, Madam Speaker, that may be acceptable anywhere else in Manitoba, but it should not be acceptable in the First Nation. When we deal with those kinds of issues—if we were dealing in southern Manitoba, or downtown Winnipeg for that matter, if you had stakes to be able to see where the road is—just so you can travel to go for health care, to go buy food, to go buy supplies, to go to your medical appointments—we would be absolutely up in arms in having this emergency debate take days and days until it was resolved.

But what are we doing when it comes to Peguis? Totally ignoring that and totally trying to offload that responsibility to Indigenous Services Canada, which is absolutely unacceptable.

So, this debate and this discussion needs to happen here, it needs to happen today and it needs to happen until this issue is resolved.

Understanding, Madam Speaker, there's going to come a time where these waters are going to recede, and they're still going to—you're going to feel those impacts for decades—not just days, not just weeks, but decades.

We've had this issue happen in First Nation communities before, Madam Speaker, and that was over a

decade ago. And those communities are still displaced to this day, still feeling those impacts today. So, that is something that this government needs to take into account. Let's solve this issue now. Let's deal with this issue now. Let's truly bring a all-hands-on-deck approach and deal with this emergency.

Because it is an emergency, Madam Speaker. This isn't something, like I said, that stops at the border and all of a sudden, on-reserve is somebody else's responsibility. As Manitobans, as—and as the government of Manitoba, the responsibility is also borne on this—on that side of the Chamber.

So, Madam Speaker, so when we talk about dealing with the urgency and the importance of being able to deal with this, it's absolutely there and there is no double standard, even though clearly, when it comes to governments and First Nation and Indigenous communities, there is clearly a double standard. There is always that excuse to try and offload that responsibility to a different level of government rather than avoid it and deal with it yourself.

But this government as the Province of Manitoba and Peguis First Nation—you can call it on-reserve land, Madam Speaker, but it is still located in Manitoba—it is still feeling that impact. There is no dome over Peguis. That water flows to Peguis, through Peguis and out of Peguis, but that impact is being felt today. So, are we talking about establishing a ring dike around Peguis to deal with that flooding situation in the future? Perhaps. But we also need to deal with what's happening here today.

Madam Speaker, a lot of people don't really understand the impacts that flooding is having. It's not just a matter of there's some water in your basement. You know, there's water in your basement, your home is ruined; your 100-, 200-, 300-, 400-thousand-dollar home is ruined. Then you have sewage backup in your home, so now your health is impacted, and you don't have that ability to cover that and recover from that on your own.

So we need to deal with the impacts of preventing this from happening again; we need to deal with the impacts of what's happening here right now, right here today; and we need to assist with a truly all-of-government, provincial-federal government approach to be able to assist the people of Peguis.

Again, Madam Speaker: 1,500 people. Hundreds of homes are being lost. Hundreds of homes are being damaged beyond repair. So we need to step up as

Manitobans, as the government of Manitoba on that side of the Chamber, and deal with this assistance.

So when the government is being called upon to exhaust all the resources, let's truly do that. Exhausting all the resources doesn't mean just kind of what may be in front of you. Let's truly get out there and exhaust the resources that we have at your disposal, because you're clearly not doing that. We're not helping with damming, we're not helping with the infrastructure.

The responsibility just simply does not end at the border, Madam Speaker, and that's why this is of urgent public importance—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): There's no question, and nobody in this House on either side of the House, I don't believe, would quibble with the fact that the flooding that is happening in Manitoba—Peguis, in the North, in the Interlake, in the south—it's raining again today—we know that it is very important. There's no one who would take exception with the fact that it is a very, very important issue. It's one that Manitobans and the government—and I think all members—are significantly engaged in.

I know that our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and the Minister responsible for Infrastructure had been touring the province to see the damage. Just this morning, the Minister of Infrastructure talked about support when it comes to flying—applying for disaster financial assistance. That shows that the government is fully engaged in this issue. He provided a statement today, a ministerial update, so that all members could hear information about the flooding that is happening around the province. There is no question this is a very, very important issue.

Here in the Legislature, and what you have to make the determination on, Madam Speaker, is whether or not there are any other opportunities to have these matters discussed. Of course, I already spoke about the ministerial statement that was provided by the member opposite—or, sorry, the member—Minister of Infrastructure, and also, of course, there is question period. Question period allows the opposition to bring forward—and typically, they would bring forward the emergent issues of the day.

Today the NDP had the opportunity—I think they asked 34 or 35 questions. Do you know how many questions they asked on Peguis and flooding? Not a single one, Madam Speaker. Not a single question.

It is such an important issue for them that they believe that there is no other thing to do but to set aside the entire afternoon, and yet they didn't ask one single, solitary question about this very matter. It doesn't feel like, from their perspective, that it was so important.

Now, I will give credit to my friend for River Heights. He did ask a question on this matter, Madam Speaker. He recognizes that question period is the place to bring forward important issues, and he did bring forward this question. But the NDP didn't ask one single, solitary question. I don't know, after 34 questions maybe it was No. 50 on the list, maybe it was 57, 70 on the list—I don't know how far we would have had to get into question period for them to ask a question.

* (15:00)

Now, beyond that, Madam Speaker, if you look at the agenda for this afternoon—and it's no secret, we've talked with the Opposition House Leader and others—we're going to resolve into Committee of Supply. We're going to have Estimates. And for those who are listening, the Estimates process is an opportunity for members of the opposition to ask ministers and the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson)—because the Premier is scheduled for Estimates this afternoon—to ask questions about, essentially, anything that they wish.

And instead of moving very quickly to get into Committee of Supply so that they could start asking questions of the Premier and other ministers who are scheduled to appear in Estimates, they've decided to delay. I don't know why, Madam Speaker. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me. Not a single question out of their 34 in question period centred on this particular issue. They don't seem to want to ask the Premier questions about this particular issue.

There must be something else at play. I'm—I hesitate to say that it is politics, Madam Speaker, because I have great respect for my friend and also for members of the opposition, but there clearly is something else going on when they don't want to ask any questions in question period about it or seemingly any questions to the Premier in the afternoon.

So, there is no doubt that this is an important issue. No one would take exception with that. But if the members opposite really want to ask questions about it, they have plenty of opportunity in question period and in Estimates this afternoon, and we await the decision of your good office on whether or not this raises to the standard of no other opportunity to ask about this issue.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I ask leave to make a response to the matter of urgent public importance.

Madam Speaker: Does the member for River Heights have leave to respond to the matter of urgent public importance? *[Agreed]*

Leave has been granted.

Mr. Gerrard: The flood is clearly a matter of urgent public importance in Manitoba. Of this, there's no question. We're in the middle of the flood of 2022. There is more rain coming today and tomorrow in the fourth Colorado low, and we have more rain coming later on in possibly another Colorado low this weekend.

For many who have been affected by the flood, these are desperate times. I understand already there are about 1,900 people who've been evacuated: about 1,600 from Peguis First Nation and about 300 from varied locations in the rest of the province.

One of the reasons that we must have this matter of urgent public importance fully debated is that there has been an almost unbelievably poor ability to forecast the flood at Peguis and to give the people of Peguis First Nation adequate warning of the flood.

On Thursday, April 28th, as I spoke earlier, Manitoba Liberals were given a briefing on the flood. I asked about the situation at Peguis First Nation, and one of the reasons that I asked specifically about Peguis First Nation was that the municipality of Fisher, located just south of Peguis First Nation, had declared a state of emergency on April 27th, and their notice specifically mentioned concerns at Poplarfield, Fisher Branch and Hodgson. The first two are just south of Peguis and Hodgson is right beside Peguis.

And yet, when I asked about Peguis First Nation, the minister responded by saying his concern was with the outlet channel from Lake Manitoba to Lake St. Martin and the channel from Lake St. Martin to Lake Winnipeg. The minister didn't mention Peguis First Nation at all.

Strangely, in the flood, which was two days later, Peguis First Nation was in the middle of the worst flood that they've ever experienced. People are talking about a one-in-a-hundred-year flood. That's like the '97 flood in Manitoba.

It should have been possible to give the people of Peguis First Nation several weeks. I suggest a month's advance warning of the potential risk would be reasonable. It's true that the snowstorms earlier in

April were a significant factor, but there should have been much better monitoring of the snowpack in the Fisher River watershed than occurred and much better information on the potential risk much earlier than was provided.

My son Charles has been involved in measuring the snow pack in British Columbia and predicting the expected runoff. It can be done, and it must be done for the Fisher River watershed in the future. Note that we're talking about areas of the watershed which are outside of Peguis First Nation, which are the ones which contribute the water to flood Peguis. The contribution from snow in Peguis First Nation itself is much less.

Only when a community can have adequate warning of a potential flood can the community properly prepare. We ensure such flood warnings for many other communities in Manitoba: from Emerson to Melita to Brandon to Swan River and The Pas. We can and we must do the same for First Nation communities, including—particularly for Peguis.

This snowpack monitoring and monitoring of risk—we have a lot of experience with this in Manitoba, but we didn't do it. Something broke down, something was not done as well as it could have been done to warn Peguis First Nation and, as of today, there are about 1,600 people who've had to be evacuated.

The fact that these 1,600 people have had their homes and livelihoods threatened is disturbing and unsettling. All Manitobans should be concerned when so many people have to be evacuated. The extent of these evacuations worries us all and points to major gaps in flood defences in our province.

It's important that we have, today, a full debate on this matter of urgent public importance so that MLAs can contribute to discussion of where these gaps are and the measures that are needed to fix the gaps.

The potential for flooding along the Fisher River at Peguis has been known for many years. On many occasions in the past, I've called for the development and implementation of flood protection and flood protection plan for Peguis. I've been in discussions where there have been alternatives described, either storing water upstream or building a channel to divert water around Peguis itself. Either way, or some combination could provide protection for the people who live on Peguis First Nation.

These solutions have been talked about for many years. Sadly, though, the NDP, when in government,

knew of the problem, they failed to act. The PCs in the last six years have done no better. Shame on both the NDP and the Conservatives. It's imperative that we discuss today this situation and that it is not delayed further.

Madam Speaker, we are in a time when at the very top of the agenda for all of us is reconciliation. Reconciliation means working and planning together, recognizing the harms that have been done in the past—as they have been done to people in Peguis First Nation—and working out a plan, as we say in our land acknowledgment every day, to collaborate to solve these problems in the future.

Madam Speaker, to not have this matter of urgent public importance today would be a step back from the motion we are making, from the forward progress we are making on reconciliation. And I would urge the government to reconsider their position, to join all members in a process of reconciliation which will allow us to discuss this situation—the situation of the flooding at Peguis—today and not wait for any other day in the future.

It needs to be 'dos' now. The situation is very serious and I hope that we will have co-operation from the government and the opposition parties and us—we are in favour, so that we can have this very important debate and we can have the process of reconciliation move forward, as it should and must today.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair regarding the motion proposed by the honourable member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) on a matter of urgent public importance.

* (15:10)

As members may recall, two conditions must be satisfied in order for this matter to proceed as a debate in this House. The first condition has been met in that I did receive a letter with notice of this MUPI more than 90 minutes prior to the start of routine proceedings, as required by rule 38(1), and I thank the honourable member for that. The second condition is that the matter proposed for debate must be urgent, with no other reasonable opportunities available to fully debate the matter.

I have listened very carefully to the arguments put forward and I agree that the impact of flooding is an issue that fits the criteria for a matter of urgent public importance and that it should take precedence over other House business today.

Many, many Manitobans across the province have been affected by the current flooding and I feel that citizens would benefit from members having an opportunity today to raise concerns and hear about proposed solutions in this Chamber. I feel the people of Manitoba would want to hear from their elected representatives regarding this crisis and that a fulsome debate on the matter should take place as soon as possible.

I therefore rule this motion in order as a matter of urgent public importance and I put the question to the House. Shall the debate proceed?

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Madam Speaker: All those in favour, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Madam Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Madam Speaker: In my opinion, the Nays have it. I declare the motion lost.

Grievances?

Mr. Gerrard: I call for a recorded vote, please.

Madam Speaker: A recorded vote having been called, call—oh. *[interjection]* Oh, does the member have support of three other members?

Not seeing any support, there is no support for a recorded vote.

* * *

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please resolve into Committee of Supply?

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

HEALTH

* (15:30)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Good afternoon. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

Before we begin, I have a leave request for this section of Committee of Supply. Our long-standing practice is for the opposition to sit at the committee table to the right hand of the—to the right-hand side of the Chairperson. Because the minister is participating virtually this afternoon, I am asking if there is leave of the committee to waive this practice. This would make it much easier for the members of the opposition to see the screens that are situated in the room.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

This section of Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Health.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement, and would they please introduce their staff that is with them?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): On behalf of the Department of Health, I am very pleased to present the financial Estimates for the 2022-23 fiscal year. In doing so, I commit to Manitobans that through this budget, we will continue to deliver high-quality health care in a safe, innovative and sustainable manner to our patients, clients, residents and families.

As the supplement describes, we will continue to strive for positive results in the department and health system, with dedicated focus on results in the areas of improving access, improving health-service experience, improving patient safety, ensuring affordability and health-system spending.

The proposed 2022-23 Health budget, in core, represents the largest investment in health care in our history, just over \$6.2 billion. More specifically, the Department of Health now reflects a 2022-23 expenditure, in core, of \$6.273 billion. This represents a \$146.1-million increase from the 2021-22 budget or a 2.4 per cent increase. In terms of summary, the 2022-23 health sector summary budget is set at \$6.687 billion.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant and far-reaching collateral impacts on many aspects of the

health-care system. The magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic backlog challenge includes surgical and diagnostic waits, cancer screening and diagnoses and waits and increasing demands for other important services to Manitobans.

The Manitoba government has created a diagnostic and surgical recovery task force to address the diagnostic and surgical backlog challenges. The five-point plan includes the following actions: (1) improve the capacity of the existing provincial health system to deliver activity; (2) increase provincial capacity through more intensive health-care purchasing efforts; (3) engage the front line in finding solutions; (4) apply innovations developed locally and globally; (5) engage citizens and community in identifying challenges and finding solutions.

The Manitoba government already recognized that significant financial resources were needed to address these multiple challenges. Budget 2021 contained a total of \$50 million to support the backlogs in activity in that fiscal year alone. Budget 2022 continues to address the pandemic backlog by providing a total of \$110 million to aid in the recovery from COVID-19 related to surgical and diagnostic backlogs. This \$110 million is on top of the amounts I referenced in our core budget.

On the topic of COVID-19, our government continues to proactively budget for and set aside amounts in respect to pressures from COVID-19. And, again, on top of the core amounts I noted earlier for Health, our government has established an amount of \$630 million in 2022-23 for the ongoing COVID-19 response and other contingencies.

In addition to the budget I just spoke about and in response to the unprecedented pressure placed on the provincial health-care system as a result of COVID-19, an initial investment of \$9 million is committed to establish a higher baseline ICU bed level in Manitoba. A further \$4.2 million and 18 additional term FTEs will be provided to Cadham provincial lab to support core and COVID-19 operations.

Budget 2022 includes other key investments and enhancements in the delivery of health services. I will now take a few moments to describe some of these investments.

Health has made large commitments related to funding for wages and benefits. Manitoba spends approximately 73 cents on every dollar in hospitals and health-care facilities on salaries and benefits for the workforce. The total investment made in respect

of these resources amounts to \$87.2 million in Budget 2022.

For the 2022-23 fiscal year, over \$12.6 million in incremental operating funding has been made available to support the annual operating cost of the following new capital projects in Manitoba: the acute 'crottes'-acute stroke unit at HSC, an increase of \$8 million in addition to \$1.7 million in funding provided in 2021-22; Rest Haven personal-care home, an increase of \$2 million in addition to \$4 million in funded-provided in 2021-22 for 83 incremental beds; CancerCare Manitoba, an increase of \$2.7 million to support several cancer initiatives.

An investment of \$7.6 million is being provided for emergency response services, including for hiring of 35 additional primary-care paramedics as part of the government's commitment to hire an additional 80 paramedics; increased capacity for life-saving dialysis treatment for those living with end-stage chronic kidney disease; and we've budgeted an additional \$1.8 million for 2022-23, and plan to invest in capacity for more dialysis spaces in Manitoba. This includes both in-centre and home dialysis for those who wish to deliver or receive care in the privacy of their home. Since 2015-16, \$34.1 million in total funding has been approved to expand dialysis capacity.

Funding of \$10.9 million will be made in support of Manitoba's Pharmacare program. This will include a 2.1 per cent increase in anticipated price increases as well as 2.4 per cent increase in prescription volumes and additional funding for drugs for rare diseases. In addition, we continue with our plans announced in 2021 to provide improved coverage for insulin pumps and glucose monitors to help those suffering with diabetes.

Although delayed by COVID-19, wave 2 of the health-system transformation continues to implement Manitoba's Clinical and Preventative Services Plan. The CPSP is focused on sustaining health services into the future so that care is optimized, guiding investments in rural and northern health care, digital health supports and infrastructure investment in projects and program delivery. And we continue to advance the implementation of Manitoba's CPSP, including the unprecedented \$8.2-million capital plan that was announced last year in Budget 2021.

New hospitals are in planning for Neepawa and Portage la Prairie, and many other infrastructure improvement projects are under way across the province. In Winnipeg, our government was very pleased to

announce the progress made on the St. Boniface Hospital emergency department project. The \$141-million project will include patient care, reduced wait times and meet growing demands for the future.

The health system and those who work in it have been providing care during a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, arguably the most difficult period in recent memory. Now they're hard at work on recovering from the backlogs and stabilizing from the pandemic. Our government has made historic investments in Budget 2022 to help our valued health-care providers do this important work.

Historically, the Canada Health Transfer played an important role in helping support provincial and territorial health services. In 2017-2018, the federal government cut growth in the CHT from a fixed 6 per cent per year to a three-year moving average of nominal gross domestic product growth, with funding guaranteed to increase by 3 per cent per year. The decrease in the CHT's growth rate since 2017-2018 has reduced the overall federal contribution through the CHT in supporting total health-care costs in Canada, resulting in billions of dollars less in health-care funding for provinces and territories. For Manitoba, it means a reduction of \$739 million in total when compared to what would have been received during this period under the previous formula.

By 2021, provinces and territories were paying about 78 per cent of total health-care costs in Canada while the federal government paid only about 22 per cent. Sustaining the health-care levels to respond to Manitobans' greatest health-care needs going forward requires an increase in the CHT of provincial and territorial—

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

We thank the minister for those comments, and would the minister introduce her staff at this time?

Ms. Gordon: Here with me today is Karen Herd, the Deputy Minister of Health; Sandra Henault, assistant deputy minister and executive financial officer, finance, shared services for all three departments, Manitoba Health.

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

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Union Station.

* (15:40)

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): So I'd like to start by thanking the staff who are supporting the proceedings today. We know how hard you folks work, and we genuinely appreciate your support and your efforts made so that we can do this work in this building and on behalf of Manitobans.

I also want to thank all of those who are working in our health-care system during this very challenging time. It is currently nurse appreciation week, and it's also allied health-care professionals week, and those folks most definitely, most certainly deserve our thanks for everything that they have done and are doing.

And beyond our thanks, they also deserve real action to address the ongoing crisis and challenges that they're facing in our health-care system.

The pandemic has posed exceptional challenges to our health-care system. As we've previously discussed, years of closures and consolidation left Manitoba uniquely unprepared for a public health emergency. We've seen the impacts of that in terms of health-care outcomes throughout this pandemic; unfortunately, being some of the worst across North America.

We know the capacity in our health-care system was cut, beds were closed, critical care was cut, emergency rooms were consolidated.

Unfortunately, over the last year, things have gotten worse in the health-care system. We're facing a record backlog for surgeries and diagnostic tests. Wait times in emergency rooms are also breaking records.

Facilities in rural and northern Manitoba also face incredible challenges, including what the northern region describes as a very fragile state of sites and services across the region. This cannot be overstated, and I'm grateful for our colleagues who represent the North in our caucus—NDP caucus—who have been advocating tirelessly for folks who reside in the North and in rural communities.

In addition, my colleague for Point Douglas will spend some time inquiring of the government regarding the very serious addictions crisis, the crisis of unmet basic needs and the crisis of unaddressed childhood trauma and trauma generally, and how that manifests in our province.

The addiction support the government has put forward are simply inadequate to deal with the problem at hand and much more must be done.

My colleague will get into more of those details by way of questions throughout this process.

I want to thank the health staff who are supporting today's proceedings under what are very challenging circumstances. Appreciate you very much, and thank you for your expertise throughout Estimates.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the member for that statement.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 21.1(a) contained in resolution 21.1.

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

Before I open the floor for questions, I would just like to remind everybody to please give a proper signal with your hand for myself to recognize you, so that way there's no mistakes of the cameras and the mics being turned on prematurely.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Asagwara: I'd like to start today by actually sharing a response to a freedom of information request we received, which I'm happy to table. It shows the discharge disposition of patients at St. Boniface Hospital's cardiac unit over six years.

So, in 2015 and '16, 69 patients were discharged because they died. In 2018 and '19, it was 115 patients. In 2019 and '20, it was 157. Clearly, you know, these numbers predate the pandemic—the rise in these numbers predate the pandemic.

Can the minister explain this rise in deaths in cardiac units at St. Boniface Hospital?

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

I would like to take it under advisement. That information is not available at this time.

MLA Asagwara: So a memo from Victoria General Hospital that was leaked recently—I know the minister is well aware of this—refers to a bed crisis. That is—that description is a direct quote from the memo. The memo says that at all sites across the region—this will

mean pulling more patients out of the emergency rooms to wherever patient care space can be created; in some cases, in non-traditional locations. That, again, is quoted directly from this memo that was leaked.

What is the minister doing to address this bed crisis? If she could outline maybe the immediate actions that she's taking and then, more generally, what steps they're taking to address this bed crisis.

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

It is my understanding from the health system leadership that the Victoria General Hospital is experiencing a surge in patient demand at this time, and a number of initiatives are being implemented and developed to lower emergency as well as urgent care wait times and reduce the backlogs at these sites.

These ideas are coming forward from engagement and conversation with staff, staff that work right in the urgent care, assisting patients. And so some of the ideas that have come forward is the levelling of transport arrivals across all sites, including the lab turnaround time for patients requiring admission. I understand that these are temporary—and I stress and emphasize the word temporary—measures of the individuals that are being moved—I'm assured are ambulatory. They're low-acuity patients. They are close to being discharged within 24 to 48 hours. They're independent and relatively low-care needs.

The spaces they're moved to are monitored by staff. They're equipped with all necessary equipment and are locations where patients who are expected to be discharged, again, within a short period of time. Our health-care facilities continue to communicate with these patients and staff about moves and plans for managing the surge.

We know that these are challenging circumstances, and we—I do want to recognize the professionalism and dedication of all our staff to ensure patients are receiving quality care in a safe manner.

Mr. Chairperson, thank you.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response.

You know, I'm sure the minister would agree that, however temporary, folks are being put in hallways or in staff lounges or wherever staff are creatively being able to find space to provide care that—for any amount of time—that is unacceptable. That it is not what Manitobans should come to expect when they access

health care in our province, and that these temporary measures—the reality of it is that they're a direct result of decisions that this government has made leading up to the pandemic, including cutting 124 beds from our hospitals.

* (15:50)

And so, you know, knowing that, I'm sure the minister recognizes that this circumstance—no one should ever expect to be experiencing this in health care, and it places an incredible burden on top of what is already a really challenging time for health-care workers to try and meet those health-care needs in that kind of an environment, as creative as they are finding these solutions.

Can the minister commit to restoring the 124 beds that have been lost in the last few years that have contributed to the state of things right now?

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

I am reviewing some CIHI data—Canadian information for—institute for health information data for 2020-2021 and it shows the total number of beds for each of the provinces and territories. And they're listed in a ranked order, and Manitoba was at 4,170, up from 4,132.

I'm not aware of the bed closures the member references. Of course, during the pandemic, there has been pressures and challenges on the health system to staff beds as a result of redeployment of staff, individuals who may have chosen, throughout the two years, to seek employment elsewhere. And so there were challenges, and you can't keep a bed open unless you have it staffed, so.

Those decisions are not being made here in the ministry. It's being made in each and every facility by leadership to ensure that individuals who occupy those beds are receiving care from the right ratio and complement of staff.

But if the member for Union Station could be more specific about the number that they are putting on the record, that would be appreciated because we are not familiar with those closures.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: So the 124—I thank the minister for that response—that number, which has been raised in question period a number of times to this point, comes from the WRHA annual report. So that's information that the minister should have readily available and,

again, has been raised a number of times in the past many weeks.

So, if the minister is able to clarify how those beds are going to be, you know, reinstated, that would be great. But, certainly, I won't spend too much time on that, if the minister is not willing to commit to reinstating those 124 beds that were cut.

What I would like to be able to get into is whether or not the minister can provide the amounts regions have spent on nursing agencies.

This is a really important question. It's a question that I certainly understand if the minister doesn't have all of the data available to her, an undertaking would be fine. But if the minister could provide the amount regions have spent on nursing agencies, broken out by region, for the fiscal year of 2021 and '22, that would be great.

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

I just want to clarify that the fiscal year is '21-22. And if that is accurate, we would not have those numbers as of yet. We're just in the process of finalizing the end of the fiscal year numbers.

So, please clarify that it is the fiscal year that has just ended.

MLA Asagwara: Would the minister be willing to take that as an undertaking?

Ms. Gordon: Yes, we will take that under advisement and provide a response.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for agreeing to do so.

Similarly to my question on those stats, is the minister able to—and broken down by area, so, for example, surgery, ER, urgent care, et cetera, and by region—would the minister be able to provide us a current vacancy report for nurses?

* (16:00)

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for Union Station for the opportunity to put some words on the record about our government's investment in nurses.

So, we have invested—nearly 1,600 nurse training seats now, over double the 700 the previous NDP government had when they took power. We're graduating 15 per cent more nurses than the NDP ever did; \$19.5 million has been invested to add 259 nurse training seats this year, and that will be at five

post-secondary institutions as part of our larger plan to add close to 400 new nursing education seats.

Mr. Chairperson, on top of these investments, we're hiring 35 more paramedics across our province. And I want to highlight that 149 nurses have completed their intensive-care unit nurse training program since last April; 93 nurses, as well, in the last year have completed the 12-week critical-care orientation program to be able to help support our intensive-care units; and 30 more nurses have signed up for the program just this past February.

And I've shared a number of times that last year I was pleased as a first-time Health Minister to participate in the Rady Faculty of Health Sciences' College of Nursing nurses' graduation ceremony, and 115 nurses graduated at that time, and there will be even more graduating this spring.

Mr. Chairperson, \$4.3 million for 37 additional nurse training seats at University College of the North is an investment where we will see more nurses being able to provide care throughout various facilities in our northern and remote communities.

And we're supporting hundreds of internationally educated nurse applicants to obtain their licensure and start practising in Manitoba with up to \$23,000 of financial aid per person. And that might—may not sound like a lot to those around the table today, but to someone who's a newcomer trying to get back into their field of practice from their previous country of origin, that is a lot.

And our undergraduate nurse employees program—last December, 63 third- and fourth-year nursing students joined care teams to support the delivery of health services for Manitobans, and this will allow them to gain invaluable paid experience in a clinical setting. And 159 more nursing students will start by the end of April.

And so we are ensuring that we provide opportunities right here in our province for new nurses, for internationally educated nurses, to be able to practise in their area of passion and expertise. It's about making Manitoba more welcoming.

And welcoming doesn't just mean to individuals that are coming to our province from another country or another province. It's about people who have grown up here and went to school here and spent their entire life here and now they want to stay here at home in Manitoba and practise in their area of passion and expertise. And so we're ensuring that Manitoba welcomes them into our health system.

So pleased to be able to have several discussions with the Manitoba Nurses Union, the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba on how we can [*inaudible*] remains open and a welcoming place for those who want to be in the nursing profession. I've said many times that it's a very rewarding and fulfilling profession, and we want to keep it that way.

And that is why we've also added 60 new full-time nursing positions to intensive-care units. And that's not just here in Winnipeg at St. Boniface and Health Sciences Centre, but it's also in Brandon and Grace Hospital.

And it's about—what this week is all about, National Nursing Week; it's thanking nurses. It's appreciating them. It's valuing them and making sure they know that—[*interjection*]

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

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response. I didn't hear an answer to my question in regards to whether or not the minister will provide, broken out by area and by region, a current vacancy report for nurses. I would appreciate if the minister could provide clarity on that point.

But I just want to also state that I agree with the minister that Manitoba should be a welcoming place for nurses. People should be excited, whether they're new grads or they're relocating from any place, they should be excited to work here in Manitoba. Which is why I'm sure the minister is concerned—as I'm concerned, as my colleagues are concerned—that hundreds of nurses are no longer working in Manitoba; since the PCs came into government in 2016 we have lost hundreds of nurses in Manitoba, unfortunately.

And, you know, this announcement that the government made in July of 2021, of last year, that close to 400 new nursing seats would be added over the next four years—sorry, next few years—it was not as specific as four years, it was next few years, it was kind of vague that way—was an announcement that they continue to tout, but there's a real lack of clarity in terms of what that means in the immediate.

And so, you know, in December there were more specifics identified for this year by the government, including that they were adding 259 nurse training seats starting this year. So, just looking for some clarity on those announcements in terms of where things are at.

Can the minister update how many of the seats she anticipates will be in place this year, as previously announced? And I would welcome the minister answering the question that I asked previously—again, if she cannot provide the data right now, an undertaking—taking it under advisement would be fine.

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

Again, I just want to highlight the investment that our government is making: \$19.5 million to add 259 nurse training seats this year at five post-secondary institutions as part of our larger plan to add close to 400 new nurses education seats.

*(16:10)

We are on track to—we continue to work with some of our institutions, and I can confirm that by the end of the year we will have 30 new seats at Red River College Polytech; 12 at—RN at Brandon University; 20 RPNs, Winnipeg, at—five at Université de Saint-Boniface; seven for Flin Flon through the University College of the North; 20 through Thompson, again University College of the North; and over 120 at University of Manitoba and we continue to have discussions with our—with a few—a couple of institutions to fulfill our target of 259.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for providing those details.

Again, I will highlight that the minister has yet to provide the information regarding the reporting of vacancies—the nurses by region, by area—and so, again, I would ask if the minister is willing to take it as an undertaking. That would be—that's fine; that's great, actually, if she's willing to commit to provide that information. It is really important information for us to know very clearly what the vacancy rates are for nurses by area, by region.

But I do thank the minister for providing the information in regards to the seats per institution that she's just provided.

I do—just doing quick math—see that the—does not total the 259 seats that were identified by the government, but the minister has indicated they're still working toward that number.

So I'd like to ask, actually now, about a question I asked last year in Estimates. The former Health minister, now Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), said that Cadham labs—at Cadham labs, rather, there were no

plans to move forward with private arrangements, and that was, again, the former Health minister made that statement, now Premier.

I'm wondering if that's still the case. Are there any plans for a public-private partnership or any other private arrangement at Cadham labs?

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

We have, in this province—and I know that the member for Union Station is aware from prior employment in the health system, that we have a wide variety of lab services throughout the province, and there are private labs—always has been, even during the NDP government's time.

We will always have a public health lab, that is Cadham lab. They work closely with diagnostics at Shared Health, and I am not aware of any plans to privatize Cadham labs; I'm not aware of that.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response. I will make a final note that, as of yet, the minister has not committed to providing any information regarding nurse vacancies by area and by region.

Given the fact that the minister is touting, and has been for quite some time, all of these efforts that she and her government are making around addressing the nursing shortage crisis that we have, I would think that she would be eager, in fact, to provide this information. So, I'm not quite sure where the resistance is in terms of providing this data. It's important information that the minister should, I would think, be eager to make available.

So, in regards to nursing, the minister talked about 120 seats at the University of Manitoba.

I'm wondering if the minister could provide clarity around whether or not those 120 seats are going to be coming online this year—this year.

And also, the minister stated that nurse graduation is up 15 per cent. That data isn't consistent with data that I have gone over, quite frankly.

And I'm just wondering if the minister can shed some light on that for me and provide the nurse graduation rate by institution, and that way, you know, hopefully, that can line that up with the 15 per cent increase that she's saying for graduation rates.

So, if the minister could cover those two items that would be wonderful.

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

I do want to go back and add to the record some information about Cadham labs, Cadham Provincial Laboratory services. If the member looks at the Supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure for 2022-23, on page 39 they will see that, for '22-23, there has been an increase to support Cadham Provincial Laboratory pandemic response and to enhance their service capacity. Again, a public lab and we are enhancing supports, and there's actually been an increase in FTEs as well as dollars for the Cadham provincial lab.

To the member's question about the 120 seats at University of Manitoba, I can confirm that, yes, they will come online this year.

And with regard to the member's question about the 15 per cent that has been stated a number of times, that is an overall increase over time since our government took power. They may be looking at year over year; we are not. We are taking an overall approach to that percentage that we are reporting.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister provide the nurse graduation information by institution?

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

* (16:20)

I do have available some breakdowns, but it is not by graduation, by institution, so I will have to take that under advisement and provide a response at a later time.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you, Minister, for that—agreeing to take that under advisement.

Can the minister tell me how many personal-care-home beds that's occupied or available there currently are in the province?

And, to be clear, I would ask for the most recent figures. That would exclude Parkview Place and any other beds which have been removed from our system.

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

It gives me an opportunity to put on the record our government's investment in Budget 2022. So, we're investing [*inaudible*] and I just want to say that that's more money than the previous NDP government ever spent.

So, to—in 2016-17, PCH funding was \$644,129. In '22-23, the funding is \$661,734, more beds—

Mr. Chairperson: I'd like to interrupt the minister as we have lost your video. I don't know why we—like—if you could check your camera.

Ms. Gordon: Can you see it now?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Health, yes, we can see you. Please proceed.

Ms. Gordon: Since we took office, we've built 506 PCH beds. In our first two years in government, we built almost twice as many PCH beds in Winnipeg as the NDP did from 2010 to 2016, and in 2020 we announced a historic \$280-million investment in safety upgrades to our PCHs.

And then Budget 2022 will invest \$32 million to implement all 17 recommendations of Dr. Stevenson's report to improve care for Manitobans at all 125 personal-care homes in the province.

And so these investments include increases in staffing within personal-care homes to ensure seniors get the quality care they deserve. It also includes investing in new personal-care-home beds. We're also strengthening seniors care by investing \$20 million to implement the new seniors strategy.

Mr. Chairperson, this makes good on our government's promise to respect and protect the dignity and independence of our seniors, and I just want to take an opportunity to highlight that it was our government that announced the first Seniors and Long-Term Care ministry with a minister, a deputy minister and a full department. And their consultation, engagement and work has begun—the talking to individuals that service seniors across our province; and more good work is going to be announced by the minister responsible for Seniors and Long-Term Care in the not-too-distant future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister tell me how many personal-care-home beds, occupied or available, there currently are in the province?

To be clear, I would ask for the most recent figures that exclude Parkview and any other beds which have recently been removed. It's a pretty clear question. Hopefully, this time the minister will provide a clear response.

Thank you.

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

I am pleased to share that by regions.

For southern, Tabor Home, it's located in Morden: new 100-bed PCH, and that replaced the existing 60-bed PCH. So the net new beds was 40 and the provincial contribution was more than \$35 million and they—it was occupied in the fall of 2017.

The—in the WRHA, Holy Family Home in Winnipeg: redevelopment of existing facility, 116 beds, for a new total of 157 beds; net new is 41. Our provincial government's contribution: over \$61 million; and that was occupied in the summer of 2019.

In southern regional health authority, the Boyne Lodge in Carman—and I was pleased, as Minister of Health, to be there for the ribbon cutting, so to speak, on that facility—was a redevelopment of existing facility: 70 beds for a new total of 106; the net new is 36, with the provincial contribution over \$28 million; and that was occupied in the fall of 2021.

And in southern regional health authority, Rest Haven home, and it's located in Steinbach: redevelopment of the existing facility; 60 beds, for a new total of 143. So net new beds is 83. Our provincial government's investment was over \$35 million; and that will be coming online—well, in—you'll hear of an announcement very soon this spring.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for providing that breakdown.

I am going to go back to that question about personal-care-home beds. There's, I think, some clarity that I want to get there.

* (16:30)

But for right now, I'm—I'd like to ask about the vacancy rate in the Insured Benefits branch. At last I checked, the vacancy rate was at 25 per cent.

We've heard from a number of Manitobans who are having an incredibly hard time getting their health cards—extreme delays in getting health cards. This is a huge issue. I'm sure—I know the minister is aware because myself and several of my colleagues, we have written letters to the minister regarding this issue. It has been raised a number of times.

Can the minister explain why the vacancy rate is so high in that branch, and what steps she's taking to address it immediately?

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

The challenges that exist throughout this province, in terms of staffing positions and—in all the sectors has certainly impacted the Health Department as well, and the branch is making concerted efforts to advertise their vacancies and to, as quickly as possible, receive applications, screen those applications, hold interviews, make offers. And so in some cases, they're having to repost some positions, which is not good, but it has impacted all sectors and all levels of government. And so we thank all the people that are showing up every day in that branch to provide services.

But I also want to take this opportunity to talk a little bit about our very successful vaccination campaign. And I just feel so proud as a Health minister to report that over 1.1 million Manitobans rolled up their sleeves to receive two doses of the vaccine, and we continue to work on increasing the numbers for the third dose, encouraging individuals to get their fourth dose as they become eligible. Several are now.

And that is what led to over 82 per cent of eligible Manitobans being fully vaccinated, and it's the highest rate among the prairie provinces. So I just wanted to put that on the record as well.

And again, over 44 per cent of Manitobans have gotten a booster shot, and we continue to ensure that as the National Advisory Committee on Immunization comes out with more opportunities for Manitobans to become fully vaccinated and to receive their boosters, that our vaccination campaign, our ads, our social media, our radio, our print ads keep pace with those changes so that we can keep all Manitobans safe, get everyone back to work, not just in our department but in all sectors of the province where there's staffing shortages.

And our goal as a government is to fill those vacancies as quickly as possible, because it's people on the front lines that build Manitoba's economy, and it's about building up the economy and making sure that Manitoba continues to be a thriving province and a place where people want to come to live, to work, play and enjoy living here for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for her response. I—as promised, I'm going to go back to the personal-care-home question that I asked.

The minister didn't provide the—an actual—the answer to the question I asked specifically, and so I'm going to ask it again: I'm looking for a system-wide number in terms of how many beds, occupied or available, are there currently in the province.

You know, the minister is well aware of the fact that her government promised 1,200 personal-care-home beds. There are currently less beds than when they started. So, you know, this is an important point. The minister has the information.

How many personal-care-home beds, occupied or available, are there currently in the province right now?

* (16:40)

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question, and I know that the honourable member worked in the health system for a very long time and can relate to how it evolves and changes over time, and that is without a two-plus year pandemic.

What the pandemic has provided is an opportunity to take a look at the types of personal-care-home beds, the types of community supports that our seniors need. And in some cases, we've had personal-care homes say they would like to have the opportunity to change the configuration of their bed base from the standard PCH bed to more, like, for example, behavioural beds.

So, we have been working very closely with those PCHs to ensure that the current needs that are before them—not the way we envisioned for long-term-care, personal-care homes, back in the '70s or even the '60s, continues to take hold when what we need is a different configuration.

And it's also given us an opportunity to work with our home-care programmed—to ask the question of: Do we need to enhance home-care services? Do we need to provide more supports to keep people aging in place? And not just aging in place, but in their current setting, in their home. Where studies—I'm sure the member for Union Station has read some of these over time—our health profession studies continue to show that the best place for someone to rehab after surgery, or to recover after a health incident, is in the home.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

And so, we continue to see individuals who want to enhance—have their home-care services enhanced so that they can stay in their home. So, our focus is on meeting the needs of Manitobans now, and engaging with seniors and long-term-care providers, SDOs and facilities.

But our support for seniors has not wavered, and that is why, for personal-care homes, Budget 2022 is investing over \$661 million in personal-care homes. And we want to ensure that this—the—there's also investments to improve the services and the care and the settings, the infrastructure, within our personal-care homes, which is, again, why Budget 2022 is investing \$32 million to implement all 17 recommendations that came forward from Dr. Stevenson's report. And that's to improve care for Manitobans at all 125 personal-care homes in the province.

I think that is substantial and I think that needs to be said many times. Again, investments include increasing staffing within personal-care homes to ensure seniors get the quality care they deserve, and strengthening seniors care by investing that \$20 million to implement the new senior strategy will certainly help to respect and protect the dignity and independence of our seniors.

So, our commitment has not wavered, but we're certainly open to engaging with facilities, with leadership of long-term care, about what makes sense now. Our province has evolved and—changing and seniors are changing. I know my mother just turned 90 years old; she's still independent, living in her own condo. She doesn't want to go to a personal-care home, but we've enhanced her home-care services.

So, it's talking about what makes sense now to each and every senior in our province. And, Mr. Chair, we are going to continue as a Province to have those engagements, have those discussions. We don't want to get locked into any one way of doing things. It's about being—if [*inaudible*] taught us anything, it's to be flexible.

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

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response.

I think I need a bit more clarity because, to me, it sounds like the minister is saying that her government's commitment to build 1,200 new personal-care-home beds—the minister is essentially saying that

that's not going to happen. The minister—saying that your commitment hasn't wavered but that things have changed, you know, there are other areas that we need to look at. I mean, the areas that the minister outlined in terms of, you know, investing in aging in place, addressing home care, all of these—increased staffing, whether it's, you know, in-home care, long-term-care homes—all of these areas are areas that require meaningful investment, full stop. These are all areas that we're seeing have significant challenges, before the pandemic due to cuts, during this pandemic.

The minister would be more than well aware of these issues. I know she's hearing from Manitobans about these areas and the concerns and the challenges that people are facing. But I guess what I'm trying to understand is, you know, these are all areas that need to be invested in meaningfully. These are all areas that are struggling, that need to be addressed.

Is the minister saying, flat out, that the commitment that her government made to Manitobans to build 1,200 personal-care-home beds, that that's no longer a promise that they're—they intend to keep? Is the minister saying that establishing, you know, hundreds, over 1,000, but a significant amount of new personal-care-home beds is just no longer part of the plan?

Because that's essentially what the minister has just identified. I mean, consultation engagement's important. People have been very clear, however, to point—to this date, rather, what is needed and necessary.

And, again, the minister has the information available to her in terms of, system-wide, how many personal-care-home beds there currently are occupied or available. So, I would ask the minister to provide that clear data, that clear number, and provide clarity as to whether or not she—I'm interpreting what she says is they've abandoned that promise to Manitobans, that they're not looking at establishing the personal-care-home beds that are needed, and that some sort of vague statements around areas that we all know need to be meaningfully invested in, but the minister has yet to and her government has yet to provide any sort of a plan in those areas.

So, if she could provide a clear number, occupied or available beds across the system in our province, and provide clarity around the statements that she's made in terms of this government not fulfilling their promise to Manitobans.

* (16:50)

Ms. Gordon: I want to thank the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for their words.

I do want to state for the record that our commitment, as a government, to seniors has not changed or to our PCHs have not changed, but we're certainly respectful of the PCHs—the choices about how they provide those services.

And a really good example is Actionmarguerite. They have converted—they've decided—this was back in 2019—to eliminate their double rooms. So, 16 beds on the C wing of the ABC tower. And they say that it was similar to projects undertaken in 2011 and 2014. And so they state that it represented the last series of rooms to be converted from a shared living space to a private space. And it was 10,000 square feet and that resulted in—once the project was complete—in Actionmarguerite St. Boniface's bed map dropping from 299 to 292 beds.

Now, as a government, we wouldn't want to say, stop everything, we don't want you to do that, because again, we're respecting the organization's decision on how they want to provide services and the type of atmosphere they want to provide services within their facility.

So, changes could be outside of the government's control.

Another really good example is Boyne Lodge. So, when the first phase of the new Boyne Lodge was announced, it featured clusters of single-resident rooms with washrooms and showers that formed a local neighbourhood of nine to 10 resident rooms. And each neighbourhood included a kitchen, dining and activity space, as well as private lounge areas, storage, utility and resident-use laundry.

The overall facility includes large multipurpose gathering spaces, offices, staff areas, maintenance and housekeeping service areas and exterior patios, walkways and parking. And I was pleased to be the Health Minister at the time when we opened the 105-bed personal-care home.

But, again, this is just an example of how personal-care-home settings are evolving and changing. And our government wants to be responsive and respectful of those changes. When an organization like Actionmarguerite comes forward to the WRHA and says, we want to eliminate double rooms—this is what we want to do, but it will lead to a bed drop—we don't want to, as a government, say, don't do that, because that is respectful engagement. That is allowing the organization to evolve and change to

meet the needs of the resident population that they serve.

So, our government's commitment has not wavered. What we are doing is ensuring that facilities know that they can come to us and they can have discussions about what makes sense now, in terms of any changes they want to make to their current bed base. Again, some have come forward and said they want more behavioural beds, and so that has to change in terms of the bed base.

So, our government—and I know the Minister for Seniors and Long-Term Care will echo my words today—has not changed, but we are going to continue to be open to having discussions with our long-term-care facilities, the leadership at those sites, because seniors are changing, their needs are changing, and what they're expecting, even within a personal-care-home setting, is changing.

And we want to be respectful and aware of that and have those discussions about what our PCH facilities should look like, how should the beds be structured, and we certainly don't want to take away from those discussions—

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

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for her response, which unfortunately did not include the information I've asked for now several times and is information the minister has readily available to her.

It's disappointing because, you know, this is a question, in terms of the occupied or available beds that are currently in the province, that's very, very straightforward. It's a question the minister should be very, very quick to answer and provide and be transparent about.

You know, the minister is providing a lot of, you know, her thoughts on approach, provides very little detail and data that would really shine a light on the actions—legitimate actions—her government is taking.

And so, it's disappointing that, after asking that question several times, the minister just simply has no interest in providing the information that, you know, I'm here asking on behalf of Manitobans.

You know, it's a question that I hear from folks that I represent as their MLA and more broadly from folks throughout the province, and it's disheartening that the minister would just outright refuse to provide a clear number today. So, I'm going to move on from that and just acknowledge that, you know, a really

simple question yet again goes unanswered by this minister.

I'm going to ask a question about St. Boniface Hospital emergency room and the renovations. Again, very straightforward question I'm going to ask. I hope the minister is willing to provide a clear answer here.

So, can the minister just provide an update for us as to the status of the 'resovay'—the renovations, rather, at the St. Boniface emergency room? Most specifically, when that project will be complete—is projected to be completed, and what is the budgeted cost?

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

I'm so pleased that the St. Boniface Hospital emergency department, which is critically important in the delivery of emergency medicine services in Winnipeg and our regional health system, has begun, and the project will create a modernized environment in which staff—

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

ROOM 255

EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

* (15:30)

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

Does the honourable Minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Yes, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Mr. Ewasko: Good afternoon. I'd like to thank everyone on this little bit of a rainy afternoon here in Winnipeg and I'm pleased to provide some opening remarks to the committee.

In January of 2022, government established our new department: Education and Early Childhood Learning, as we know that learning starts well before formal entry into school and continues right through to grade 12 and, of course, beyond.

Just to start it off, I want to thank all the students, teachers, early childhood educators, school staff,

school leaders, school administrators, parents and caregivers in our province who have given so much and persevered through the challenges of this pandemic. Throughout the most significant event to impact our education system in 100 years, they have been dedicated to staying engaged and adapting to new ways of teaching and learning. Together with public health, we worked closely with the sector to keep schools and daycare centres safe and open to the greatest extent possible while pivoting to remote or virtual learning when needed.

We also recognize how challenging and stressful the past couple of years have been and are working with the Canadian Mental Health Association to provide a continuum of mental health supports for students, teachers and other staff.

Throughout this time, we also continued to engage and consult with our partners and communities, and heard about the importance of building upon strengths and continuous improvement. For early learning and child care this includes creating 716 spaces in new child-care centres and supporting 50 new home-based spaces this year alone, reducing fees by 50 per cent this year for low-income and middle-class parents, expanding eligibility for subsidy and supporting wage increases across the sector.

We are currently building a more responsive, equitable and high-quality care system through two inter-connected Canada-Manitoba early learning and childcare agreements for almost \$1.3 billion over the next four to five years. For our K-to-12 education system, our goal is to improve equity and accountability and provide flexibility to school and division leaders to help address their local needs.

Our kindergarten-to-grade 12 education action plan, which was announced on April 20th, sets out the path for implementation of the K-to-12 education commission's recommendations and 10 imperatives for improvement.

Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—our Indigenous education policy framework is the foundation for all of our collaboration, co-operation, truth and reconciliation efforts, to that every student in Manitoba can reach their full potential and live a good life.

Budget 2022 invests \$1.7 billion in K-to-12 education; over \$138 million more than last year. A funding review is under way in consultation with our partners that will see a new funding model implemented for the 2023-2024 school year; and that is

equitable and provides the supports students need to learn and succeed.

We want students to have the opportunity to learn and grow in high quality learning environments and are minimizing transportation costs and overcrowding of existing schools in growing communities.

By 2027, 22 new schools will be open for Manitoba's children and youth. We want an education and early learning system that is culturally diverse, affordable and accessible where all Manitoba children and students succeed no matter where they live, their backgrounds or their individual circumstances.

Mr. Chair, I look forward to taking questions from the committee.

Thank you.

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

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

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I'd like to thank everybody gathered around this table today and for the minister virtually for undergoing and involving himself in this process. It is greatly appreciated. We know that the Estimates process is one where we can actually discover what some of the motivating pieces are and what is the philosophy, what is the driving principles behind the decisions that government has made regarding public education.

I'd like to begin by, of course, thanking everybody in the system. The past two and a half years, Mr. Chair, have been really challenging. When I visit schools, and I was just visiting schools during the break week, you really get a sense when you walk into the building of how tired people are, of how the pandemic has certainly impacted not only the everyday stuff but it's also—not that teachers ever took it home before or anyone ever working this system never took it home but, boy, are they taking things home now.

And it is—and what I mean by that is carrying the burden. I mean, obviously, this is not a profession where you can just leave it at the door. It's something that sticks with you. And certainly, everybody that has been in this system has been impacted. And what they're looking for is a plan.

I will say, Mr. Chair, that when we talk about a plan, a plan that is trauma-informed, a plan that is pandemic-informed. And what we would like to see from the Department of Education is not only a

trauma-informed plan but also a pandemic-informed plan. So when the minister refers to looking back at the K-to-12 commission, yes, there are some pieces in the commission report that certainly, you know, will—had some really solid recommendations, but there also has to be a realization now that the pandemic has changed a lot, that that plan needs to have some pandemic-informed policies that will be brought forth by the Department of Education and by this government because it's important.

People in Manitoba, Mr. Deputy—oh, Mr. Chair, sorry—really care about the public education system. We saw that with the bill 64 fight. We saw that it's an important core government service along with health care. Education is something that Manitobans hold very dear.

And what they noticed was, and I find it rather interesting that now this government is all of a sudden going back to that K-to-12 report when bill 64 clearly didn't indicate any real desire to do that. And we found out—a little bit confounding and, certainly, Manitobans did as well. Because online, on the website, the department of Ed website, we can see the 62 briefs that were presented and the hundreds of people that went to committee and felt that their voice wasn't heard.

And what happened as a result of that process, Mr. Chair, is that people lost trust in this government when it came to public education, when it came to how it was going to proceed in the future. Because I will tell you, many Manitobans saw this as nothing more than just a power grab, and they were really concerned—really concerned—because as I said in my earlier remarks, is that people really care about public education, it being a trust, it being something that is very much a stewardship piece that governments are handed and that—and one that requires not only fiscal investment but also investment of a government that really wants to provide a public education service and system that is forward-looking, that is innovative and that is some of the best in the world.

* (15:40)

And we have the people here to do that. We just have to have the will to implement many of these thoughts and pieces.

What we—some of the pieces, too, that we would like to see going forward is that—and I know that we've talked about this a lot, but we're looking at now a new funding formula for public education. It absolutely needs to happen. I would agree with that.

And, hopefully, when we're done with this process, we can have a funding formula that is actually easy to understand, one that the public knows how it works. Because currently, right now, the funding formula is really difficult for most people in the general public trying to find exactly how it works.

And so that part is something that certainly needs to happen and we're looking forward to that and seeing how that looks—of course, putting kids first in the process, right? Because we know that depending on where you live in the province, it can have a little bit of some variability as to the services that are received by students.

I will also say, Mr. Chair, that there's also the financial reporting and in—and accounting in Manitoba education. We're looking forward to the latest FRAME reports and when they'll be presented by the minister. FRAME is really important, Mr. Chair, because FRAME really indicates exactly where the funds are placed in public education.

The other thing it really—and right on page 1, Mr. Chair, it says the percentage of the provincial support for public education. I will say that in 2016, the percentage amount was 62.4 per cent was supported by the provincial government. In the latest FRAME, that number is now down to 58.2 per cent.

That is actually quite stunning, when you think of the impact of that much of a reduction of the provincial share. And what that does is it places school divisions in the impossible position of having to make decisions on what services they can provide their students. And nothing can be more important than that very important service that the classroom teacher provides, along with the team that supports that classroom teacher.

Right now, Mr. Chair, we have school divisions making choices where they have to cut teachers, have to cut student support, have to cut clinical services for kids. And this is a direct result of the Province not living up to its commitment, its share, its absolute—I don't know what the word is I'm looking for, but it's more than just something that you do.

This is—it's a duty that you have to the citizens of Manitoba to ensure that these services are available. And by looking at what FRAME has itemized in the past five years is a systematic decrease in the provincial support. So then, school divisions are left with choices that are very difficult to make, and shouldn't have to be made.

And right now, when we know that we're being impacted by, obviously, a pandemic and other issues that impact public education, we need to see a province step up, Mr. Chair, when it comes to the funding of this core service, this core government service that has undergone, really, I would say, a tremendous amount of stress—stress put on by the pandemic, by introducing a bill that was roundly criticized and completely out of touch. And then all of a sudden, when it's politically expedient, it's gone.

And that was something people really want, Mr. Chair, is a government that is committed to public education and one that puts students first in this particular piece.

I will also say early childhood education certainly does belong in the Department of Education. As the minister said in his opening remarks, learning begins very early on—soon as conception, actually. And the service that we can provide for early childhood educators is something that's very important. What it does is—it's economically—also allows for fuller participation in an economy that people desire and people have seen occur in other parts of the country.

We do know that Ontario has a junior kindergarten program, a full-time kindergarten program; one that dovetails very nicely with their early childhood education system and one that hopefully will arrive here in Manitoba.

So with that—those opening remarks, Mr. Chair, I look forward to having a constructive dialogue with the minister.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate of the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 16.1(a) contained in resolution 16.1.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and can you hear me with no problems? Give me a bit of a thumbs up.

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, we can hear you.

Mr. Ewasko: Good, thank you, Sir.

Okay, so just listing off individuals that are with me today for the Estimates process: We have deputy minister, Dana Rudy; we have Claire Breul, who's our executive financial officer; we have Michelle

Stephen-Wiens, who's our—with us through our Early Learning and Child Care sector of the department. We have Janet Tomy, who's our assistant deputy minister for Student Achievement & Inclusion; we have Mona Pandey, who's our assistant deputy minister for System Performance & Accountability; and we have Helen Robinson-Settee, who's our director for Indigenous Inclusion Directorate.

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

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

The floor is now open for questions.
[interjection]

The honourable member for Transcona.

Mr. Altomare: Sorry, Mr. Chair. My questions will be global in nature and will be—is that correct? I have to state that, correct?

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Altomare: Okay, good. So let's begin. I do know that the minister, in his opening remarks, talked about reconciliation and education. We have had the TRC report released since 2015-16; specifically, recommendations 62 to 64 were very, very specific.

I would like to ask the minister, with No. 62, when it comes to curriculum development, at what stage of curriculum development are we at with regards to including Indigenous topics in our Manitoba curriculum?

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'll get used to the hand signals and all that type of stuff, to let you know when it's time to speak or whatever else.

* (15:50)

So, you know what? I'd like to start off, also, by saying thank you to my friend and the MLA for Transcona. I know that him, being an educator himself as well and being in a administration role also in the early years, I know that we share that passion as well. Me being a former—or, still a teacher; I still like to consider myself as a teacher as well.

So in regards to calls to action, the member knows—and I'm hoping the member knows—

that on April 28th, our government launched Mamāhtawisiwin, which is the wonder that we are born with. And, basically, that is our framework for Indigenous inclusion education and which will actually continue to be that—the foundation as we move forward with our K-to-12 action plan, which is a roadmap for student success.

You know, specifically, when the member asks a question in regards to curriculum, I mean, we know that the calls to action is to definitely address some curriculum changes within the K-to-12 system. You know, so holding true to our form and listening to many of our education partners throughout this great province of ours, we are moving forward on—through development and, of course, reframing of curriculum. Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning is engaging with our Indigenous partners, and we have been over the past number of years in regards to when we formed government in 2016.

And we're undertaking many new curriculum projects with a focus on Indigenous perspectives. This curriculum development work is intended to serve as that pathway to support truth and reconciliation in service our—of our Indigenous students and every student in Manitoba, no matter where they live, their cultural background or, of course, their independent or their own circumstance.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Altomare: One of the main reasons I asked that question is that, yes, you've been in government since 2016. The TRC report was released in 2016. And here we are, it's 2022. I think that is a long enough time frame, Mr. Chair, to have made some—taken some concrete steps and have some concrete examples.

So I'm going to ask the minister: Can he point to specific examples where curriculum has been implemented that reflects the recommendations from TRC 62?

Mr. Ewasko: I'd like to thank the member from Transcona for the question.

Whenever we start talking about Indigenous education and, of course, now with truth and reconciliation, making sure that we're addressing the needs, it's—it is a little. You know what, I'm going to try to, through these question-and-answer periods that we're going to be, you know, enjoying each other's company for quite some time over the next few days—so I'm going to try to keep the non-partisan—or, the partisan daggers to a minimum. And so I'm hoping that my

friend and—my friend from Transcona will try and do the same.

I know for many years and, being an educator myself, working with—within Sunrise School Division, I mean, there's many great things to celebrate through each and every school division that are doing various different things to help with truth and reconciliation, specifically for calls to action. I know that, you know, and I'll refresh the member's memory, that back quite a few years ago, it was called the AAA committee, and I had the opportunity as a guidance counsellor to learn from many of our elders across this great province of ours, specifically, and going to communities, First Nations communities first-hand, and see a lot of the challenges but also a lot of the successes that are happening not only in the communities but also the neighbouring school divisions that are working with the First Nation communities.

And back, like I said, quite a few years ago now, I was part of that AAA committee—which stood for Aboriginal Academic Achievement committee—and within Sunrise, they felt that they had an Aboriginal education committee for the whole school division. And I applauded a lot of individuals for stepping up and having those heartfelt consultations with community members and working with Indigenous students on trying to then, you know, make sure that we're teaching culture, languages and identity and, you know, to build on those successes. So, when the calls to action came out, I mean, it was building on a lot of those successes.

And I've—have so much good news to share with the member moving forward on our K-to-12 action plan, and, of course, Mamāhtawisiwin, which is our framework for Indigenous inclusion and education, moving forward, as I said earlier in one of my—in my previous answer. That's the foundation to the four pillars that are in the action plan.

I mentioned the AAA committee that we had back a few years ago. It is now called the Indigenous Academic Achievement committee, and—not committee, but it's Indigenous Academic Achievement, and each and every year, our government continues to put forward \$10 million of funding and with the various different programs and plans that we've got going, moving forward. I mean, we want to make sure that it—that basically we're making sure that we've got sustainable funding moving forward to make sure that we can connect the students with those cultural experiences for their identity, languages. And that being said, we're also working with various First Nations

groups to talk about recruiting and training and retaining Indigenous teachers as well.

So I'd like to thank the member for bringing the question up.

Mr. Altomare: That was—I just want to remind the minister that was my point. I mean, this came out in 2016. The department has an Indigenous inclusion director. I would—I'm going to make the assumption, Mr. Chair, that the Indigenous inclusion director has had work to do. And we are now at 2022.

And my next question for the minister is based on what specifically has the director been doing. Because I do know that the actual—the mandate really describes not just professional development being provided but also leadership in this area.

So I'd like to ask the minister what specifically has the directorate been providing in the realm of professional development for current educators in Manitoba.

* (16:00)

Mr. Ewasko: Hopefully, after about nine or 10 days of questions and answers with the member from Transcona, I'll get the signal correctly that I have to wave my hand when I'd like to speak, Mr. Chair. So you're going to have to bear with me, and we're going to hunker down here for a good maybe 10, 12 days. I mean, we've got 100 hours, so I'm game if the member from Transcona is.

So I'm hoping—I'm hoping—that the member from Transcona is not questioning the validity and the necessary role that the Indigenous Inclusion Directorate plays within our government, Mr. Chair.

We know that Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning provides very—a variety of grants to support school divisions and Indigenous and education partner organizations that support multiple, multiple, multiple initiatives which are intended to improve student and school readiness, student achievement and, of course, well-being and educational attainment for Indigenous students.

The member decides to bring forward—and again, I'm hoping that he's not going down this road, so I'm going to temper this with more of a—with more—just answering his question, because the tone in his question was a little off. And that's not that member. I know that. That's coming from somewhere else, Mr. Chair.

I know that, you know, this work on Mamàhtawisiwin started—and again, I can get the member a copy if he'd like. I mean, him as an educator, I know that last week for constituency week, I know, as a good teacher himself—that's where he's coming from, that's where I'm coming from—I'm sure he would have taken the opportunity of constituency week to educate himself and hopefully some of his colleagues on some of these great initiatives that we've moved forward on.

Mamàhtawisiwin and the action plan and anything in regards to Indigenous education, Mr. Chair, does not happen just overnight. The reason why we're doing a lot of these things now is because it hadn't happened before. We're building on successes.

And so, for the member to assume or direct or—I don't even know what the word is right now, Mr. Chair, because I can't believe he would put certain things on the record of questioning whether people within the department are actually working with our Indigenous partners, with our Indigenous and our educator—education partners across this province.

I mean, again, Mamàhtawisiwin didn't happen just overnight. The work on Mamàhtawisiwin started probably late 2015, early 2016, and then as time had rolled along, this had many, many, many engagements with our Indigenous leaders and our knowledge keepers, our elders, our education partners—whether that being superintendents, administration, students, parents—everybody, Mr. Chair.

So I'm hoping that the member wasn't meaning the question the way it came out, and maybe he can clarify or even apologize to the directorate for his—for the way that question came out, Mr. Chair. But this is very important work. We are working together. We're making sure that the directorate works across all school divisions to advance, specifically, truth and reconciliation, because you can't have reconciliation without truth.

Mr. Altomare: What—I just want to remind the minister, I was asking for specific examples of leadership shown by the department in this area.

What we've seen, and what he mentioned during his last answer, is that they've been listening to people in the past couple months. I was referring back to 2016 and leading up to this point. And I know the important work the director does; they've been doing that for years, even before 2016. I was questioning whether this government was listening to what the director was saying, Mr. Chair. Because, certainly, by—judging by

the actions and the lack of movement since 2016 up until 2021, there was very little evidence to indicate that, and people were getting frustrated; frustrated because this government wasn't acting on the recommendations in TRC 62 to 64. Very specific. And that's where the line of questioning was intended.

We certainly have a number of people doing very important work, and they—we will continue to do that important work because that's what educators do. They'll continue to come to the table with their ideas. And what we need to see is a government that's willing to take that and move forward with it.

Part of the other piece with the recommendations from 62 to 64 was that it was to provide denominational schools with funds so that students in denominational schools can learn about Indigenous spiritual beliefs, values and systems. I would like to ask the minister, at what stage of development is that plan?

Mr. Ewasko: Again, I'm going to get into some specifics as far as what has been happening within our directorate. And, again, working with—not only the K-to-12 department with our education partners, absolutely.

And I'm appreciative that the member from Transcona finally puts it on the record that we have been listening to Manitobans, Mr. Chair. I think that is absolutely extraordinary, and I don't know, maybe the constituency week has done him quite well. And it's good; it's good to show progress on his part, but also on our part. It's not only collaborating to the extent that we've been doing, which is extensive, extensive collaborations all across this great province of ours with tens of thousands of Manitobans.

And so, I will give him a couple of the specific examples of what the directorate and what our government has been working towards, and then, again, we will then pivot as well to Mamàhtawisiwin, which is, again, our framework. And he knows—because he's an educator—he knows what we're talking about when it comes to frameworks. These are, sort of, mandated things that the government does to bring forward ideas for school divisions, schools, educators, everybody involved—our education partners—to move forward with these ideas, to then get those outcomes for student success.

So, I mean, for one thing, I mean, we've—partnered with the Manitoba Aboriginal Language Strategy. We're working hard to make sure, with our Indigenous friends and colleagues all across this great

province, that we start, you know, making sure that we're—we've got an Aboriginal languages strategy.

And again, 17 years under the former government: nothing, nada, zilch, right? So we're making sure we're moving forward. Why? Because it's the right thing to do, Mr. Chair. It's a non-partisan issue. This is absolutely something that should have been done years and years and years ago, and I'm proud of our government, I'm proud of our K to 12, our Education and Early Childhood Learning Department and, of course, our directorate for working so hard on this because it is the right thing to do.

* (16:10)

We're also working on our—it's called our—It's Our Time tool kit, and this is a partnership with the Assembly of First Nations, and basically, what this does is increasing understanding of the First Nations history and culture among Indigenous and 'non-indigenals' peoples, producing relevant tools and resources.

Again, Mr. Chair, and—like I said, I'm looking forward to the next 10, 12 days of questions and answers coming from the member from Transcona. Those are just a few examples of a lot of great things that are happening.

We are also partnering—I know this is a tough word for the member from Transcona—but we're also partnering with the treaty commission, and we've made a commitment to make sure that our educators are committed to learning about treaties, Mr. Chair. This is absolutely, again, a non-partisan issue. This is something that has to happen.

Why does it have to happen? Because it's about time. Manitobans deserve it. Manitobans need to know the history, the languages. We need to make sure that our students in this great province of ours know the history—and again, when we talk about truth and reconciliation, Mr. Chair, we can't have reconciliation without the truth, and I've got many more examples of the great work that the department has done in regards to working towards that truth and reconciliation over the last few years. So, I look forward to taking more time in the next few minutes.

Thank you.

Mr. Altomare: I just want to remind the minister that I asked about specific examples regarding denominational schools, and at what stage we're at where they are receiving instruction, exposure to Indigenous spiritual beliefs and ways of teaching and learning.

Mr. Ewasko: Yes, specifically, the member did ask a question in regards to the various different things that are happening, and I know that—again, this goes back to the member, you know, potentially—hopefully—apprising himself of many of the good things that we have launched not only recently, but in the last few years.

And again, we look to our education partners. The member himself was an administrator. So when—and, if he wants, I can give him some dates, as well, because I don't know if he's just not reading some of the news releases or the documents that we're putting out. But it's okay. It's fine.

So, on the 20th of April, we launched the action plan. And then the day after—which, by the way, the action plan was heavily applauded for the direction and making sure that students are at the centre of that action plan. It's a living, breathing document. But I'll get into the action plan in a little bit. I know the member asked a specific question and he's looking for those answers.

So, the very next day after we launched the action plan, which then would have been the 21st of April, we launched the framework for learning.

And again, superintendents, administration, within our school—within our education partners, they applauded the framework for learning because all of Mamàhtawisiwin and our Indigenous inclusion basic framework for moving forward—and keep in mind—and I don't—I know I don't have to tell the member from Transcona this because, again, he's an educator and he knows all of this. But I'm going to pass along the information through him also to the many viewers and listeners that we have that are listening in on our information today, Mr. Chair.

So there's been many initiatives. We talk about, you know, Orange Shirt Day. I've already mentioned the framework. So within that framework and, again, he knows this: that framework is developed from the Department of Education, then the school divisions and the school boards; they take that framework. They take it back to the front-line professionals; those teachers, and the teachers then take a look at what type of resources can they use to help deliver that framework to the students in making sure that we are learning about and teaching about treaties, residential schools.

I mean, we know that coming up shortly, September 30th, we have, you know, Orange Shirt Day. We're going to be learning about all of these

things and we're going to continue to learn. I know the member didn't have all the answers and didn't know everything when he was an administrator and nor did I.

But that's why we need to collaborate and work with our partners, our Indigenous groups, our treaty commissioner to make sure that those individuals teaching our kids, our students, our future—our most precious future resource about all of this and making sure that they've got the right direction.

And then at the same time, we know that school boards, school divisions are then taking those and then making sure that the students are getting what they need in regards to awareness of so many important issues that not only happen here in Manitoba, Mr. Chair, but all across this incredible country of ours, and around the world.

Mr. Altomare: I guess I need to be a little more specific in my questioning.

I wasn't referring to anybody or any school system that's in the public realm. The—very specifically in TRC 63, it states that there will be action and funding so that students in private denominational schools, that are what—outside of the public school system will be provided resources so that they can provide education around Indigenous spiritual beliefs and Indigenous ways of living and growing.

At what stage is the department at regarding this particular issue?

* (16:20)

Mr. Ewasko: So, specifically—since the member put the question so succinctly. So, our independent schools association, Manitoba federation for independent schools, so just recently—and maybe even the member participated—I didn't think I saw his name on the attendees list when I brought greetings to it and stayed and listened to the keynote speaker, but the theme of their conference this year was Indigenous education in motion, moving forward together.

And so the independent schools are absolutely finding that they want to do this as well. And so that's why that was their theme. They had many presentations in regards to treaties, into land acknowledgments, various other presenters, and I applaud absolutely everybody who was involved in basically showing that we are all moving towards truth and reconciliation, trying to, you know, do the calls to action, which again brings us forward to the many great things that our department has done and is doing.

And, again, working with our education partners, making sure that if—in order to participate, you know, the department, the directorate itself had basically worked with the Manitoba federation for independent schools to help with the planning and identifying, you know, many of our elders and knowledge keepers.

And hey, that just brings me to another great announcement by our government. But I'm hoping that the member takes my answer as an answer, and that's what I'm here today to do, Mr. Chair, over how many ever days that we're going to be going through the Estimates process, is basically try to answer his questions to the best of my ability.

And so with that, Mr. Chair, I just want to again put an exclamation mark on the fact that this is not a—this is not done in 10 hours or 12 hours. And I'm talking about truth and reconciliation and moving forward on education and trying to help our Manitoba students—no matter, again, where they live, their cultural background or their individual circumstance. This is a—this is an ever-evolving system with education, and he knows that. He's a lifelong learner. So am I. So are all of Manitobans.

So this is definitely something that I'm glad that our government is—has taken it on and making sure that we've got those resources and supports put into place to make sure that we're enacting those calls to action.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Altomare: Judging by that answer, I'm—I need to ask this question of the minister: Does the department of Education track what independent schools are doing, with regards to truth and reconciliation?

Is there somewhere that the minister can point that—where data is kept regarding this? Where—how—action plans, like, of what stage they're at? This is very important. The minister has said that. I certainly believe that as well. Advancing truth and reconciliation is important work, work that needs to be tracked, work that—where we then can hold schools accountable as to where they're at—at what stage are they at at this?

So I'll repeat it again. This my—this specific question: does the Department of Education track where independent and non-denominational schools are at when it comes to truth and reconciliation?

Mr. Ewasko: The member's asking—you know, I'm not quite sure if somewhere along the line the

Manitoba federation for independent schools or something has wronged him or which line of questioning he's going.

But this is the way I'm going to answer this, is the fact that the action plan basically says that we need to strengthen—and based on, again, that the K-to-12 commission, you know, 75 recommendations, within there is all about—and not all about, but some of the recommendations is definitely pointing towards data collection.

And the member from Transcona knows specifically of how much of a—I can't even come up with a word—how much of a jumbled pot of soup the data collection systems in Manitoba have been over the years, Mr. Chair—and basically, the commission and the recommendations says, you know what? You need to come up with some better data collections; and again, our government is committing to doing that. We're under way for a cross-jurisdictional data collection system.

* (16:30)

But to go back to Manitoba federation for independent schools, and specifically talking about the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action—and I know that, you know, the member gets me off topic a little bit once in a while. But I'm trying to, again, take the high road in the answers that I take to his low road questions. But that's okay.

So I know that the Manitoba federation for independent schools is working towards those Calls to Action for Truth and Reconciliation. How do I know that? I know that the department's working closely with them.

I know that the Calls to Action for Truth and Reconciliation, it doesn't have just, you know, a specific education-only tag line. This is for all Manitobans, the Calls to Action, and I strongly feel that with the department we're trying to better align the entire system and, again, work with our education partners. And whether that's Manitoba federation for independent schools, Manitoba parent councils, Manitoba association for students—for school superintendents, Manitoba association for school boards, Manitoba Teachers' Society—you know, I can keep going with all the partners—our parents, our guardians, you know, of our students.

But the ultimate goal, Mr. Chair, is a fact that we want to make sure that Manitoba students—again, no matter where they live, no matter what their cultural

background is or their individual circumstance—is seeing success.

And it's unfortunate, but yet fortunate. It's unfortunate that the previous government didn't take this seriously, Mr. Chair, and I'm glad to see that my friend, the MLA for Transcona had decided to throw his hat in the ring because he knew that his party wasn't doing a great job, so he needed to run to make sure that we're moving things forward. And I look forward to working with him as we continue to move things forward that came from our action plan, the framework for learning, Mamāhtawisiwin, which again—six years in the making—it's here. It's today.

We're getting many accolades from many, many—thousands of Manitobans, unfortunately, except for the member from Transcona and his leader, where they wanted to be stuck in the past and not move forward with truth and reconciliation.

Thanks, Mr. Chair, and I look forward to the member's next question.

Mr. Altomare: So judging by that response, I would say no. The department doesn't track it, Mr. Chair.

I would say, and I would respectfully ask that the minister and the department begin tracking that because this is important—important for kids, but also important for that whole piece around truth and reconciliation. It's important and it's something that's the challenge of our times right now.

And judging by that previous response, I certainly get the impression that the department doesn't know what's going on in independent and denominational schools when it comes to truth and reconciliation. And I would hope that through this line of questioning that the minister and the department endeavour to find out exactly what's going on with this very important topic in independent and non-'denom'—and denominational schools.

So further along this track, I'd like to ask the minister: Is there a specific budget line in place in the department that talks about the support they'll provide to independent and denominational schools to ensure that they get 63—TRC 63 accomplished?

Mr. Ewasko: So, again, going back to some of the announcements that we've recently made and also the—all the great work that our government has done since 2016, since forming government in 2016, working with our—with the department of Education and now Early Childhood Learning, which is, you

know, again, a great, great, great move by Premier Stefanson, by amalgamating those two departments.

And again, just emphasizing the fact that we are committed to the fact that early childhood learning is very important as—especially when we get going into the K-to-12 system, and it's those synergies and ability to collaborate and have those conversations.

* (16:40)

I'm not sure if the member—I'm trying to see if I can—because I'm virtual—I'm trying to see if I can see, but I can't—if the member has the action plan in front of him. Can't quite see that. But the fact is, is that within the action plan—and I know that the member, being an educator himself, would have apprised himself of all the information getting ready for Estimates—but in fact, to answer his previous question and, unfortunately, you know, he put his own, I guess, answers on the record.

But one of the recommendations from the K-to-12 commission, Mr. Chair, is that we need to make sure that we're moving forward with achievement, truth and reconciliation Calls to Action. And we need to do a measurement of system-wide progress. And when we talk about system-wide progress, Mr. Chair, that's everybody involved in the education world. And I know that the member and his party, for some reason, you know, wanted to have, I guess, disagreements or don't want to work with Manitoba federation for independent schools.

Mr. Chair, I'm a public schoolteacher. That's what I went to school for. That's what I was doing. That's what the member opposite was doing. But we're—we know that some people do not choose that stream of education, but we're willing to work with them because that's what we do. We work with our education partners.

Again, measure system-wide progress towards the achievement of the TRCC Calls to Action. And that is one of the commission's recommendations. That's No. 31.

We're rocking it, Mr. Chair. We're moving forward on this stuff and it's good. And some of the individuals that I think the member opposite probably raised his eyebrows when they came out applauding our government for a lot of the good things that are coming forward. I think that was definitely one of those sad days for the member and his NDP supposed team over there.

With that, also making sure that we, as I said, working with our education partners. Our directorate is also making sure that they avail themselves to help with anybody that wants to help students in this great province of ours learn more and more as we move along. So, we want to make sure that we partner with the various organizations and we have a variety of grants that are specifically targeted in the '21-22 Budget, or for the school year and then moving forward in the 2022 totalling of just over \$14.5 million, which, unfortunately, the member opposite voted against.

So I'm not quite sure. On one hand, Mr. Chair, the member talks about wanting to move forward and wants these educational opportunities for our students, but on the other hand, you know what, the actions aren't really matching the words. So I'll look forward to the member's next question.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Altomare: In order to be, you know, somewhat successful in ensuring that this occurs in independent and in denominational schools is that, you know, you can point to a specific budget line that says we dedicated this amount; this amount was used; we are in the process of ensuring that independent and denominational schools have the support that they need from a government that's listening, from a government that really wants to provide this type of support to the teachers in that system.

So I'll ask the minister again, Mr. Chair, is there a budget line that he can point to that specifically targets independent and denominational schools so that they can move on this path of truth and reconciliation?

Mr. Ewasko: So, the member is asking, specifically, is there a line-by-line item that we, the government, the department, tell our independent schools what they have to spend their money on or not. And it almost sounds like the member is saying that we should be directly telling independent schools what they should or should not be spending their money on.

Which is interesting, because, much like our public school system—so, just to put it on the record, so we're—just over the last two years, we're funding—and I know we're going to get into this a little bit, probably, shortly. But over the last two years, we've funded education in this great province of ours to the tune of about \$327 million, which is about a 17—over a 17.2 per cent increase.

Now, what happens is that this funding is allocated due to a—like, within a formula. Which, you

know, the member, you know, mentioned this and I mentioned this, the fact that we're going to be—we're in a funding review and all that type of wonderful stuff. So, it gets allocated globally to the school divisions. So, independent schools get money sent directly to them and then—I know this is a shocker to the member—but then they decide what to do with that money.

The Calls to Action—and I appreciate the member putting some of his words on the record because, you know, because this is public information. And I think that a lot of our public would be very interested in the member's line of questioning because it's almost sounding like the member wants me, the Minister of Education, to now go tell individuals and school divisions and our partners of exactly what to do with the money that we are providing them.

* (16:50)

Mr. Chair, again, the calls to action are calls to action. What that means is these are things that absolutely everybody should be doing. And we in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning are making sure that we are helping with that; we are providing resources, we are providing a framework, we're providing yet an action plan to help with what? And I'll say it again: to help with what? With the student success of all Manitobans, and again, no matter where they live, their cultural background, or their individual circumstance.

So, specifically—specifically, is there a line item that says that independent schools have to spend a certain amount of money on truth and reconciliation, the calls to action? No, Mr. Chair. Why? Because we fund them and public education globally, and then it's up to school boards, school divisions, elected officials, Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools, to be able to then take that money and move forward on making sure that they are checking off the truth and reconciliation calls to action.

Mr. Altomare: I will say that in TRC 62 to 64, they are very specific in tasking the provincial governments in Canada of ensuring that funds and financial support are provided extra, above and beyond what currently goes to independent and denominational schools, to ensure that Indigenous spiritual beliefs, ways of living and being, are taught in those schools within the province of Manitoba.

It is the responsibility of the provincial government to ensure that there are funds for that, not third

base grant, Mr. Chair, but a separate line item, because what that allows for is for the department then to track and say, you know what? Our independent schools are doing really well. Our denominational schools are using the money that we've allocated for this very important work, and look at what we're doing, an opportunity to be a real leader in a country. And doesn't that make sense for Manitoba to be the real leader in the country regarding this?

Treaty 1 territory, Mr. Chair. We're not talking about some little place here on the map of Canada. This is Manitoba, the homeland of the Métis nation, and here is an opportunity that is outlined by the TRC, and when they task provincial governments to show leadership in this, they're talking about very specific pieces that can be tracked.

What can be better, Mr. Chair, I ask, than having to say to Manitobans, look what we've done to—and how we support an independent and denominational schools in ensuring truth and reconciliation is occurring at those schools? A real opportunity here, and this is meant—this line of questioning—is meant to just to see, you know, where we're at. Where are we at this point now in 2022?

I mean, TRC report came out in 2015. You do allow for time for it to be implemented, but here we are in 2022 and the minister is struggling to answer how they're specifically supporting independent and denominational schools in this important work. I would hope that we can find that out, and if not, have a plan in place so that the Province can track it and also say, look at how we're doing this.

So, I want to ask the minister again, then, when it comes to this specific part that I'm talking about, this very important part, Mr. Chair: What are the plans of the department of Education to ensure that independent and denominational schools can carry on and/or begin, in some cases, this very important work?

Mr. Ewasko: Again, my friend from Transcona has asked another great question.

I guess one of the things that we—I absolutely have to highlight for the member and the committee, and whoever—all those fans that are listening and paying attention to this afternoon's Estimates process—is the fact that the Manitoba federation for independent schools have never had a themed—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

CHAMBER

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:20)

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

Does the honourable First Minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): It's indeed a pleasure to be back. I know last week was constituency week, so many of the members are now back in the Manitoba Legislature and just pleased and honest to be part of this Estimates process or Committee of Supply in this role. This is the first time I've had the opportunity to be in this role for the Committee of Supply purposes, so just honoured to be here as Premier.

And just want to also say that I know in the past, I've had the opportunity to be on this side of the House and the other side of the House throughout the deliberations, with respect to Committee of Supply. And I've always found in the past that it's a very helpful—there's helpful deliberations that take place in the Estimates process. And I know, both as a minister in the past and as a critic, I've found that this is an opportunity for us to sit down and have that conversation on the record about how we can do things better in Manitoba.

And so, I know that there's no—there's certainly no monopoly of good ideas in the province, and I have often learned from our—my critics in the past. And as well, I have worked with members of the NDP Cabinet, as well, as a critic when I was in opposition. And so, certainly I've found this—these deliberations in the Committee of Supply to be very helpful.

And so I—it is my hope that we will continue to have a respectful dialogue. That's the dialogue that I've always had in the past in these deliberations in the Committee of Supply, and I'm hoping that that will be the case moving forward in this Estimates process in the Executive Council, Mr. Chair.

So, just over six months ago, I was elected the Leader of the Manitoba Progressive Conservative Party and our Premier. I ran on a vision of a more collaborative government that enhances our province's diversity, builds our economy and advances reconciliation. And I ran because I believe in Manitobans,

Mr. Chair. And I believe that government should create the conditions for their success.

And I know the many successes of many Manitoba businesses and just, indeed, with Manitobans themselves, we wanted to set out a vision, which I believe we did in our Throne Speech, and those were outlined in our Throne Speech: a vision of a strong economic and social recovery, Mr. Chair, with a focus on the health and well-being of all Manitobans. A plan to listen, to heal, to bring Manitobans together, and last month, we introduced Budget 2022, which puts our visionary Throne Speech into action.

Budget 2022 has five key themes highlighting our commitments to the people of Manitoba: strengthening health care, making life more affordable, building our economy, investing in our communities and protecting our environment. This budget puts the priorities of Manitobans into action, and it will ensure that we all recover together.

A few highlights from our health-care budget signal our government's commitment to addressing the backlogs on surgical and diagnostic procedures, expanding care closer to home and responsible management of the COVID-19 pandemic recovery. We're investing more than \$7.2 billion in health care, the most significant health-care investment in the history of our province.

This includes \$110 million to address the surgical and diagnostic backlogs, \$812 million to—in continued capital funding for rural and northern health care, \$630 million dedicated to COVID-19 response and recovery, over \$100 million to triple the St. Boniface emergency room and more than \$11 million to increase nursing enrolment at Manitoba's post-secondary institutions—with more to come, Mr. Chair.

With new hospitals in Neepawa and Portage, and expanded services in Brandon and Morden-Winkler, Selkirk, Ashern, Russell and Dauphin, we're delivering on better care closer to home. Over the last few months I have visited each of these communities, and I can tell you I can't wait to be back to see those shovels in the ground.

* (15:30)

Budget 2022 also recognizes our commitment to our seniors. They deserve the dignified and respectful care that they earned after years of contributing to our community, and we will deliver on that. That is why we are investing \$20 million in our new seniors

strategy and \$32 million to implement Dr. Lynn Stevenson's recommendations to improve seniors care throughout Manitoba. This includes increasing staffing in personal-care homes, investing in new personal-care-home beds and expanding care options across our province.

The mental health and well-being of Manitobans is also a priority for our government. Through Budget 2022 we are investing \$390 million in mental health and addictions, building 100 new supportive recovery units and expanding supports throughout our province. We all know that this pandemic has been hard—even brutal—on many people in our society and in our community. This investment will increase capacity to ensure that more Manitobans have access to the professional supports and services that they need. We are committed to strengthening health care in our province, and we will deliver on that, Mr. Chair.

After two years of the pandemic, our economy is on the rebound: employment is up; retail sales, manufacturing sales and farm cash receipts are at historic levels. And we continue to see unprecedented investment in job creation across this great province of ours. We are recovering, but we know we need to do more to succeed in our highly competitive world economy, making Manitoba the most competitive province to attract and retain capital.

Budget 2022 takes action. To date, we have created a \$50-million venture capital fund, made the Small Business Venture Capital Tax Credit permanent, reduced the payroll tax burden for almost 1,000 businesses and completely eliminated the tax for 200 employers. We've invested \$5 million in immigrant programming and created the Immigration Advisory Council to recommend changes to our system, helping the new—helped—helping to attract newcomers to Manitoba and address the critical labour shortages facing our province. And there is more good news to come—that Manitoba is open for business. We look forward to that news coming in the next short while.

Affordability, Mr. Chair, we've heard from Manitobans is one of the top priorities and certainly on the mind of many Manitobans. Inflation is driving up the cost of just about everything. That's obviously nothing unique to Manitoba, Madam Speaker—or, Mr. Chair, sorry—but we know that there's more work to be done there, and we're committed to that. Rising interest rates, supply chain challenges and higher federal taxes, to name just a few of the many growing

expenses, it's becoming a significant weight for Manitobans to bear and we certainly recognize that.

Too many families are struggling to make ends meet and this is not a new issue for us on this side of the aisle. Since forming government, we have already put \$2,020 back in the pockets of Manitobans. That's \$2,020 more every year back in your back account than you had in 2016. We lowered the PST from 8 per cent to 7 per cent. We removed over 15,700 Manitobans from the tax rolls by indexing the basic personal amount. We cut ambulance fees in half and we lead the country in ending the death tax, saving grieving families \$8 million each year.

But we know there's more work to do and that's why our plan to recover together takes action to provide further relief. We are increasing the education property tax rebate from 25 per cent to 37.5 per cent this year, saving the average homeowner in Manitoba \$581 more this year alone. And there's more to come for next year as well, in terms of education property tax relief for Manitobans.

And we also created the new residential renter's credit, providing up to \$525 each year to 4,500 more households. Mr. Chair, in 2019, our government ran on a 2020 rollback guarantee; this year, we are exceeding it, putting \$2,400 more in the pockets of Manitoba-Manitobans, Mr. Chair.

These are just a few of the significant investments in this year's budget. It also includes historic investments in education, affordable child care, Indigenous reconciliation, environmental protection and infrastructure throughout this wonderful province of ours. It puts our plan into action, our plan to recover together, a plan that strengthens health care, invests in making life more affordable and builds our economy.

Thank you so much for allowing me to have that opening statement as we move forward in the Committee of Supply together.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) for those comments.

Does the Leader of the Official Opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I want to congratulate my colleague from Tuxedo on her election as the first woman Premier in Manitoba's history and also to extend, I guess, a warm greeting to the Estimates process here

and her first time participating in this context in that role.

So, certainly, I do take seriously the opportunity that we have to engage on matters that matter to the people of Manitoba and, of course, the opportunity to converse at a greater depth than we might get to in question period or the budget debate and other settings that we are participating here as legislators.

I know that people across the province are dealing with a lot right now. We're still in a pandemic and certainly, the health-care system is feeling a ton of strain related both to COVID but also due to many other serious health issues. The addictions crisis, in particular, I would note as being one major cause for concern.

There's also a serious issue around affordability. Price at the pump, price in the grocery store, the price of Manitoba Hydro bills just continues to go up and up and up and Manitobans are certainly feeling that. Gassed up in Teulon the other day, where gas is about \$1.80 per litre. Put like 80 bucks in, and fuel meter barely budged after that 80 bucks that I put in the tank. And certainly, there's a lot of folks around the province who are being confronted with much more challenging situations than that when it comes to affordability. Certainly, folks on fixed incomes, pensioners, folks on the minimum wage, people who may already be working multiple jobs and don't really have that ability to pull in more money because they're already maxed out in terms of their situation.

We also know that the potholes this spring has certainly emerged as quite the talker, I would say, both in the city but also in rural Manitoba as well. Provincial highways, roads in Winnipeg and in other urban centres around the province have certainly taken a beating and we know that that's a major issue for folks that they want to get addressed as well.

And then, of course, as we look ahead to a future perhaps where the pandemic is less top of mind, a plan to grow the economy for the next few decades will certainly figure large into the work that we have to do here as legislators.

So our team has been very active. You know, in the past week, we're around the province taking a look at the flooding situation, lending a hand where appropriate, speaking with Manitobans from many walks of life and taking in both community activities, cultural celebrations, religious events and many other chances to speak with the good people of Manitoba.

And through it all, like, I think Manitobans are generally feeling pretty optimistic. There's a lot of folks out there who are feeling frustrated by the potholes or, you know, shaking their head at the price of gas or wondering just what the heck is going on in our health-care system right now, but, throughout those challenges, do maintain an attitude where they're looking for reasons for hope. And so I think part of our job here is to help signal a path forward for those folks and ensure that they know that their best interests are being represented here at the Legislature and that folks from all sides are working together to advance that.

Of course, sometimes working together means working in opposition, in this context, and so I think it's no secret that we oppose many of the policy decisions that the government has made, both under Brian Pallister and under the current Premier (Mrs. Stefanson). But it's my belief that a strong opposition should make a government better, and I know that we've worked very hard to be a strong opposition and we've raised many credible issues; many issues that people across the province are concerned about and have asked questions that people consider important.

* (15:40)

Right now, in the health-care system, we are dealing with the after-effects of the cuts that were launched by this government in 2017. We know that the consultants who were engaged by the government came back and warned—and said that this plan was going off the rails at the time due to a rushed timeline and a lack of oversight, a lack of management on behalf of the PC government; PC government continued, irregardless.

Even prior to the pandemic, we know that there were many challenges in ERs, like St. Boniface. As a result, we lost beds. We remember those days when nurses in the health-care system were forced into the basement of HSC. They had their jobs deleted and they were forced to argue with each other to reapply for those positions. The health-care system still hasn't recovered from that.

The impact of COVID certainly exacerbated what was already a crisis in the health-care system. And so as we look forward to health-care improvements in the future, we know that there's certainly investments that need to be made, but an overall guiding vision that prioritizes patients, that commits to ending the practice of patient transfers hundreds of kilometres away from home, that commits to ending hallway medicine,

that commits to ending highway medicine, where we forsake surgical capacity here in the province to send people out of country.

When it comes to affordability, you know, we know that Manitoba Hydro is the Crown jewel of, you know, the province. Manitobans take great pride in it and really, Hydro gives us the opportunity to send a message to the world that you can have an advanced economy while doing your part to solve the climate crisis.

However, what we have seen under Brian Pallister and what has continued under the current administration is that the public confidence in Hydro is being undermined by the never-ending rate increases.

And there are ancillary impacts, both economic and social to the mismanagement of Manitoba Hydro, but it's really important for us to get a handle on this because Hydro drives a huge chunk of our economy and a huge chunk of our clean energy future. And I think that keeping rates affordable is a very important step towards maintaining the public confidence in our most important Crown corporation.

And when it comes to the minimum wage, again, I don't hear a counter-argument that somebody working full time shouldn't have to live in poverty. And so let's set the floor; let's ensure that people who put in 40 hours a week can have their basic needs met, in terms of a roof over their head, food on the table and the clothes on their back. You know, it's a pretty straightforward working class, blue-collar ethic, but I think that reflects the values of the people of Manitoba.

The people in Manitoba do believe if you work hard, you should be able to get ahead. Unfortunately, right now, you can work hard, you can put in overtime even, and you could still be living below the poverty line.

So these are some of the questions that I think Manitobans want us to address and certainly, we do engage with them seriously; substantively, and hopefully, we'll be able to dive in. I know that the flooding situation is certainly very top of mind, so we'll definitely have some questions about that.

And here, I think—we know emergencies are going to happen. There are going to be natural disasters, right? And certainly, it's not the fault of any government when these situations befall the province, but questions always, I guess, arise in terms of what the response is; what can we do to prepare for the

future; are there any lessons learned that we can take into mind going forward.

And I'd say the same for the pandemic, too. You know, we have clearly articulated we would like to see an inquiry into the pandemic and, again, it should be future facing. We've been through a tremendous challenge together these past two years as Manitobans, and it seems to me that for any large organization, any family, any individual and certainly any provincial government that's been through such a similar challenge, should take a moment to reflect and ask what worked, what didn't; most importantly, what should we do now and going forward into the future to help ensure that the people of Manitoba get the best possible outcomes? And, of course, I mean outcomes, writ large: in health care; in education; economically; in mental health, as well.

So these are all important considerations but in terms of opening statements, I think I'll leave it at that.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) for those remarks.

In accordance with subrule 77, subsection 16, during the consideration of Departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put on the resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

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

The honourable First Minister, with some introductions.

Mrs. Stefanson: I'll just introduce Don Leitch, who's our Clerk of Executive Council, as well as Jordan Sisson, who is my chief of staff.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Leader of the Opposition, with some introductions.

Mr. Kinew: I'd welcome Don, who I met in a previous role with the Business Council and sat around the table there a few times. Certainly, always productive conversations.

And Jordan, who, if I can say, you know, quite the meteoric rise. I think he was asking some tough questions of me at Brandon public events just a few short years ago and now he's occupying the current role. So, all in good fun and, you know, certainly welcome.

I want to take this opportunity to introduce my chief of staff, Mark Rosner, who, upon naming him to the role, I believe I christened him the Tory's worst nightmare.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for those remarks.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Kinew: I do want to start with the issue of flooding, just because it's such an emergent situation, by way of a quick introduction.

I do want to acknowledge the really strong flood-fighting efforts that we've seen across the province to date, you know, whether it's a really co-ordinated volunteer corps in a place like Altona or, you know, all the people sandbagging communities like Morris. Whether it's the emergency response in Peguis and Fisher River, folks pumping in Fisher Branch, and many other communities across the Interlake and the Red River Valley.

We certainly have seen the spirit of Manitoba, where Manitobans step up to help out when needed. We've seen some very trying situations too, you know, people stressed out, people worried about their homes, worried about family members. I've had some of those conversations myself.

Also, I want to acknowledge the many elected officials at the municipal level, at the First Nations level. Others in leadership roles around the province who are working around the clock to serve our shared constituents, and, of course, who are doing really, really important work.

I also want to acknowledge provincial folks who've been working on this: elected officials, technical staff, civil servants. They've certainly been going all out over the past number of weeks to try and address the situation.

So, I wanted to maybe just begin with a very general question, just in terms of the state of play right now. The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has access to a lot of up-to-the-minute information. I think everybody in the province is concerned with more rain that we've been seeing today, potentially more in the forecast. Leading up to the Estimates session this afternoon, I hear that the forecast is, you know, sort of changing by the hour, if you will.

So just wanted to ask by way of opening: What do we predict is going to happen and what's the state of play both right now and expected to be over the next few days?

* (15:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question, and I, too, want to just extend my gratitude for the incredible people and the work that they have been doing to help mitigate the flood out there, and just all the staff, the volunteers who have been helping out, the emergency—our own staff and also all those in our municipalities, as well, who have really been at the very local level. We've been in touch with each and every one of them through AMM, but just in general, as well—and I know the minister has been even more in touch with them on a regular basis and particularly in some of those more hard-hit areas.

He and I have had the chance to tour through Interlake area and in the Red River Valley region as well. There was some overland flooding, as well, in Morden that caused some significant damage there.

And so we'll continue to keep in touch with those municipalities and all the emergency measures teams that have been really helping out and doing incredible work throughout this time. We just want to, first of all, extend our thanks and our gratitude for all the work that they have done and that they continue to do as we continue to face this flood challenge together.

What I will say is I know I—we are getting daily updates from Infrastructure and Transportation, and we will continue to get those and make sure that we are completely up to speed with what is going on. Sometimes, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, that's not just a day-by-day basis. It's sometimes an hour-by-hour basis. I know it's been raining, I think, for the last hour out there, so I'm sure there'll be more information coming to us later today.

The last information that I had is that there's, I think, 26, maybe up from that now, but 26 state of local emergencies, and I believe upwards of 300 people that have been evacuated from their homes. And then on—and that's aside from Peguis First Nation where there's been about 1,600 individuals who have been evacuated from their homes. And I know we continue, through our Emergency Measures office, to keep up to speed on that, working very collaboratively with the Red Cross, with the federal government as well, and ensuring that we help with those evacuations as well.

So that's the role that we've played in that, and as there is more information that comes out, we certainly will continue to post our daily bulletins. If there's

more information and more need to get that information out more quickly, we will do so to ensure that all Manitobans are aware of what the situation is in Manitoba with respect to the flood.

Mr. Kinew: I wanted to maybe start with the situation in the Red River Valley. You know, we had a flood briefing with the minister of Infrastructure on April 28th, and at that time, there were certain projections that we'd be seeing the peak around now. Obviously, the situation—forgive the bad pun—is fluid, and, certainly, you know, I know that that's been moderated a bit. We now expect the, you know, things to peak further south and maybe here in the coming days.

I'm not going to ask the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) necessarily to put on her flood forecasting hat, but more so the response is—you know, we know that certain forms of equipment, sandbags, super sandbags, you know, even staff have been deployed in the Red River Valley. I was just wondering, is there any expectation that more of that is going to be needed, or is it sort of, the resources that have been deployed up to now in that part of the province, will they be sufficient to deal with what's expected?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. It's an important one to know and understand, you know, what, you know, what is taking place over the course—what has taken place and what will be taking place.

What I do know is that EMO staff is working diligently to assess the situation on an hour-by-hour basis as there is more of a need for sandbags. We will ensure that they get the necessary equipment that is needed to help out in those affected areas.

So, again, we continue to monitor it. I'm sure the Leader of the Opposition can appreciate we can forecast all we want with the weather; we don't always know what is going to actually land in Manitoba with respect to precipitation.

But I know that the staff is working very diligently to ensure that we continually assess what is needed and make sure that we get those necessary tools to the municipalities, and in the case of Peguis, as well, to help out in First Nations as well, help out the—our federal—the federal government who's—who we're working collaboratively on.

Mr. Kinew: There are some pretty striking images circulating on social media of Morris and just how the dike there is holding back what looks like a giant inland lake right now.

I'm wondering, for that community or others in the region, are there requests coming forward around long-term flood mitigation? Whether that's further infrastructure, you know, examining Highway 75, I'm sure, is always a topic of discussion. So I was just wondering what the asks are at the moment from folks in that region with respect to flood fighting longer term.

Mrs. Stefanson: A good question, and certainly, I think we need to kind of get through and make sure that we're addressing the situation as we go forward when we're in the middle of this situation right now. So we'll continue to monitor it daily and see what is needed on a daily basis.

In terms of the longer term, we'll have to assess after the event has completed and see what is needed at the end of that. If there's more diking that's needed or restoring diking, we will continue to ensure that we work with the municipalities with respect to that. The Leader of the Opposition will know that we did make an announcement today on a DFA program, and so certainly, we will be working with the federal government to see what that looks like at the end of all this to see what the damage is, and then we will take action in terms of the short, medium and longer term as to what's needed in those communities.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, and just picking up on Peguis. Certainly, we've heard from the chief and other folks that, like, you know, there was really no warning there. And I can attest to the fact that we had a flood briefing with the Minister of Infrastructure on April 28th. And really, there was no mention of Peguis. There was no identification of there being a risk of flooding there. We asked many questions in the briefing, and there was nothing that came up there.

You know, I want to get the tone right here because certainly, I recognize that there are a lot of, you know, changes that can happen with flood forecasting. But it just seems to me like with a community of that size that gets flooded with that much water, like, certainly we got to figure out a better approach.

So, you know, I'm trying to understand, like, why is it that we didn't really see this coming, so to speak, in terms of the flood forecast? Is this, like, a data collection issue? Is it a technical issue with the model? Is there some other step that needs to be taken here to try and ensure that, you know, a community like Peguis is going to be able to get as much advance warning as possible in the future?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, what I'd say to that is, certainly, we are working very collaboratively with Chief Hudson and with the federal government to ensure that whatever we can do to help mitigate the damage, we are working together. And I think it's that collaborative approach that is helping us right now, and I think it's important to mention that.

With respect to warning, I mean, it's a one-in-100-year flood situation in Peguis First Nation. And, you know, four Colorado lows; there's—we can't always predict how detrimental and how bad it will be with the weather.

So, you know, we can say, yes, there is some precipitation coming, but we don't know until it actually comes as to what kind of damage and what the consequences are to that, and—but, obviously, I know our Emergency Measures staff and—in Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure, the staff is working diligently to ensure that we monitor, you know, the hydraulic levels and so on. And we will continue to ensure that we get as much advance warning to First Nations communities and to other communities to ensure that we help mitigate the damage to the extent that we can.

* (16:00)

Mr. Chairperson: Forgive me if I speak louder. I've been told by Hansard that I need to speak up, so—the honourable First Minister—or, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew).

Mr. Kinew: You didn't have to shout it. No, just kidding.

Yes. You know, I understand that, you know, weather modelling is a—it is a science. It's an evolving science; certainly, it's improved dramatically over the past few decades.

I would also like—by way of the way we acknowledge flood fighters in the opening question here, I would say that, in those communities where folks received advanced notice, there was a tremendous outpouring of volunteerism in response. Folks really, you know, along the Red River Valley came out and did the prep work and, at least, bought their communities time and in many cases, really were able to protect a significant amount of homes and assets.

Peguis, though, however, it seems like—you know, again, I return to the fact that we had a briefing on April 28th and there was no mention of this; there was no risk being highlighted. The same meeting with the same weather, you know, in the same southern

chunk of the province was identifying significant flood risks in many other communities, predominantly in the Red River Valley, but also, you know, to be fair, they were highlighting issues at Shellmouth and a few other situations.

But it just seems like a very stark difference between saying, there's a very, very strong risk of flooding in the Red River Valley, we're keeping an eye on things, you know, along I guess the Assiniboine and tributaries to it upstream, and then in the Interlake, just really no, I guess, advanced warning at all.

So, again, I want to tread lightly here. I'm very respectful of folks' expertise, but I do think it's important to ask, like, how are we going to learn from this? How are we going to address whichever situation helped lead to maybe a blind spot? I don't know if that's an accurate way to characterize it, but it just seems like there's something here that needs to get addressed, so.

Is there going to be a review? Is there going to be some kind of examination to ensure that we get it right, for not just Peguis—we certainly I'm sure would like to hear answers, but really for communities across Manitoba to ensure that there's not an issue like this in the future.

Mrs. Stefanson: I think, yes, it is very important that, if there are better ways of doing things, we will conduct a review and Emergency Measures does conduct reviews after any significant event of this type of nature as well, so. We'll—if there's better ways we can do things, if we can learn from what happened and we can find better ways of doing things, we will.

I will say that this is a very significant weather-related event that has happened in the Interlake, in particular. Interlake has a different weather pattern than the Red River basin, and so it's, you know, difficult to predict what may happen, particularly with the kind of precipitation that we saw come towards the Interlake as well.

So when you look at Fisher River, it was the—I think it's the highest recorded levels in the history of the province in that particular area, so we're dealing with unprecedented times here. But I know that the—and I know it was being monitored on an hour-by-hour basis, and so sometimes these weather conditions can't always be predicted as to how bad and how extensive they may be, but certainly that's why the staff monitor it on a day-by-day basis.

And so, again, I would just reiterate that a review will take place once we get through the events here

and see if there's—and examine ways that we can look to, to do things better. We will definitely take that into consideration.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I think that's an important answer, so I certainly acknowledge that. Just by way of a quick follow-up, I'd ask the First Minister if she would undertake to share that review with the committee once it is prepared, to take it as a matter under advisement.

Mrs. Stefanson: I believe all those emergency measures reports are made public, so it would be made public as well.

Mr. Kinew: And just to confirm that it will be taken under advisement, just to confirm?

Mrs. Stefanson: So if—is the Leader of the Opposition asking if we would make that available to him and to the public because that is what happens and that will happen.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, typically this matter's taken under advisement at the Executive Council and you know, the clerks track that. They don't track how closely it's adhered to, but just basically, would there be a commitment to bring that back to the committee once the report is prepared?

Mrs. Stefanson: No, I think I've made that—I meant to make that public. I don't know—I know the member is mentioning maybe bringing it back to this specific committee. Certainly, we're—I don't know if that's how that works, but certainly, we'd be making that available to the public, not necessarily specific to this Committee of Supply.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, for example, I couldn't give you the exact day here. Like, it doesn't need to be returned to this committee as it sits. It can just be shared with the members of the committee by mail or however is appropriate in the future. So—it looks like there's a response forthcoming, so I'll just stop it there.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I mean, you know, I don't know when the review will take place. Obviously, we don't know when the event will be completed as of yet. There's still rain happening outside so we don't know and we can't predict at this stage, you know, when the rivers and tributaries may crest.

We don't know at this stage and so we obviously have to wait and get through this event and then obviously, the emergency measures team will conduct a review to see what we can learn from that, so, you know, to the extent we can share that, you know, when it is completed, I'm happy to share it to members of

this committee, but again, we just don't know necessarily the timing on that, whether or not we would be sitting in the Committee of Supply at that time. I wouldn't want to wait for the next time to sit in Committee of Supply to make that information public to Manitobans and so—but certainly happy to do both if that's the will of and the want of the Leader of the Opposition.

* (16:10)

Mr. Kinew: So when did EMO and the government become aware of the scale and the significance of the flooding in Peguis and when was that communicated to the community?

Mrs. Stefanson: We don't have those exact dates in front of us right now. I mean, those are probably best—those detailed questions will be best asked in Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure but, you know, we're happy to get that information to the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: Thanks for that answer, and just to confirm, that'll be taken under advisement.

Mrs. Stefanson: We'll get the information that the Leader of the Opposition is asking for.

Mr. Kinew: All right. Thank you for that. I appreciate that.

So, the chief of the community, Glenn Hudson, you know, he's shared a letter, I think, articulating some frustrations around long-term flood mitigation. He's made similar public comments. I've spoken to him and heard those same sorts of comments directly. I'm sure the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has, as well, which raises the prospect of long-term flood mitigation. I know there's a few ideas floating out there, whether there's diversion or, you know, I'm not sure the feasibility of a large ring dike in the area but, you know, there's a few of those options on the table.

I know the province does have an interest. Certainly, the province is active in the community right now. When I was visiting I saw Manitoba Infrastructure employees on the ground, vehicles on the ground. Of course, there would be Shared Health, Infrastructure, in place as well. There's a provincial highway that goes through the community north to Fisher River Cree Nation.

So given, I guess, the province's involvement there, I'm just curious to know is there a commitment on the part of the First Minister for long-term flooding infrastructure in Peguis?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. I certainly—I mean, I know that when we diverted away from a Cabinet tour that we were on in Westman, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure (Mr. Piwniuk) and I went and tried to actually get onto—and we, you know, we could get so far onto Peguis First Nation. I was in touch with Chief Hudson at that time, just texted with him and tried to get through. And the road was washed out and so we were unable to go onto the property to meet with him at that time.

But, you know, I—we have a, I think, a collaborative relationship and we're working closely with the First Nation community and certainly I, you know, I have committed to that and we'll work, you know, very collaboratively.

Obviously, the federal government has a significant role to play. If after we get through this event, I think it would come from the First Nation themselves and the first request will go to the federal government to see, and we will work collaboratively in any way we can to ensure that whatever is needed to protect those individuals on the First Nation, we will work in a collaborative way with the federal government.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, it really is quite striking, like, on the amount of water, I should say. Like, on the provincial highway there's at least a few feet of water, right, and that's the highway, not to mention a back road or, you know, a service road, anything like that. So I do think that there's important work that needs to be followed up there.

In terms of another large-scale flood infrastructure project, I wanted to ask about the channel and see what the status is there, if the Premier, maybe just by way of opening that discussion, can bring us up to date on where the project stands and where the timeline is at.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. I know the Leader of the Opposition was talking about the provincial road going into Peguis First Nation, and certainly, we could see the amount of water there when we were there and it was very significant to the point we couldn't get through and get to meet with Chief Hudson at that time.

But what I will say is that, you know, we certainly recognize that in Fisher River, this is the, you know, this is the most—it's the highest in record and in the history of our province in terms of the levels—the level of water in Fisher River, and of course, moving north, a one-in-100 year, I guess, flooding in—on Peguis First Nation.

So these are somewhat unprecedented times, and so for those roadways to be covered—there was over-land flooding as well, and in many other communities as well, as a result of the land being frozen at the time. And so water was just running off and over many highways. So I just want to indicate that, you know, these are unprecedented times and we will continue to work in a collaborative way with the federal government with respect to that side of it.

When it comes to the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin outlets, the Leader of the Opposition will know that the Prime Minister was in Winnipeg. I did have an opportunity to meet with him as well, and that was one of the issues that we did discuss.

And I think there will be some positive news coming out of that; I think he recognizes the importance of this. We could see at that time—that was when one of the Colorado lows was just starting in Manitoba, one of the first ones—and, you know, my indication to him is that, you know, we need to move expeditiously to ensure that we get this channel built. And I think we had a very good collaborative discussion.

I think we also had—I also had a very good meeting last week with Minister Dominic LeBlanc, as well, who is responsible for the transport—infrastructure sort of area for the federal government. We had a very good discussion about this very issue. And I think, you know, I'm very optimistic based on the discussions with both Minister LeBlanc as well as the Prime Minister that we're in a position to move forward in a collaborative way in the very near future.

Mr. Kinew: Thanks for those details to the First Minister. I'm just wondering if she can share what the timeline is for the completion of the project now.

Mrs. Stefanson: I don't have the details of that before me, but I think there is a willingness through a new, kind of, collaborative approach to dealing with things with the federal government that I'm optimistic that we can start to move forward.

And I know that we will be having ongoing discussions over the months ahead to see when we can, you know—and I think we'll have more good news coming out of that. I don't want to say more than I should right now, but I will say that I'm more optimistic than perhaps I was prior to the meeting with the Prime Minister and Minister LeBlanc.

Mr. Kinew: And much has been made with consultations with communities in the area that have been and will be impacted, so what's the status and the timeline

for those consultations towards completion of the channel?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I believe those discussions have been ongoing as—that's, to my knowledge, what is taking place, and, I think, if the member wants to get more information and more detailed information, I would suggest just asking those questions in the Estimates process, the Committee of Supply process in Manitoba Transportation-Infrastructure. They'll be able to get more details on that.

Mr. Kinew: And what's the current budget for the Lake St. Martin—Lake Manitoba channel project?

Mrs. Stefanson: As I understand, it's \$600 million.

* (16:20)

Mr. Kinew: So there—when we talk about the consultations, again, just to return to that, there was a website that had some of that information online, but the timeline for those consultations was taken down. So I'm just wondering why that took place and what the timeline is.

Mrs. Stefanson: We don't have all the details of that. I would, again, just point the Leader of the Opposition to the Estimates of the department of Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure. They would have more of the details in the departmental Estimates.

Mr. Kinew: Again, the aforementioned website, I think, lists the project cost at \$540 million. So we hear now 600, which I appreciate the answer. So I'm just wondering where the additional \$60 million to the price tag comes from. Is that a result of delays, or is there some other factor there?

Mrs. Stefanson: So it's not due to delays. It's just increasing to \$600 million. It's tied to licence requirements that we're working through, as well as extended timelines due to COVID at the request of Indigenous partners. So it's not due to delays.

Mr. Kinew: Sorry, just, like, the terminology there—can I ask for clarification? Like, it sounded like a delay, to be frank. So the term given was that there's extended timelines. Sounds like a delay to me, so can you just—or, rather, can the First Minister explain the difference between a delay and an extended timeline? Because it does sound like the price is increasing as a result of delays.

Mrs. Stefanson: No, it's just that there's more consultations that are taking place, as a result of not being able to do it during the COVID times, so those con-

sultations—you know, it's to pay for those consultations as well. So not because of a delay in anything. It's just more consultations that will be taking place.

Mr. Kinew: What's the breakdown of the additional \$60 million?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, I think that those are more detailed questions that would come from the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, and more suitable in the departmental Estimates, the Committee of Supply for that individual department.

Mr. Kinew: So the project is cost shared. When it was \$540 million, I think it was something like 292 provincial and then the balance from the federal government. With the additional 60, I'm just wondering: is that going to be cost shared as well, or is that going to be all on the provincial side, all on the fed side? If the First Minister could just explain that.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, we don't have the details of that in front of us right now in our Estimates but, again, that would be appropriate for a question in the Transportation, Infrastructure Estimates.

Mr. Kinew: Could the First Minister undertake that as a matter of advisement to provide the—whether that's cost shared, the additional 60?

Mrs. Stefanson: I don't think we need to take that under advisement. I think that that is something that is very appropriate to be asked in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. I think, you know, through various discussions and questions that the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite will have, they'll be able to flesh out what some of the answers are that they're looking to get in that process.

That's the appropriate place for those discussions to take place.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I just—I think \$60 million, it's significant. PCs should know if the provincial government's paying for that or if the federal government's paying for that. Seems like a lot of money. Cost-shared: is it? You know, it seems like a pretty straightforward question that folks at the Executive Council table should be able to answer.

So I'll ask again: Is the additional cost going to be cost-shared?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, I don't have the details of the specifics with respect to that \$60 million, and that is very appropriate to be asking in the Departmental Estimates process within the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Kinew: I want to acknowledge, I guess, the conversation on flooding and related infrastructure so far.

I wanted to turn now to ask some questions about health care, so that we could touch on that at least somewhat in this opening session of the Estimates this year.

Certainly, there's a lot to talk about in health care. We're hearing a lot from those on the front lines; we're hearing a lot from patients, particularly around emergency rooms but also personal-care homes. We're hearing issues in the community about people who are not able to access care when they want.

One of the issues, of course, though, that we've been following for some time, and that the government has also been active on, is the privatization of medical aviation. Certainly, when the government moved in this direction, folks were in different Cabinet positions at the time. However, the team that made those decisions is still largely intact here with the current PC government.

And we have seen that Manitobans have been impacted by this: the privatization, the changes to the level of care, standard of care, provided on-board medical aviation services has declined and it has declined in a way that affects the patients on board.

Late Friday, which is typically thought of as a time when governments try to put out information that they're not super proud of, this government released information on a request for proposals for medical aviation services. So, I wanted to talk about this a bit.

And just to begin, I wanted to ask, you know, what prompted the government to issue this RFP?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question.

And I think it's important to—and I know that the NDP party, and the Leader of the Opposition and members of his party have often talked about and taken an ideological approach when it comes to health-care services and the delivery of health-care services in our province.

We don't take an ideological approach. We want to ensure that we utilize all avenues to get better health care for Manitobans.

* (16:30)

With respect to the RFP that was sent out, it's to my understanding it was sent out in a timely fashion because—as a result of a current contract that is going to be expiring so we want to ensure that we have the

continuation of those services moving forward. So that's the reason for the RFP and why it was sent out.

Mr. Kinew: I just want to just return to something there. Privatizing a public health-care service is an ideological decision, right? So that is an ideological approach that we saw with the PCs when they privatized government air services and specifically, air ambulances.

I do also want to express some concern that the First Minister is saying that they'll take all avenues here when we're talking about privatization, which seems to be opening the door to the provision of privatized health-care services in Manitoba.

So I really hope that that's not where the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) is directing her government to go.

So, I want to pick up on the comment that, you know, current contract is expiring to ask, you know, just for the record here in the committee: When is the current contract expiring? What is the timeline for the new contract, and also what are the milestones and timelines along the RFP process?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's important to state for the record that the RFP process was put in place to enhance the service standards being delivered with respect to the medical aviation, and so this is to provide better service for patients and provide better standards of service for those patients as well, so that was included in the RFP. So this is about better health-care delivery for Manitobans.

With respect to the details that the Leader of the Opposition is asking, I do believe that that is more appropriate to ask those questions in the Departmental Estimates for Health. I know that that's ongoing right now, and I know certainly that I'm sure that the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) will be able to answer those questions in her Committee of Supply.

Mr. Kinew: The First Minister makes a claim about services perhaps improving. She uses the word better.

Prior to the privatization of air ambulance, there was a requirement that a physician be on board. That is no longer the case. So how does the First Minister say that things are getting better when it comes to the provision of medical aviation?

Mrs. Stefanson: The RFP is about enhancing the service standards, so that is what that is about. And with respect to the details and more details of that particular RFP, I believe that those questions can be more appropriately answered by the Minister of Health in her Estimates.

Mr. Kinew: Prior to being the First Minister, the member for Tuxedo was the minister of Health, so she should know the answer to these questions, you know.

There was—and I hear the First Minister saying these are just details, but it's a significant detail, right? Before air ambulance was privatized, there was a requirement that there was a physician on board. There's no such requirement for the private carriers who are contracted by the government now.

So, I'd ask again: How is it that the First Minister can say that—or claim that things are improving here?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, the Leader of the Opposition is asking detail questions that are more appropriately answered in the Department of Health Committee of Supply, Mr. Chair, and those are details that I don't have in front of me right now.

I'm sure that Manitobans don't expect me to know every single little detail with respect to an RFP and something that is administered through the department or other areas. That's what I empower my ministers to do, and they are there to be able to answer those questions in their Committees of Supply along with their staff that is well-versed in the more detailed components of what the member opposite is asking. I think it's very well known through the Committee of Supply process that the detailed, the more high-level questioning comes about, and maybe the Executive Council Committee of Supply, but when we start to get into the details of, you know, various RFPs and the details of anything to do with the management of the health-care system, that those questions are more appropriately asked in the Committee of Supply.

I believe that the Leader of the Opposition knows that. And I know that the Department of Health is actually sitting in the Committee of Supply right now, so he's welcome, or welcome to have one of his members of his caucus go and ask those questions in the Department of Health, but those are—that would be the appropriate place for those more detailed level of discussion to take place.

Mr. Kinew: We certainly will, but I would just like to ask why it is that a former minister of Health, a very recent minister of Health, can't speak to the quality of care provided on medical aviation services?

Mrs. Stefanson: I did speak to that. In fact, in the information that I received was that the RFP was about enhancing the service standards. And I did mention that already and that is sort of the higher level of that.

Again, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to get into more details with respect to this area, he is welcome to go down to the Ministry of Health and ask those questions there.

Mr. Kinew: So is it the First Minister's contention that she's not aware that physicians used to be required on board air ambulance services?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's important to note for the Leader of the Opposition, again, it was already largely delivered prior to our government coming in. It was the private sector, even under the previous government, that delivered those services.

So they deliver and they provide the—those who are working on the, you know, on the airplane. The doctors for those airplanes are provided by Shared Health. So there are doctors on those planes and that falls under Shared Health.

To the extent of more details, again, I would refer the Leader of the Opposition to the Departmental Estimates for Health.

Mr. Kinew: So does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) think that there should be a physician on board an air ambulance flight?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, it is the practice for doctors and physicians to be on board when required, and I don't believe that has changed.

Mr. Kinew: There were no physicians on board a number of the flights transporting ICU patients during the third wave, which occurred while the Health minister—or sorry, while the Premier was minister of Health. So what accounts for that discrepancy?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's important for the Leader of the Opposition to know that these are not political decisions that are made to whether or not a physician is on the aircraft and transporting patients. It's important that those decisions are made, and rightly so, by physician—by medical professionals in this area, and so I will defer to the medical professionals in the area to make those decisions. That is the right and appropriate place for those decisions to be made.

* (16:40)

Mr. Kinew: I think it's inaccurate to say that this is not a political decision. We know that the decision to privatize air ambulance services as part of the privatization of government air services was a political decision. We saw that the standard of care was eroded during that period. So the political decision caused an impact on the level of care.

We know that there are other examples of the quality of care being negatively impacted beyond just not having physicians on board flights. We've heard very specific instances of not having the right equipment, not having the right training for staff who were employed on these flights.

So how does the Premier say that these are not political decisions when the political decision to privatize government air services has created so many examples of where the standard of care on board, you know, medical aviation flights deteriorated?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I mean, the Leader of the Opposition needs to know and understand that this is not a new practice that just started to take place under our government. This is something that happened under the previous NDP government as well, and these services were contracted out at that time.

And so, you know, if the Leader of the Opposition is trying to blame us for something here, I mean, he should look back and, you know, at his own party, who brought this forward as a way to transport patients in the province of Manitoba. So, you know, again, he is wanting to have an ideological argument in this and what I will say is that we're not interested in having ideological arguments. What we want to do is ensure that we are providing patient transportation in a safe and effective and efficient way.

As I understand we are investing more than double what the NDP did in this area to ensure the safe transportation of Manitobans and, you know, what I will—you know, and so I don't want to look at this as an ideological situation. I think it's important to look at it as a patient safety issue to ensure that we get those people transported.

The reason for their transportation is so that they can get the medically necessary services that they need given their situation. Again, those decisions are made by medical professionals. They're not made by politicians. And so I'll just caution the Leader of the Opposition to not make this an ideological, you know, debate, that this should be about patient safety, which is exactly what we are delivering on.

Mr. Kinew: But does the Premier accept the fact that patient safety has been compromised by this privatization process?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I think it's important for the Leader of the Opposition to know and to understand that, you know, that there are different RFPs that go off for different levels of service when it comes to air ambulance. And we're looking at both: those that

would have physicians on board and those for critical-care incidents where you'd have physicians on board. So the RFP would not go out to include physicians on any of these because the physicians, when they're required, come from Shared Health directly.

So—and those decisions as to whether or not a doctor is needed on board—those decisions, again, are made by medical professionals, not by politicians. And that's where it comes from—from Shared Health, so not necessarily from the service delivery of the transportation services itself; it's separate. The doctors and the physicians, when they're on board, will be—those decisions are made by medical professionals, and those physicians will be paid for directly through Shared Health. And those decisions are made as to whether or not they would be, you know, on the plane or not and where they're required.

Mr. Kinew: I'll just repeat the question. The question was: Does the First Minister accept the fact that the standard of care for patients has deteriorated since this privatization process began?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, the Leader of the Opposition should know that these services were offered by the previous NDP government as well, and so I guess he's suggesting that the previous NDP government has somehow put in place something in the province of Manitoba that perhaps they shouldn't have. And he can take that up with his own party at their convention.

What I am saying is that we want to look at—and in this case, we've—an RFP has gone out to provide—to enhance the service standards of delivery, and that's what this is all about. And we think, you know, and we believe that we need to ensure—I mean, safety of the patient has to be paramount. And again, those decisions as to whether or not a doctor is on board, those decisions are made by medical professionals, and we trust those medical professionals in making those decisions. And we thank them for the incredible work they do day in, day out to ensure the safety of patients in our province.

Mr. Kinew: So, still no answer there. Is it the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) contention that the quality of care for patients has improved since this privatization began?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, we have come out of two years of a pandemic where there's been significant challenges within our health-care system as a result of that. And so there has been challenges; we do acknowledge those challenges. I don't believe that it's an

ideological debate that needs to be—that needs to take place.

If the Leader of the Opposition is saying that it's just because they're private, that that's the challenge, I think that the important thing is that Manitobans get the health care that they need when they need it, and part of that is about looking how we can enhance the delivery of those services for Manitobans.

And part of that is making sure that we exhaust all avenues to ensure that we have better patient delivery of health care, and we will not stop at, you know, just the public system. We will look at—beyond that to ensure—because the most important thing in all of this is to ensure that Manitobans get the diagnostic and surgical health care that they need when they need it.

And so it's been a common practice, even under the previous NDP government, to contract out some of those services to the private sector to ensure that we enhance the delivery of health care in our province, to ensure that we enhance the capacity of that delivery of health-care services. And it's not compromising it; it's enhancing the capacity.

So we won't take an ideological approach. I know the Leader of the Opposition has said that he will; that's unfortunate. We are going to be on the side of Manitobans that need those diagnostic and surgical procedures when they need it, and that will only come with an enhanced delivery of health-care system.

* (16:50)

Mr. Kinew: So, you know, the Premier is contending here that in addition to medical aviation that, you know, looking at private providers for surgeries and diagnostic tests is a big part of her agenda. What other aspects of health care is she going to look at private providers for?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think what Manitobans want is to be able to get access to the health-care services that they need when they need them. And I think in order to do that and to increase the capacity and to be able to deliver those services for Manitobans, we need to look at all aspects of how do we increase the capacity?

And part of that will be not having an ideological lens on this. It's looking at all options out there. All options should be on the table.

I think what Manitobans want, they want to be able to get that surgery that they need. They want to be able to get that diagnostic procedure when they get it. I think Manitobans, they're more concerned about

getting it in a more expedited fashion and ensuring that they can get those services, and that's what we're going to deliver on for Manitobans. We're not going to take an ideological approach. We're going to ensure we look at all aspects of delivering health-care services in Manitobans, all—to Manitobans.

I will remind the Leader of the Opposition that, you know, under the previous NDP government, they also looked at enhancing the private delivery of health-care services in the province of Manitoba under their watch, because they recognized—Gary Doer was the premier at the time, and he recognized the importance of expanding that capacity in Manitoba. And the importance—and other provinces have gone there and they have the capacity to be able to deal with some of the surgical and diagnostic procedures.

And so I don't think—certainly, if a previous NDP premier didn't look at it in an ideological way, I don't think anyone should, Mr. Chair. I think it's very important that—and I think what Manitobans want is they want to have access to those surgical procedures when they need them. And we will not stop at anything to look at, you know, how we deliver those services to Manitobans.

Mr. Kinew: So the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) says that all options should be on the table when it comes to the private provision of care. Would that go to overnight stays for surgeries? Would that go to other forms of health care currently delivered in the public system?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I'm talking about the delivery of health-care services and us being able to increase the capacity by utilizing, you know, public, private ways of delivering those health-care services. So, again, a single payer, which is the government, on behalf of those Manitobans.

But we see it in other areas and in dental areas, Mr. Chair. You know, we will look at ensuring that Manitobans get the health care that they need when they need it. We will not take an ideological approach. We will ensure that we try and increase that capacity for Manitobans on the delivery of health-care services.

Mr. Kinew: So, you know, if there's a single-payer model, is the Premier okay with overnight stays for surgeries?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think, you know, obviously, we're living within the Canada Health Act and there's various parameters with respect to that, and we respect where that's at. That's fine. That's under the federal

purview. We will live within that—within the Canada Health Act.

But I know that there's other provinces that have been able to deliver health-care services and—to their citizens, and I think we—that Manitobans deserve to have the same level playing field that they do in other provinces. And that's what I'm talking about delivering for Manitobans.

Mr. Kinew: So what are these services available in other provinces that the Premier is interested in examining?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think there's areas—again, as long as we, you know, and other provinces are living within the Canada Health Act and I think that's obviously what we are looking to do as well.

But I think, you know, what we have seen as a result of the pandemic is that there has been a backlog of surgical and diagnostic procedures. We're seeing other provinces that are—that have built that capacity, sometimes in the private delivery of health-care services, whether it be MRI, CT scans, you know, in the diagnostic areas, that they've looked at in other provinces that weren't looked at here under our previous NDP government.

And so I think right now, what Manitobans want is to be able to have access to that. They don't want to have to go to Saskatchewan or Alberta or Ontario or south of the border to get their MRI or their CT scan. And so I think that there's an opportunity for us to ensure that we have a level playing field when it comes to our citizens here in Manitoba, that they have the access to the services that they need, when they need it.

And, you know, we've come through a significant time with COVID that has caused backlogs within our system, and it's nothing unique to Manitoba. But I think other areas and other provinces have been able to have a bit of a leg up because they do have that ability within their own provinces to contract out those services to other providers within their provinces. And we simply have not had the capacity here to be able to do that, and I think that there are some opportunities to do that.

And again, all of what we're trying to do is ensure that we provide those services to Manitobans within Manitoba, to the extent we can. And if we can't, we're going to have to—like we are doing right now—we are looking to contract out those services to other areas like, you know, the US and to ensure—I think Manitobans really just want to make sure that they get

the surgical and diagnostic procedures that they need, when they need them.

And I don't think they want us taking an ideological approach to extend those wait times even further. I think they want us to look at being creative and how we can do that, and we will do that on behalf of Manitobans. I've heard loud and clear from them that the most important thing is getting timely access to those surgical and diagnostic procedures.

So I think we need to think outside the box a little bit. I know other provinces have gone here, and it certainly leaves it open for us to do similar things on behalf of our citizens here in Manitoba.

Mr. Kinew: Just wanted to acknowledge the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) extemporizing on the provision of more private health-care services here in Manitoba.

I also want to make specific reference to the RFP for medical aviation. In the RFP itself that, you know, I'm making specific reference to here, it talks about aligning with the Health System Transformation.

We know that the Health System Transformation has been an unmitigated disaster since the PCs brought it into place. Even before the pandemic, it was leading to ERs that had to turn patients away. Throughout the pandemic, it led to some of the worst outcomes of any jurisdiction, not just in Canada but across North America, if you can imagine that.

And to see that the government insists on trying to align the provision of medical aviation with what has been a very troubled Health System Transformation, I think is very concerning and I hope Manitobans pay close attention to that.

It's very concerning because, again, what they've done to one aspect of the health-care system, is the PC government under this Premier going to try to repeat in other areas? Are the mistakes and unanswered questions that we've seen with air ambulances going to be allowed to persist? And are the staffing shortages that this health-care system transformation caused going to be repeated time and time again when we're talking about patient transport?

I'd also point out that there's a greater reliance on patient transportation because of so-called level loading by this government. Of course, level loading is a process that doesn't afford dignity to the patient and instead, sends them, in many cases, hundreds of kilometres from their homes. This is something that's a great concern to myself—

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Is there leave of the House to not see the clock until I've made a committee announcement?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave to not see the clock until the honourable Government House Leader has made a committee announcement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate the House's indulgence.

I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Wednesday, May 11th, 2022, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 7, The Police Services Amendment Act (Enhancing Independent Investigation Unit Operations); Bill 27, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Alternative Measures for Driving Offences); Bill 30, The Police Services Amendment and Law Enforcement Review Amendment Act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Wednesday, May 11th, 2022, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 7, The Police Services Amendment Act (Enhancing Independent Investigation Unit Operations); Bill 27, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Alternative Measures for Driving Offences); and Bill 30, The Police Services Amendment and Law Enforcement Review Amendment Act.

The hour being past 5 o'clock, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 9, 2022

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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