

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

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

Vol. LXXVI No. 57C - 10 a.m., Friday, May 27, 2022

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AL TOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
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

Friday, May 27, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): Good morning, everybody. As previously announced, the Committee of Supply will be resuming the consideration of departmental Estimates this morning.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

(Continued)

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(Concurrent Sections)

(Continued)

ROOM 254

HEALTH

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

Before we begin, I have a leave request for this section of the Committee of Supply.

Is there leave to allow the opposition to sit on the other side of the table to allow them to see the screens that are situated in the room? *[Agreed]*

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health. Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I'd like to actually allow—not allow, but ask the minister to complete her response that we ended on yesterday. The minister was providing information in regards to the 'radiology'—radiology machines in Brandon.

So, the question that I had asked was if the minister could tell me what plans were in place to replace the radiology machines—the aging radiology machines there and when that might happen. The minister had asked for clarification as to what radiology machines, and I clarified that it was specifically the fluoroscopy 'radiology'—radiology equipment.

So, if the minister wouldn't mind just providing the rest of her response from yesterday that she was in the midst of providing, that would be great.

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I first would like to start by saying good morning to the Chairperson and the clerk and members of the opposition, as well as members of the government that—around the table. I wish you a happy Friday and a safe and enjoyable weekend ahead.

I thank the member for Union Station for the question. I do have—I did answer part of the question yesterday, but I do have updated information today.

The approval has been provided to Shared Health Diagnostic Services to purchase a fluoroscopy machine. The time of arrival has—cannot be confirmed. As the member is aware, there are several supply chain issues and timing of arrival and the equipment is sometimes up in the air and cannot be confirmed. But the total amount committed for that fluoroscopy machine is \$989,545.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Asagwara: It—I thank the minister for that response and for her providing that remaining information that she started to provide yesterday. I appreciate that.

It was publicly reported that there were 105 external shipping containers installed in personal-care homes. Through FIPPA, we were able to confirm the following installations: 30 of these external shipping containers were installed in the Prairie Mountain region; 21 in southern; 21 in the Interlake; and none in the northern regional health authority.

Can the minister tell me how many external shipping containers were installed in PCHs, personal-care homes, in the WRHA, and what was the final cost for this across the province?

Ms. Gordon: I'm—needed to seek clarification for—from the member for Union Station.

So, the member began to—by providing a list of the visitation—external visitation shelters for all the regions, and then the member said, I would like to know what the number was for WRHA, as well as the cost.

Is the member asking for the cost for all regions or for just the WRHA? Please clarify.

MLA Asagwara: I'm seeking clarification for the final cost across all regions, so across the entire province.

Thank you.

* (10:10)

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, did you ask to be recognized yet? *[interjection]* Thank you.

Ms. Gordon: I do have the list of internal and external visitation shelters. They're actually not called external shipping containers, they're called internal visitation shelters or external visitation shelters. So I'd like to provide that information now.

For external visitation shelters, the cost is \$25,907,913.

They are—we have one in Ashern—this is for the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority. We have one in Ashern Personal Care Home; two in Betel home in Gimli; two in, again, Betel home in Selkirk; two in East-Gate Lodge Personal Care Home; one in Eriksdale Personal Care Home; one at Fisher personal-care home; one at Goodwin Lodge Personal Care Home; one at Lac du Bonnet Personal Care Home; one at Lunder; one at Pioneer Health Services in Arborg; two at Red River Place; two at Rosewood Lodge Personal Care Home; one at Selkirk Mental Health Centre; one at Sunnywood Manor; two at Tudor House; one at Whitemount *[phonetic]* district health centre personal-care home; one internal visitation shelter at Kin Place; one external visitation shelter at Nisichawayasihk Personal Care Home; one external visitation shelter at Pinaow Wachi Ltd.; one internal visitation shelter at Flin Flon Personal Care Home; one internal visitation shelter at Northern Lights Manor; one internal visitation shelter at Northern Spirit Manor; one internal visitation shelter at St. Paul's residence.

For Prairie Mountain Health, we have—these are external visitation shelters: one at Baldur Manor, one at Benito Health Centre; one at Bren-Del-Win Lodge; one at Carberry Personal Care Home; one at Country Meadows personal-care home; one at Delwynda Court Personal Care Home; one at Dinsdale Personal Care Home; one at Dr. Gendreau Personal Care Home; one at Elkwood Manor; one at Evergreen Place; two at Fairview Home; one at Gilbert Plains Health Centre; one at Glenboro Personal Care Home; one at Grandview Personal Care Home; one at Hartney Community Health Centre; one at Hillcrest Place Inc.; one at Melita Personal Care Home; one at Minnedosa Personal Care Home; one at Morley

House Personal Care Home; one at Rideau Park Personal Care Home; two at Rock Lake Health District Personal Care Home; one at Rossburn Personal Care Home; one at Russell Personal Care Home; one at Sandy Lake Personal Care Home; one at Sherwood Nursing Home; one at Swan Valley Lodge; one at Swan Valley personal-care home; one at Valleyview Care Centre; one at Westman Nursing Home.

Continuing with Prairie Mountain Health: one at Winnipegosis and District Personal Care Home. And then we—these are the number of internal visitation shelters and where they're located: one at Bayside Personal Care Home; one at Birch Lodge Personal Care Home; one at Cartwright, Davidson Memorial; one at Crocus Court Personal Care Home; one at Dauphin Personal Care Home; one at Erickson and district health centre; one at McCreary Alonsa Personal Care Home; one at Riverdale Personal Care Home; one at Souris Personal Care Home; one at St. Paul's Home; one at Sunnyside Manor; one at Tiger Hills Manor; one at Wawanesa Health Centre; one at Westview Lodge; one at Willowview personal-care home.

Again, those were the homes—the external and internal visitation shelters for Prairie Mountain Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority and northern regional health authority. And I will continue in the next question.

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: I'm happy to allow for the minister to continue providing the remaining information that she has, as well as she could also clarify the \$25 million—if that's for across the entire province for all external visitation shelters—that would be great.

Ms. Gordon: Happy to clarify that. Yes, the \$25 million that was quoted for—it—that is just for—we're still seeking the number for the internal, so that is just for the external visitation shelters. And, yes, it is across the entire province.

So, I will continue with Southern Health-Santé Sud. These are external visitation shelters. We have one at Bethesda Place; one at Boyne Lodge Personal Care Home; one at Centre de santé St. Claude Health Centre Personal Care Home; one at Eastview Place; one at Emerson Health Centre; one at Foyer Notre-Dame; one at Heritage Life Personal Care Home; one at Menno Home for the Aged; one at Pembina Manitou Health Centre; one at Red River Valley Lodge; one at Repos Jolys; one at Rest Haven,

Cedarwood; one at Rest Haven nursing home; two at Salem Home; two at Tabor Home; one at Third Crossing Manor; two at Villa Youville; one at Vita & District Health Centre.

Now, I'll continue the list with the internal visitation shelters: MacGregor Health Centre Personal Care Home has one; one at Portage la Prairie, Douglas Campbell Lodge has one; two at Portage la Prairie, Lions Prairie Manor.

And now I will go to the list for Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. And we'll start with the external visitation shelters: we have two at Actionmarguerite Saint-Boniface Incorporated; one external visitation shelter at Actionmarguerite Saint-Vital Inc.; one external visitation shelter, Actionmargarite St. Joseph Incorporated; three at Concordia Place; one at Extendicare Tuxedo Villa; one at Golden Door Geriatric Centre; one at Golden Links Lodge; one at Heritage Lodge; one at Kildonan Personal Care Centre; one at Luther Home; one at Maples Personal Care Home; two at Meadowood Manor; one at Park Manor Care; one at Poseidon Care Centre; one at River East Personal Care Home; two at Riverview Health Centre; and one at Southeast Personal Care Home; one at St. Norbert Personal Care Home; one at St. Amant; one at The Convalescent Home of Winnipeg; one at the Middlechurch Home of Winnipeg Inc.; one at West Park Manor Personal Care Home.

* (10:20)

And now the internal visitation shelters: we have one at Beacon Hill Lodge; two at Bethania Mennonite PCH; one at Calvary Place PCH; one at Charleswood Care; three at Deer Lodge Centre; one at Donwood Manor PCH; two at Extendicare Oakview Place; one at Extendicare Tuxedo Villa; one at Fred Douglas Lodge; one at Golden West Centennial Lodge; three at Holy Family nursing home; one at Kildonan personal-care centre; two at Lions personal-care home; one at Maples Personal Care Home; two at Misericordia Place; two at Parkview Place care centre; one at Pembina Place Mennonite PCH; two at Poseidon Care Centre; one at River East PCH; one at River Park Gardens; two at Saul and Claribel Simkin Centre; and one at Vista Park Lodge.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Asagwara: Thank the minister for providing that information and I'm hopeful that she will be provided further details in terms of the costs related to the

internal visitation shelters. I appreciate that she's already provided the costs for the external.

Can the minister—apology—I'm going to ask a question about EMS. I know that I touched on that yesterday.

Can the minister advise currently how many EMS personnel are directly employed by Shared Health, and can the minister provide snapshots going back further, since they took over EMS services around Manitoba, and how many vacancies are there currently?

Thank you.

Ms. Gordon: I would like to seek clarification for—from the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) regarding the fiscal years that they are requesting this information for. Can you clarify with specific fiscal years please?

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for asking for that clarification. So, in terms of how many EMS personnel are directly employed by Shared Health, if the minister could provide that information dating back to when Shared Health took over EMS services around Manitoba, that would be great. So the year that Shared Health took over those services and how many vacancies are there currently.

Ms. Gordon: I now have the global cost for the internal visitation shelters: \$13,100,000. And that applies to the entire province.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. We will—I will get back to you with the—these—the following—the previous question.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister of Health.

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for Union Station for the question. It gives me an opportunity to highlight our government's commitment to paramedicine and to the emergency response and emergency measures services.

And I want to share with the member that Budget 2022 included hiring of 35 full-time FTE primary-care paramedic positions, and it's an investment of \$4 million, Mr. Chairperson. Further, our government is increasing call volumes in the emergency response system with an investment of over \$3.5 million.

And since we took office, we have purchased 65 new ambulances to refresh approximately one third

of the province's fleet. And we continue to develop our EMS infrastructure, as seen by the \$3.8-million investment for EMS stations in Portage la Prairie and Crystal City.

And Budget 2022, if I can go back to that, continues the \$812-million investment that our government has made, the largest single health-care commitment in Manitoba's history. And that commitment is to improve rural and northern health care through the clinical and preventative services plan.

And I just want to highlight how the CPSP will assist EMS, specifically EMS services and patient transport. So, I'll be announcing, once the blackout for the by-election in Thompson has been lifted, some significant new changes in terms of patient transport and a specific pilot that was done in one specific region of the province that we're now going—has been so successful, we're now going to be rolling it out in other areas of the province. So, I look so forward to being able to share that good news with Manitobans.

But the historic investment, as well, it doesn't stop there, Mr. Chairperson. It's going to help us to reduce the need for Manitobans to travel long distances for care by providing more services closer to home. We're going to be establishing that northern hub, as well, where—will certainly decrease call times and wait times for EMS personnel to arrive, to provide care and compassion and help to those in need.

So, I just wanted to put that on the record, Mr. Chairperson, so that Manitobans are aware of our government's incredible investment in this area.

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response. I didn't hear anything in there specific to the question that I asked.

Can the minister provide clarity here: How many EMS personnel are directly employed by Shared Health? And can the minister provide the details going back to when they took over EMS services around Manitoba? And currently, how many vacant positions are there?

* (10:30)

Ms. Gordon: I'm so pleased with the investments that have been made and the opportunity I had to go to Crystal City and Portage la Prairie to open the new Emergency Medical Services stations that I would like to just share some of that news on the record.

Specifically, I'll share that the Emergency Medical Services stations total \$3.8 million and opened in Crystal City and Portage la Prairie as part of Manitoba's commitment to building a stronger service that meets the needs of residents in those communities in the broader Southern Health-Santé Sud region.

And these new stations support enhanced emergency care for patients and, again, underscore an ongoing commitment to develop a more effective and integrated emergency response system in the province. This is a major upgrade—like, they were major upgrades to stations in rural Manitoba—and demonstrates our government's commitment to build a more responsive, reliable and sustainable EMS system in Southern Health-Santé Sud and across Manitoba.

So the new EMS stations will act as operational hubs for paramedics who are repositioned across the region using a flexible dispatch model. So I haven't put this on the record before, but this flexible dispatch model uses computer modelling and predictive deployment to ensure timely emergency response in all areas of the region. And this station in Crystal City is a significant investment for now and for the future of sustainability of the critical service in that area.

So staff based in Portage la Prairie—I was just updated, when I announced that opening, that they responded to nearly 3,100 calls last year, making that station the fourth busiest in the province outside of Winnipeg. And the new 5,834-square-foot facility replaces a station located in an old fire hall in nearby Southport which was constructed on the same site as the Portage District General Hospital and includes a five-bay garage, offices, crew space, and an area for training and meetings.

The station located in Crystal City is 1,800 square feet and provides EMS staff with a larger station that has ample office space and staff areas, as well as vehicle space that meets modern requirements for emergency service vehicles.

And I know the individuals that were on-site for that announcement shared with me that they were so pleased to have a more modern facility that would provide more suitable space for staff training and vehicles. And they talked with me about the benefit staff and everyone in the region would receive as a result of the stations. And they did express their thanks to our government for the investment that they said would enhance service for people in this region, particular—at times when they need help the most.

So, that—those two particular announcements that I made last year of two-hundred—is in addition to some of the announcements I've made for that area: \$283 million for a hospital in Portage la Prairie and the combination of the new EMS stations and a new hospital, which will offer more in-patient beds.

Expanded capacity in an improved emergency department underscores our commitment, again, to ensuring residents and communities in Southern Health-Santé Sud can access a high level of care closer to home.

And they—those announcements build in our government's commitment to invest in emergency services and enact recommendations that, were actually made in the 2013 Manitoba EMS System Review. The member might be aware of that review, because it occurred during the previous government's time in office, but the review recommended investing \$4.2 million in a new EMS station in Selkirk to serve residents at Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority, purchasing 65 new—

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

MLA Asagwara: It's disappointing that the minister has taken a total of 10 minutes to avoid providing a very straightforward response to a very straightforward question. It's information that the minister should have readily available. It's important information, given everything that we know is going on with paramedicine across our province and the challenges that are being experienced. And that's disappointing that the minister continues, in her second—my second attempt to get an answer on that question, to do everything but provide the information requested.

I'm going to move on to nurse overtime. Can the minister provide me with a total nurse overtime in Winnipeg each year for the last year? So, can the minister provide me with a total of the nurse overtime worked in Winnipeg each year for the last three years? I'd like to note that an undertaking would be fine. And to clarify, the last three years would be 2019-2020, two-thousand and two thousand—sorry—2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-22.

Thanks.

* (10:40)

Ms. Gordon: I'm pleased to provide some additional information regarding rural health care and paramedics, and our paramedicine program in general.

So, Shared Health is actively recruiting staff to provide 24-7 paramedic coverage in order to reduce

Manitoba's reliance on overtime or on-call staffing. And, of course, as COVID has progressed over the past two years, existing staff vacancies have been exacerbated at various points in time by staff sick calls and individuals who were unable to work either due to COVID-19 diagnosis, symptoms or exposure.

Manitobans—I want to assure Manitobans that emergency response services remain available to them. Our paramedic fleet uses a globally recognized deployment approach which strategically positions emergency response services throughout the province to ensure Manitobans have access to emergency services even if a local unit is temporarily unavailable.

Shared Health assumed operational responsibility for emergency response services in 2019, and has made recruitment a significant area of focus. During the pandemic, these efforts have also included re-deployment, engagement of relief staff and call-outs for recently retired or former paramedics to rejoin the workforce as part of the COVID response.

Initiatives to improve emergency response services in Manitoba also include: increasing application of full-time, 24-7 paramedic staffing; moving away from a dependence, as I said before, on overtime or on-call scheduling. This includes the addition of 149.2 full-time-equivalent paramedic positions since 2016. Shared Health also worked with the College of Paramedics to obtain provisional licences for new graduates, enabling them to join our workforce along more senior—so, as a buddy system of paramedics—much sooner.

Enhancing roles of paramedics and the models of care provided throughout the province using a globally recognized flexible dispatch model that allows for ambulances, again, to be strategically positioned in real time to ensure timely response. Increasing use of low-acuity transportation options with 'liscent' and contracted partners. Establishment of a centralized team to co-ordinate provincial recruitment of ERS personnel from all disciplines, including paramedics. Working to increase educational capacity for high-demand professions within ERS. And strengthening our partnerships with regulatory and educational institutions.

* (10:50)

So, as part of the clinical and preventative services plan, our government has committed \$812 million, the largest single health-care commitment in Manitoba's history, to improve rural and northern health care. This historic investment will

build and expand 38 health-care facilities across rural and northern Manitoba, improve access, quality and reliability of care, reduce our wait times, increase our nursing staff, improve diagnostics, emergency medical services and patient transport, create new hospital beds and personal-care-home beds, use an Indigenous partnership strategy that will be collaborative and co-designed with Indigenous leadership, create a new intermediate-care hub in northern Manitoba and reduce the need for Manitobans to travel long distances for care by providing more services closer to home.

So, this is just a little bit of a summary of how diligently Shared Health has been working with many stakeholders to ensure paramedic coverage is available across the province, and, of course, we know that the COVID pandemic has really exacerbated staff vacancies and, at various points, staff sick calls and individuals who were unable to work. And we continue this week, as Paramedic Services Week, to—

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

MLA Asagwara: I see that this Estimates committee, unfortunately, may be one where the minister does not provide the information that I'm asking on behalf of Manitobans and the information that is really important.

You know, the Estimates book's gotten smaller and smaller, certainly since when I started as an MLA, and, you know, they're much smaller than they have been historically, much less information. And so, asking these questions is really important to get clarity around the decisions this government is making in terms of spending dollars in health care or not spending dollars in health care.

I'm not going to, you know, ask the minister the same question half a dozen times just for the minister to continue to waste time. So I'm going to move on in the hope that the minister will be more forthcoming on the questions that I have remaining.

I'd like to ask for clarity around the beds at Health Sciences Centre. The minister is well aware of the challenges being faced by that hospital, and I'd like to know how many hospital beds are currently occupied and available at HSC, and if the minister can also provide me the information around this for the last three fiscal years, that would be very helpful. So, how many hospital beds are occupied/available at Health Sciences Centre, and can the minister provide me that data, that information, for years 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022?

Thank you.

Ms. Gordon: Seeking clarification from the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) around the question related to Health Sciences Centre beds. The member has asked a dual question, so it's how many beds are occupied and how many beds are available?

So, how many beds are occupied changes by the moment. So it's difficult to nail down a fiscal year and a moment unless the member has the very moment in time that they're wanted to know when the beds were occupied. And available is based on a bed map that we maintain that allocates beds to specific sites within their region. So I will just leave that for a moment for the member to ponder how that question would be clarified.

And I do—wanted to go back to the earlier question about nurses and overtime, and just share some of the measures that are being taken to address nurse vacancies and overtime.

So, Mr. Chairperson, all RHAs in Shared Health report that they're actively working to reduce nursing overtime costs both within and across their respective organizations, but that pressures arising from increased vacancies and service needs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic have increased the need for overtime over the past year.

As context, Mr. Chairperson, in 2017 the provincial nursing leadership council, including the chief nursing officers for each RHA, initiated a nursing workforce optimization project to identify the specific drivers of nursing overtime and agency costs, and to develop strategies and tools that could be leveraged within and across organizations to reduce nursing overtime and agency costs. This work, I am pleased to share, is continuing under our provincial nursing workforce stabilization project currently under way with a focus on skill mix, recruitment, retention, analytics and turnover and specialty nursing.

And I also wanted to share that in July of 2019 the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and Shared Health, using this nursing workforce stabilization project, is seeking very diligently to both stabilize the nursing workforce and to improve their working conditions and I just—I'm not sure if the member is aware, but there are approximately 13,500 unionized nurses working in the health system in Manitoba.

And, again, the arrival of COVID-19 has heightened workforce issues, including those related to workplace safety and health, Mr. Chairperson, and the

nursing workforce stabilization project's primary goals are to decrease nursing vacancies and update and streamline recruitment and retention strategies. To this end, six work streams produced corresponding recommendations for implementation, which in turn have been prioritized for action given Shared Health capacity and competing demands. Further background can be found in briefing materials for the fall of 2020 session: 2.3, summary of steps taken to improve working conditions for nurses across Manitoba, and specifically WRHA and HSC.

The nursing workforce planning subgroup has also produced a set of four recommendations for action: increase nursing seats at the province's post-secondary institutions, which our government is actively in the process of carrying out; review and adjust models of care; continue the equivalent full-time EFT review; and deploy the workforce planning tool province-wide.

So, future planning must also take into account the needs of the community health agencies and private personal-care homes. So we have stressed that to this committee as well as development of the seniors strategy which is now with my colleague in the Ministry of Seniors and Long-Term Care. And we are going to continue to support initiatives under the various health ministries to—as well as Shared Health—to decrease overtime for our nurses.

* (11:00)

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

MLA Asagwara: Happy to provide the clarity the minister is seeking in regards to my question around beds at HSC.

So, historically, Shared Health—or, sorry—historically, the WRHA has reported on bed availability in their annual reports. This has not been the case via Shared Health since they took over HSC. But we do know that the WRHA provides a snapshot at the end of the fiscal year in terms of beds available. And so that's what I'm asking for.

I know the minister—I certainly understand and appreciate that occupation of beds does fluctuate throughout the year. But what I'm looking for is the information from the WRHA specific to HSC in terms of how many beds are available—have been available—at the end of March.

So, if the minister could provide that information, not only for—that is most currently available, so the

beds that were at HSC up until the end of March, but also for the years preceding it, which I've already outlined, so 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-22.

Thank you.

Ms. Gordon: Now that the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) has clarified the point in time, I am seeking that information and will provide it shortly. If the member wishes to go on to another question I'd be happy to take another while we gather that information.

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you, Minister, for that. I do appreciate that you folks are working on providing that information.

In the meantime, if the minister could provide me the total—with the total nurse overtime worked in Winnipeg each year for the last three years—so 2019-2020, 2020-21, 2021-22—that would be great. I know that I've already asked this question, but I didn't get a response from the minister and I'm hoping she can provide it this time.

Thank you.

Ms. Gordon: I would like to provide the member for Union Station with some updated information regarding the fluoroscopy machine, if that is all right. Shared Health logistics has confirmed that the equipment was ordered and received at Brandon Regional Health Centre. They confirmed receipt of the equipment and approved payment on May 16th, and that installation is taking place at this time. So I'm pleased to just provide an update, and we continue to collect the information from—for the other question.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for providing that updated information on the fluoroscopy radiology equipment; I appreciate that.

I think the minister just indicated that they're also working on providing information in regards to the total nurse overtime in Winnipeg for the last three years. So, with that in mind—and I'm waiting on, therefore, two pieces of information—I will move on to another question, anticipating receiving responses to both those questions.

So, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) earlier this week did say that they would consider—that the government would consider calling in the military to help shore up capacity at overwhelmed hospitals in Manitoba.

Can the minister identify for us what would trigger that decision? So, what is it exactly that would trigger the decision being made to call in the—to make the request to call in the military? Can she provide the details around that?

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

* (11:10)

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for giving me the opportunity to once again thank the staff and the health-system leadership for their continued dedication and professionalism, as well as their direct feedback during recent meetings that they've held with the CEO of WRHA, as well as the CEO of Shared Health, to seek out measures and initiatives that will have a positive impact on patient care. And welcome the input of—and we welcome their continued input.

And, Mr. Chairperson, I don't for one minute want Manitobans to believe that this is not a priority or an important issue for myself as Health Minister, as well as for our government.

And current wait times, I'm told, are largely caused by patient-flow challenges in hospital in-patient units, as the daily number of patients in need of admission has exceeded discharges for several months. And so, this is due, in large part, to slower or limited supports for continued recovery at home or in the community, and it's due to a variety of factors, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

But what I want Manitobans to know is that clinicians and front-line staff in the health system have brought forward very innovative and creative initiatives to address these wait times, and preliminary data suggests the implementation of the initiatives has started to positively affect patient flow at Winnipeg sites, decreasing various wait-time metrics over the past 12 days.

And just want to highlight some of those: expedited placement of ALC patients from hospital to long-term care, so freeing up space in in-patient units for admissions from emergency and urgent care. ALC patients are frequently long-stay patients that could be appropriately cared for in other settings with appropriate supports. And just as an example, there were 112 ALC patients in Winnipeg hospitals on Wednesday, down considerably from April, when the daily average was 151.

There's also repatriation of stable patients who live outside of Winnipeg to continue their care, when clinically appropriate, to sites in their home health region, and that's under way. As of Thursday of this week, 162 patients have been repatriated to sites in their home health region for this month, freeing up space at Winnipeg in-patient units for others, while allowing patients to continue their recovery at sites closer to home and their support network. And there were 139 patients repatriated in all of April.

And, as well, another initiative is improved collaboration between community and facility-based teams. So, as staff that support community and home care are returning to their normal work following COVID-related reassignment or redeployment, teams have prioritized the arrangement of supports at home or in the community for in-patients, allowing them to be safely discharged more quickly and opening up space in medicine units.

Also, the idea came forward from the hospital setting of levelling of ambulance transport arrivals across facilities. This change to ambulance transport protocols is shifting appropriate lower acuity patient arrivals to urgent-care centres rather than emergency departments, which is easing the patient-flow challenges at acute-care facilities while improving patient safety.

And then, the use of physician-in-triage model of care, which places a physician in the triage area to manage and provide care for those waiting to be seen. So, they may have a particular focus on higher acuity patients. And this model began in late April as staffing has allowed, and discussions are ongoing on expanding the pilot program to St. Boniface and Grace Hospital. Again, system leaders from both Shared Health and WRHA continue to meet with staff, physicians and site leaders to discuss their concerns and share ideas on how to further improve patient flow and reduce wait times.

And work also continues to recruit and retain health-care workers, including nursing staff at all sites, Mr. Chair. We're—

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

MLA Asagwara: Well, unfortunately, I didn't hear an answer in there to my question. And it's a really important question. It's something that, you know, many, many people are wanting to understand and know.

You know, folks are—as the minister is well aware, as we're all well aware—going to emergency

rooms and leaving. You know, 14 per cent of—in March, 14 per cent, on average, of people were leaving the emergency rooms without being seen; 24 per cent at HSC. We know that the ER wait times are going up. Unfortunately, that may correlate to folks increasingly leaving the emergency room without being seen.

Hospitals are overwhelmed; staff are actively seeking other jobs or leaving their jobs in hospitals because they can't provide the care that they want to because they are overwhelmed. There's no capacity. And so this question about would the government—would the minister consider calling in the military and what it would take to make that decision is a really important one.

It's one that would show Manitobans and show us that the government has a plan, has a strategy in place to make sure that our hospitals don't outright collapse and that there's adequate human resources in health care to ensure that Manitobans accessing care can get it in a timely way and in way that—at a standard that they should come to expect—they should expect from our health-care system.

So, it's disappointing. I don't know if I should take that to indicate—as an indication, rather, that there is no plan, that the minister does not have identified triggers that would result in the military being called in to support our hospitals.

I hope that's not the case, but I don't really know what else to gather from that response, other than this is maybe an area that the minister and the government have failed to develop a strategy around, and that would be unfortunate.

Can the minister advise how many treatments, such as remdesivir or Paxlovid, have been provided to COVID-19 patients in Manitoba, and what more can be done to ensure that those at risk get timely access to these lifesaving oral treatments?

Ms. Gordon: Mr. Chairperson, I now have the information the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) requested for beds at the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Health Sciences Centre. This is all beds, so it's not broken down; the member didn't ask for any type of breakdown.

So, for 2019-2020, 790; for 2020-2021, 782; and for—as of March 31st, 2022, 782.

We will—I am also working on a response to the current question.

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response, and so—I do appreciate the minister provided that information.

And so we—I am waiting now, then, for the total nurse overtime in Winnipeg over the last three years, and, as well, the response to the question I just asked about oral treatments for COVID-positive and at-risk Manitobans.

So, then, I'll move on to another question while we wait for the—a response from the minister on the other two.

We know that Manitoba, unfortunately, is lagging in the Canadian average in delivering vaccine boosters to Manitobans. Manitobans have done a great job throughout this pandemic on getting their first and second doses. I know that that is a direct result of the efforts of the vaccine task force led by Dr. Joss Reimer and with the support of many, many folks and experts, and cannot thank them enough for their efforts during this pandemic. And, again, we saw the results of those efforts made and the efforts made by folks in community, a lot of community activists and organizers making the effort to make sure that citizens and residents of Manitoba could access the vaccine with minimal barriers and in ways that respected their needs.

* (11:20)

Unfortunately, what we're seeing with the vaccine booster is a significantly big differential in folks getting their booster shots. This is really important. We know that folks are still having some pretty devastating outcomes related to contracting COVID. And so I'm wondering what this minister is doing to help bring those numbers up, and would the minister consider increasing her advertising and other measures here to help? We know that this government spent a lot of money on the, you know, quite frankly, ill-fated—I think it was the ready, set, go campaign. You know, that money would have been better spent in other areas of health care.

But, with all of that in mind, is the minister considering increasing the investments in advertising and in other measures here to help bring up those vaccine booster numbers in Manitoba?

Ms. Gordon: I, you know, have always been someone who focuses on the positives and takes time to thank individuals, especially in our health system, for their efforts, and particularly those who stepped up and supported us during the pandemic, specifically in our vaccination campaign efforts.

And I'm proud to report that over 1.1 million Manitobans have rolled up their sleeves to receive two doses of the vaccine. And so, that means over 82 per cent of eligible Manitobans are fully vaccinated, and this is the highest rate among the Prairie provinces. Over 44 per cent of Manitobans have gotten a booster shot, and for children under 11 that are vaccinated the total is 74,277.

Manitoba Health is currently running the Recharge Your Immunity campaign through this month of May to encourage booster uptake, and the four-week digital and social campaign will target Manitobans age 35 to 65. And so vaccination continues to be our defence against severe COVID-19 infections, and Manitoban Health recommends that all Manitobans get vaccinated against COVID-19, including applicable boosters as they become eligible.

And we do know that there are individuals that may require or may want to benefit from COVID-19 treatment. So I can say that, as of May 19, 1,089 treatment courses of the oral antiviral Paxlovid have been dispensed, including 255 in the past two weeks, and there were 8,755 treatment courses of Paxlovid remaining. And so we continue to encourage Manitobans to access that, and we've made it easier for them to do that.

So, eligibility criteria for available treatment options have been expanded to include some fully vaccinated individuals whose second dose was administered more than four months ago. As of May 19, 676 doses of the COVID infusion therapy remdesivir had been administered—up 166 over the past two weeks. This does not include allotments available for use in First Nation communities, which are controlled by Indigenous Services Canada.

But I do want to highlight that dispensing of Paxlovid has shifted to retail pharmacies, and that was done as of May 20th. And so this will be reported on by the Provincial Drug Program. But we have made it more accessible for individuals to gain access to our antiviral—oral antiviral treatments, Mr. Chairperson, and we will continue to take steps in the next few weeks through Public Health to ensure that any suggestions that come forward to further increase that access is looked at very closely.

But I also want to just share with the member a comparison that they might find interesting. As of May 9—if we look at another province right next door—as of May 9, Saskatchewan had delivered 397 treatments of Paxlovid; and when you compare it to Manitoba's total on May 2nd, we were already at

835 treatment courses of Paxlovid. So our province is definitely, in terms of the western provinces, doing very, very well. And, again, now that we have made access to the second—the oral antivirals more accessible, we are confident that we will see those numbers increase.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: What is the minister doing to help bring up the number of Manitobans who are accessing the booster vaccine? Is she making any increased investments in advertising or taking any other measures, perhaps having mobile booster vaccine clinics in areas where uptake is even lower than other areas in Manitoba, working in partnership with community organizations? What steps is the minister taking to help bring the booster vaccine numbers up in Manitoba?

* (11:30)

Ms. Gordon: I also want to add a little bit more information about access to Paxlovid. So, Manitobans can fill up—fill their Paxlovid prescription at more than 175 community pharmacies across the province, so I want to have that number on the record.

And I also want to talk a little bit about the third-dose booster, because the member has asked what is being done to encourage Manitobans. And 50.47 per cent total Manitobans aged 12 or older have received a third dose; 72.1 per cent of Manitobans aged 50 and older have received a third dose; 78.9 per cent among those 60 years and older have received a third dose; and 83.1 per cent among those aged 70 and older have received a third dose.

And in terms of our third-dose advertising—and the campaign is occurring right now—a quarter of a million dollars has been invested in this campaign.

I want to share that the total value of the paid campaign was \$262,325. The booster campaign ran from January 10th to February 20th, and included radio, digital display, social media, digital, outdoor billboards, print. The overall vaccination campaign—this is not just advertising, but total spend on communications, which includes production, agency and digital costs and advertising: \$755,253 on COVID public health coms in '21 and '22; \$2,650,807 on vaccination communications in fiscal year '21-22, and approximately \$1 million of this was directly for paid public advertising for the vaccination campaign.

And our—we also ran an ad campaign just this week on rapid tests, encouraging Manitobans to pick

up kits for their household. We're also developing a campaign that we're expecting to be with the public in early—has already begun and will end some time this month on, again, how Manitobans can access regular COVID updates online. And we advertised, again, in the Recharge Your Immunity campaign once third doses became available. And it is—and during National Immunization Awareness Week, advertising was done as well on social media.

And, again, in terms of accessibility of the vaccine, physicians and pharmacy partners can continue to offer COVID-19 immunizations across the province and independent immunization channel partners continue to offer COVID-19 immunization—all hospitals, correction sites and personal-care-homes.

The online vaccine finder map is continually updated to show where individuals can book or walk in for COVID-19 vaccines. Regional health authorities continue to offer COVID-19 vaccine clinics throughout their regions, including through pop-up clinics and through appointments and walk-ins at public health offices.

In addition, personal-care homes are currently providing booster doses. They have pop-up clinics to all their eligible residents and continue to plan clinics right to the end of this month based on eligibility. And regional public health and pharmacy teams are offering on-site vaccine clinics to provide second booster doses at elderly personal-person housing congregate living sites—so outside of personal-care homes: supported living, assisted living sites.

Discussions are ongoing with the sites who hosted urban Indigenous clinics, as well, in terms of how we can continue to support access to vaccines for First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples.

And I certainly don't want Manitobans to get the impression that this is not an important issue for our government because it is. And, you know, in talking with Public Health, we will be rolling out, as well, for the fall influenza campaign, another COVID immunization campaign. And so a lot of work is being done behind the scenes—

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

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response and for the information within that response.

We have information that shows us that between the months of October 2021 and January of 2022 that

nearly 1.6 million COVID rapid tests were not distributed to Manitobans, despite being available for Manitobans. And if the minister will recall, this was during a time when Omicron was rapidly being transmitted throughout our communities in Manitoba and having a significant impact on Manitoba.

This was also during a time where Manitobans were pleading for this government to make rapid tests more readily available and accessible. I know that myself and many of my colleagues—our entire caucus, quite frankly—advocated on behalf of Manitobans to be able to access very much needed COVID rapid tests.

And so the minister would understand why it would be so concerning to learn that during that period of time where we saw, unfortunately, some businesses charging hundreds of dollars for tests, you know, feeling like they had the opportunity to do so, but that did mean that many Manitobans were spending, during a really critical time, hundreds of dollars to try and access these tests, and, you know, many folks just didn't have the resources financially to be able to do so and went without being able to access tests.

* (11:40)

This was a really challenging time for many folks, especially over the holiday season, and being able to access rapid tests certainly would've alleviated a lot of anxiety for many Manitoba families. Perhaps they would've had the opportunity to gather differently had they had access to those tests.

So how does the minister explain or justify nearly 1.6 million COVID rapid tests not being made available to Manitobans during a time when they were sorely needed?

Ms. Gordon: I would like to draw to the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara)—that the distribution of tests, rapid tests, that they refer to, falls under the jurisdiction of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services. That Committee of Supply in Estimates is occurring in the Chamber—will be occurring in the Chamber. That question can be directed to the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services (Mr. Helwer).

But I can say that I know that that department, the minister, the deputy minister, as well as the teams, the various teams that were brought together during COVID-19 and the pandemic, worked very closely with hundreds of stakeholders, not just in Winnipeg but across the province, to ensure that they had access to distributing rapid tests.

Of course, some of those stakeholders had to place orders for those tests in order for them to be distributed or for them to receive supplies. But I'm certainly pleased to hear from several of my own constituents about the breadth of—and scope of the access, being in libraries, community centres, and I know I myself distributed masks over the pandemic period. I even, over the holidays, the Christmas holidays, was on-site at one of the facilities that was preparing the rapid test kits, helping to break up the kits and have them available for distribution, so saw first-hand all the efforts that were going into ensuring that rapid tests were readily available to Manitobans.

So I want to, as the Health Minister, thank my colleague, the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services (Mr. Helwer), for the work that was done—and his staff, for the work that was done from the beginning of the pandemic to ensure that vaccines and tests were available to Manitobans across the province. Was a monumental task. It required a lot of co-ordination, a lot of discussions with stakeholders across the province.

So I thank the minister and again refer the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) to the Committee of Supply in Estimates that will be occurring in the Chamber following Executive Council—that—where further information can be obtained from that department regarding the distribution.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for her response.

I can appreciate that, perhaps, some clarity around why the decision was made to withhold nearly 1.6 million tests for Manitobans can be directed to the other minister. I suppose what I'm seeking here, then, is clarity from the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) as to whether or not she thinks it was appropriate during that time in Manitoba that we all can remember, between October of 2021 and January of 2022, when Omicron was in our communities, community transmission was high, people were incredibly stressed across our province because they were struggling to access these COVID rapid tests.

People were pleading with this government to make more rapid tests available in a barrier-free way, especially so that folks who are at even greater risk of coming into contact with COVID and don't have, perhaps, the same level of protective factors that many other folks have the privilege of having, you know: housing where they have separate washrooms and

individual rooms and space to isolate if necessary; you know, the ability to work from home and not work in places where there's increased chance of COVID being transmitted in the workplace.

There were a lot of people during that time in Manitoba who really and truly needed to be able to access a rapid test. And that's why it is astounding to me that nearly 1.6 million of these very much-needed rapid tests were withheld and not made available to the Manitobans who would have benefitted from being able to access them.

And so I ask this question of the Minister of Health to get her perspective on whether or not she thinks, as the minister responsible for Health in this province, that it was appropriate for nearly 1.6 million rapid tests to not be distributed to the Manitobans who needed them during a time in our province, this pandemic, where really everybody across the board had made it very clear that as many of these tests that could be provided and made available should be.

Does the minister think that withholding those tests from Manitobans was the right move, or does she think that, you know, it would have been in the best interests of Manitobans for those tests to be distributed? And I ask her this from her perspective as the Minister for Health.

Ms. Gordon: I can see that we're once again—as happened yesterday, the honourable member for Union Station is steering away from Committee of Supply in Estimates for the Department of Health into a question period that generally occurs in the Chamber. So now we've moved into a QP session, and what I find very inappropriate is that the member has placed this—has developed this leading question that includes the words withhold and withheld that is, in my view, very inappropriate and shameful. And there certainly was no decision on the part of the Health Ministry or Health Department, Public Health, or the Department of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services to withhold or withhold rapid tests from Manitobans.

Again, I myself was at one of the facilities helping to break up packages into smaller quantities so that we could get them out to Manitobans over the holidays. And this was based on how we received the packaging from the federal government in larger quantities. So there were, like, hundreds of volunteers over the holidays that helped with this. That should indicate to the member how urgent we felt it was to get rapid tests out to Manitobans.

And, again, I want to direct the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) to the Committee of Supply and Estimates that is occurring in the Chamber. Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services will follow Executive Council. They will have the details, in terms of the distribution of rapid tests and how that occurred.

* (11:50)

But, again, I just want to end by saying I'm deeply disappointed in the question period style of questioning that is occurring with inaccurate—and information that's not factual about rapid tests being withheld, which is not accurate.

And so, again, I'll refer the member to the Committee of Supply Estimates in the Chamber for Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services. I see that members from the opposition do sit from time to time in the Health Estimates and has been encouraging the member for Union Station to ask questions.

So I encourage, as well, the member for Union Station to join in the Committee of Supply and Estimates that will occur in the Chamber and to pose that particular question, because it is that department that has the details the member is requesting.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Asagwara: I think that it's really important for Manitobans to have a good sense of where their Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) believes—or what position, rather, the Minister of Health takes when we get information like this.

You know, Manitobans right now—for some time under this government have really struggled to trust this government with their health care. Certainly, I hear that every single day via email, phone calls, over social media; people reach out to let me know that and to let our caucus know that.

I actually know that Manitobans also reach out to this minister and members of the PC caucus to express that because I'm often cc'd on that correspondence. And so, you know, I think it's reasonable for me, as I ask questions about, you know, Estimates, specific questions, I think it's important to also provide opportunities for the minister to try and instill a little bit of hope in Manitobans that, you know, her perspective on these really important matters reflects that she's putting the health of Manitobans first.

So I tried to provide that opportunity to the minister; disappointing the minister had no interest in that—taking that opportunity.

But I will will move on to a question that is really important in regards to the number of positions and, specifically, vacant positions and the vacancy rates for NICU at St. Boniface and HSC.

Can the minister provide me with the number of positions—vacant positions and the vacancy rate for NICU at St. Boniface and HSC?

Ms. Gordon: I'd like to request a five-minute break, please.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been requested—a five-minute break. Is that agreed? [*Agreed*]

The committee recessed at 11:55 a.m.

The committee resumed at 12:01 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Union Station.

MLA Asagwara: So, I'd like to just hear from the minister whether or not the information around overtime for nurses will be provided. I know the minister had said earlier that they were working on getting that information and providing it today, but I'm wondering if the minister would be willing to take it as an undertaking.

And I was also waiting for a response to my previous question from the minister as well.

Thanks.

Ms. Gordon: I want to just share, because I'm so pleased and proud about the new state-of-the-art Women's Hospital here in the city of Winnipeg, province of Manitoba, where many babies are born. I know, for myself, my first son was born, actually, during the storm of 1986, and it was at the former women's pavilion, they called it, in the Women's Hospital. And I was—I'm so pleased to see that we have a new state-of-the-art Women's Hospital that is improving care for Manitoba's families.

And that new Women's Hospital at Health Sciences Centre, it opened on December 1st, back in 2019, and at the tune of \$232.9 million. It's providing women, children and families with a state-of-the-art facility where highly skilled staff are delivering excellent care.

It's the largest capital Health project in Manitoba's history and reflects our government's continued commitment to improving Manitoba's health-care system not just for today but for the future. And the new fill-facility is helping the dedicated staff at Health Sciences Centre, our provincial hospital, Manitoba's hospital, to provide the highest possible standard of care to women, their babies and families for generations to come.

And so the new three thousand eight hundred and three thousand eighty-eight five hundred square-foot hospital is located, like, right on the corner, there, at 665 William Ave., and is home to in-patient and outpatient obstetrical, surgical and medical services, currently, that were being provided at the women's pavilion at 735 Notre Dame.

And again, it's a \$232.9-million facility and it's three times larger than the previous space. And it's bringing together the staff and services that were currently—that were previously dispersed across three neonatal intensive-care units spread across the HSC campus.

And, you know, I can share a little bit of personal information, that my second son was—spent some time—he was actually born at the Victoria General Hospital but spent some time in the NICU, the neonatal intensive-care unit, after he had to have a few surgeries shortly after he was born.

And I can tell you that bringing together the spaces that were located across three dispersed neonatal intensive-care units under one roof at the new Women's Hospital is something that I'm very pleased to learn about.

Construction on the facility was substantially completed in February of 2019. But I'm pleased, again, that it was opened on December 1st, and I celebrate that for the women in our province that are looking for facilities—state-of-the-art facilities—and modern services in terms of delivering babies and for other women's health care.

* (12:10)

So, the new facilities, I mentioned before, will improve the patient experience for families across the province, but it also has modern design standards. Most people don't think about the design or the structure of a building. They tend to focus more on the services that are inside, but the design standards will improve—are improving work flow for staff and privacy and comfort for patients and their families.

I remember when I delivered at the women's pavilion, there were no private rooms, and so I'm hearing some great news about this facility and that it also incorporates security features and new technology that are enhancing care and enable specialized care to be provided remotely and some—it's actually allowing some patients to remain or return closer to home while continuing to be cared for by incredibly skilled staff. And I'm sure during the—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable minister's time has expired.

MLA Asagwara: The minister's unwillingness or lack of ability to provide clear information that she has readily available to some pretty direct and important questions in this Estimates committee regarding Health is shameful. It really and truly is.

I'm going to cede my remaining time for today to the member for River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): To the minister: I have a limited amount of time and a number of questions. I wonder if she could keep her responses short or have them taken under advisement so she could provide the answers later.

First of all, as the minister knows, I've been a strong advocate for getting funding under medicare for the processors for the cochlear implants, and that was included in the budget, and for that I thank the minister.

Is that funding now available for people who want processors or need a processor upgrade, or is that going to be starting at some later date?

Ms. Gordon: I—with regard to the member's question, more information will follow after the Thompson by-election blackout, but I do have a response to a previous question that the member for River Heights asked regarding the home-care hub. And so I'd like to provide that information now.

In collaboration with the Canadian Home Care Association, a knowledge network hub with representation from each RHA was established to support the work under way to address the recommendations contained in the OAG's report. The hub utilized the Canadian Home Care Association's expertise and the Home Care Knowledge Network to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations.

The hub's first goal was to define core home-care services and to what extent they are available in the regions. This determination was central in meeting

many of the other OAG recommendations. Consultations were held in each RHA to identify gaps and explore potential solutions in meeting this goal.

The hub then reviewed policies and standards in order to prioritize those that should be updated first, with a plan that, as policies are revised, performance measurement will be included to improve accountability and provide for greater forecasting and analysis of future trends and current conditions. The hub evaluated present performance measures used within each RHA with respect to service timelines and reliability.

In the clinical and preventative services plan this hub work was identified as a good initiative to start to enable care planning across the province. Since the approval and release of the CPSP plan, an implementation project on home- and community-care modernization has been advanced.

The project has been working on modernized models and approaches for home care that will expand services to Manitobans. Initiatives will be introduced in stages over the coming months and years. The process will include consultation with stakeholders and patients.

So I'm pleased to respond to an earlier question from the—posed by the member of River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister for that.

My second question relates to the coverage of Suboxone. Now, this deals with a question which I raised in the Legislature yesterday in question period.

One of the major problems in treating people with addiction is that they need to be treated when they are ready to be treated. One of the problems that people in—physicians in the RAAM clinics are finding is that people who come in for addictions treatment are often, you know, whether they were rich businessmen or whether they were—had been homeless people before, are in a desperate situation. They've exhausted their money; they're not on EIA or other—have no insurance coverage, and so they need to be started right away on Suboxone,

And so it really is critical that there be an option for people who don't have other coverage for the Suboxone or other compound which is similar to be used and to be covered under medicare. I think the Pharmacare program falls under the minister's purview and I would just ask the minister to take this concern very seriously and she what she can do.

* (12:20)

Ms. Gordon: Hi there—oh, sorry—thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

I do want to just clarify that the Pharmacare program is a universal, income-tested program. So it means that the—an individual—individuals with the least ability to pay pay the lowest deductible. Likewise, an individual with the greatest ability to pay pays the highest deductible. Those who have no ability to pay are supported through the Department of Families income assistance—Employment and Income Assistance Program. So, this is to ensure that no one falls through the cracks.

And I also want to share with the member that in this room, after the Department of Health Committee of Supply and Estimates has concluded, Mental Health and Community Wellness will follow, if the member so chooses to bring that forward, in terms of Suboxone, to that minister. The Ministry of Families is—will—is also in room 255. That can be brought forward, in terms of EIA supports.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, the problem, in terms of EIA, is that it may take several weeks to come into effect, and—so that the Suboxone is not immediately available for people who need it for addictions treatment if the person is not on EIA, which unfortunately does happen.

Now, my next question deals with two things: one is TRIKAFTA. The—Health Canada has approved it now for cystic fibrosis for ages six to 11. The Canadian agency for drugs and technologies in Canada, CADTH, has approved it.

I'm hopeful that the minister will see if it can be approved quickly in Manitoba for children with cystic fibrosis ages six to 11.

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for River Heights for the question.

I was pleased last fall to announce the listing of TRIKAFTA on the provincial formulary. And when we first listed it back in the fall, we did it consistent with the expert advice of CADTH.

So, based on the information the member has shared, I will certainly take that back to the department and our Pharmacare branch and—because we always want to review evolving recommendations. So, I can't give a firm answer as to the direction we'll be taking, but I can say that we will review the

evolving recommendation that the member has shared today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, my next question deals with—I know there's multiple departments involved, but I would like to know what, if anything, her department is doing in terms of preventing the adverse health effects of exposure to lead and to radon, two toxic substances which are all too prevalent in Manitoba.

Ms. Gordon: I'm pleased to respond to the question posed about our department's role in preventing lead and radon.

So, our role is generally, through Public Health, to provide scientific and medical advice and advisors to departments that are more closely linked with that work, so climate and parks, and other departments. And we certainly don't want to overlap or operate at cross-purposes with the other departments.

So, that is the role of the Health Ministry is—again, Dr. Roussin quite often at the table and the discussions related to lead—

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 12:30 p.m., committee rise.

ROOM 255

ADVANCED EDUCATION, SKILLS AND IMMIGRATION

* (10:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): Order. 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 Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): I do, Mr. Chair.

Good morning. I am pleased to be here today to discuss Budget 2022 as it relates to the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration.

I'd like to, first of all, before I begin my opening remarks, to let you know that I have with me here for Committee of Supply Eric Charron, my Deputy Minister for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration; Melissa Ballantyne, the assistant deputy minister of Finance and Corporate Services; Karmel Chartrand, assistant deputy minister, Immigration

Pathways Division; and Mr. Joe Funk, assistant deputy minister for Advanced Education Division.

I'd like to take this opportunity to reiterate that Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine is tragic, and our government condemns the events taking place right now. Our Ukrainian task force continues to work 'collaborally' with our partners to ensure we are welcoming and supporting Ukrainian citizens as they face this humanitarian crisis. As part of our support, we have expedited applications and waived the \$500 Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program application fee for citizens applying from Ukraine.

Up to 300 Ukrainian refugees will arrive—have arrived, actually, this past Monday, in Manitoba. It was one of the first of three federally arranged chartered flights. The Ukraine community, in partnership with governments, is providing much-needed supplies and services to help these newcomers settle and adjust.

We will continue to welcome Ukrainians and provide support through the reception centre, including intake services to determine needs, temporary accommodations and meals for those without Manitoba connections and orientation and referral services through Manitoba Start. We will continue these efforts and work closely with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to implement enhanced measures for Ukrainian citizens that will facilitate the movement of Ukrainians who want to leave their country temporarily or permanently.

The pandemic has changed our world and economy in ways that we could not have imagined. Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration continues to adapt, and through our collaborative approach with our post-secondary industry, Indigenous and immigration partners, we will recover together. Our Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy is foundational for helping create the pathway to employment and better economic opportunities for Manitobans. Significant work is under way on many of the targeted actions under the four pillars to build stronger partnerships between post-secondary institutions: immigration, training and employment services and labour market needs.

Under pillar 2 of the strategy, we are increasing partnerships between post-secondary institutions and industry to align education and training to labour market needs and help students succeed now and in the future. This will ensure students gain the right skills

and competencies to thrive, increase Manitoba's participation rate in post-secondary education and help all students succeed.

This includes the recently announced Post-Secondary Accountability Framework, which will build on post-secondary accountability to encourage stronger outcomes for students while addressing the recommendations, including in the Auditor General's independent audit report on it, of the oversight of post-secondary institutions. The framework is a significant step in the government's implementation of Manitoba's Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy and will ensure Manitoba's education and skills training systems are building the solid foundation on which to form our future workforce.

I'd like to thank all of our dedicated front-line workers who have worked tirelessly over the last two years. We know that there are nursing shortages globally and across Canada. In partnership with our post-secondary institutions, we are moving forward with the commitment to add a total of 400 new nursing training seats in Manitoba to help fill the identified nursing vacancy gap.

As part of a multi-phase plan that started in 2021-22, Budget 2022 provides funding for up to 259 seats to increase the supply of nurses into the Manitoba workforce. Attracting and retaining skilled workers, biz investors and international students while also ensuring newcomers can work in their regulated profession is a key theme as the fourth pillar under the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy and a core focus for our department.

Immigration will play a critical role in Manitoba's post-secondary economic recovery. Immigration contributes to strong communities and a strong economy. Our Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program is well renowned and brings thousands of qualified, skilled workers to Manitoba each year.

The newly established Immigration Advisory Council is reviewing the entire continuum of immigration to provide recommendations to strengthen Manitoba's immigration programs, building on the success of our Provincial Nominee Program. The focus of the expert panel will build on promotion to attract and recruit more immigrants and biz investors to the province, help streamline the Manitoba—sorry, the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program by 'setly' the right balance between our regional labour market, economic development and communities and foster Manitoba's settlement and integration programs and

services as well as foreign credential recognition and bolster immigration retention.

I was pleased to see the federal 2022 budget included new commitments and supports for immigration and refugee initiatives. This includes support for the processing and settlement of new permanent residents and facilitation of the timely and efficient entry of a growing number of visitors, workers and students.

However, we will continue to advocate with the federal government to expand our annual immigration levels with the aim of welcoming more new Manitobans to contribute to the growth and prosperity of our province. We will welcome and encourage more immigrants to come to Manitoba, the home of hope, where they can enjoy the job opportunities our province can offer.

* (10:10)

This year, we will invest more than \$5 million in the newcomer integration support program to contribute to the network of services that help connect newcomers to our communities and find good jobs. The department continues to promote access to Advanced Education opportunities for Manitobans through strong, competitive post-secondary institutions with programming that supports successful outcomes for students.

As the pandemic eases into an endemic, economic recovery and growth remains a top priority. Under pillar of the—1 of the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy, the department will continue to work closely with post-secondary institutions and employers to anticipate the skills needed for the future so Manitobans can gain the right skills to succeed and build their careers here at home.

Budget 2022 provides more than \$700 million to post-secondary institutions, plus additional funds to support priority maintenance to their facilities. We remain committed to supporting students so they can pursue and complete a post-secondary education.

Manitoba is a place of innovation and many Manitobans have a successful entrepreneurial spirit. We want to do more to leverage our creativity and ingenuity in post-secondary systems to assist in recovery, spur economic growth, innovation and research breakthroughs. Under pillar 3 of the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy, we will continue to strengthen the collaboration between academia and industry to support research and develop and foster entrepreneurial and innovative skills.

Ensuring access to higher education is a foundational to Manitoba's Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy. Loans, scholarships and bursaries allow more students to access and complete quality post-secondary education. The department continues to seek opportunities to improve student access to education and training. Our programs and financial supports assist students and adult learners to pursue educational pathways to develop the skills needed to contribute to a high quality of life in Manitoba.

The Manitoba bursary provides eligible students with upfront, non-repayable bursaries to assist them with costs of their education. Students are automatically considered for these programs when they submit their application to—for Manitoba and Canada student loans, reducing red tape for students. Last year, the program increased its budget to almost \$17.3 million, benefiting for 11,000 students, including over 1,500 Indigenous students. This year, we have increased the budget to \$21.1 million and anticipate it'll even benefit more students.

We will continue to work in partnership with Indigenous communities. Our support to adult learning and literacy programs also helps Manitobans pursue education. Budget 2022 provides four—\$20.3 million to continue our support for adult learning centres and literacy at ages throughout Manitoba.

As we move forward with our post-pandemic recovery, we remain committed to listening to our stakeholders to ensure we are creating opportunities to build the skills and talent needed for a stronger economy and brighter, more 'positry'—

Mr. Chairperson: The minister's time has expired, and we thank the Minister for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration for those comments.

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

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I want to begin by welcoming all the new immigrants who have made their way to Manitoba, whether it's been over the past year or more recently, and that's—particular those immigrants who arrived here from Ukraine. We understand the difficult struggle that it's been, dealing with the war-torn nation as a result of the violent attacks by Putin's regime. We are so thankful that you are here in Manitoba and we hope to be able to welcome you into our community.

And I think that, in that welcoming, we also recognize that the government here has a lot more

responsibility and a lot more that it could be doing to support new immigrants into Manitoba. Namely, we could be seeing more supports for settlement services, ensuring that there are settlement service workers available to assist new and landed immigrants in our province.

And, additionally, we could also see, and also call for and continue to call for, additional supports for those educated professionals from outside of this country to be able to find a way, a pathway—their skills to be used and for them to continue in their profession right here in Manitoba and have some of those barriers that they may face, being an internationally educated professional, for them to find work, find a career here using the skills and the knowledge that they've already built up. We call on the government to do more to break those barriers down and find opportunities for those international educated professionals.

As part of that, we see for—as part of that plan to support newcomers but also to support Manitobans—are here. There's a gross underresourced adult education system that we have in Manitoba and a huge need to improve that system, to have a resource and have it available for people in Manitoba to educate themselves, to get the literacy skills that they need to find work and find success in Manitoba and for them to get their education that they need, you know, whether that's just getting up to that grade 12 level through an adult education system that has spaces available for those who want to take those courses, and affordable rates, that has resources, supportive—attached to it, that will actually support individual success.

And these are—there's models out there that we can look to, that we can use in Manitoba, models that would encompass a child-care program for single parents or parents who need child care in order to get educated, ones that would support them through transportation to get to classes or other needs that would allow them to be successful in getting an education and allow them to be more fully participant in our economy.

Additionally, we see great—we've seen great upheaval in our post-secondary system, upheaval that was essentially caused by this government's actions. We saw a massive strike—longest strike in University of Manitoba's history this past year. And that's because this government's interference into the labour negotiations—saying that wages had to be at a certain level. And it prevented a proper, free and fair negotiation.

This is a huge issue, not just for the faculty that were on strike, but for the thousands of students in Manitoba that were affected, and the thousands of potential students that saw, that thought—or thinking about education. Maybe they're in high school and looking at the choices they're going to make for their post-secondary institution. When they see that the government doesn't value post-secondary education in this province, it's going to make their choice to leave little bit more easier, so it's such a misguided step to save—to attempt to save some money by interfering in negotiation but, in fact, causing so much more pain and economic depression in our province that it's—you know, we call on the government to take a different course.

We're happy that there was a resolution in that strike but we continue to see difficult times for students with continued and ever-increasing—at a rapid rate—tuition and student fees. And this tuition increase is mounted on the fact that there hasn't been a government grant to post-secondary institutions that would match. In fact, we've seen quite the opposite. That grant that's given from the government to post-secondary has remained flat or been decreased over the last few years under this PC government.

And then the burden of that extra cost has been placed on the backs of students, with their increase raising—their tuition increase going in many cases to near a 50-50 split of funding. Nearly half of the funding for some institutions very soon will be—almost half of the funding for U of W, for instance, will be paid for based on the tuition of their students. That's—wasn't the case even just six years ago.

* (10:20)

And when we see an economy where we have low and stagnant minimum wage because of this government's choices, where we see high inflation, challenges for young people to get work or high-paying jobs, and at the same time we see ever-increasing and rapidly increasing tuition, it makes it extremely difficult for a young person to see themselves going into university and being successful without taking an extremely large debt. And that is a huge problem onto the opportunities that a young person might face as they're trying to educate themselves and get into our economy and our labour force in Manitoba.

We also have seen the upheaval—the—that the government's caused in our post-secondary system through the issues that people have had accessing Student Aid, and some students who needed, who qualified and ought to have receive their Student Aid

simply not get it because of this government's failure to deliver on them receiving Student Aid.

We've also seen this government propose and basically inflict an unwanted, unneeded and, frankly, damaging proposal for performance-based funding for our post-secondary institutions; and addition, the idea of a differential tuition where you would pay different levels of tuition based on the type of program that you're taking. And these ideas have failed in other jurisdictions. It's unwanted, uncalled for by administration, by faculty, by students, and it serves no purpose to benefit institutions in Manitoba.

So I call, again, on the government to revise its—this ill-thought plan and actually listen to the needs and the items that students are calling for to actually make post-secondary institutions a better place.

And so, Mr. Chair, I'll leave my opening comments there. But, again, I want to thank the staff in the department for the work they've done over the year. But I also want to recognize that we call on this government to do so much more by students, by faculty, by administrations, by the newcomer immigrants who are landing here in Manitoba, because we know that we need all of them in order for us to build a better and brighter Manitoba.

Thank you.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department on the Committee Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 44.1.(a), contained in resolution 44.1.

And, 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 questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Moses: Can the minister undertake to give a list of all technical appointments in the department, including names and titles, and as well give an organizational chart that lists all employees and program areas?

Mr. Reyes: To answer the question from my critic, the technical staff, all I have is my special assistant, Madhur Sharma. And the organization's structure

is actually listed on page 12 of the Budget 2022 Supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure.

Mr. Moses: I also was asking the minister if he can undertake to provide an organizational chart that lists the programs in the last question, and I was also wondering if the minister could provide a current list of vacancies in the department.

Mr. Reyes: As I indicated in my response, the critic can go to page 12 of the Supplement to the Estimates of expenditure. However, I will read to him some of the organizational structure in this—with this question.

We have executive support, which oversees the development and implementation of departmental policies and programs that are designed to achieve the goals set out in the department's mandate.

We have the finance and corporate services that provides corporate leadership and co-ordination of strategic initiatives, financial management, legislative and regulatory development and information technology services to support the department and related agencies in achieving their mandates. I'll let him note that Corporate Services, including financial services, are a shared service provider to Economic Development, Investment and Trade and Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration.

There is also the policy and performance, which contributes to the co-ordinated and effective delivery of the department's mandate through policy expertise and data analytics. The division is also responsible for leading Manitoba's engagement intergovernmental forums related to advanced education, adult learning and immigration.

As well as advanced education, Advanced Education provides direction, funding and/or regulatory oversight to Manitoba's publicly funded universities, colleges, private religious institutions, private vocational institutions and apprenticeship to ensure positive outcomes for students, communities and the economy. The division is responsible for ensuring a sustainable, fiscally responsible and accountable post-secondary education system that delivers programs aligned with labour market needs.

The Student Access and Success division helps remove barriers to student success, including financial and skill barriers and promotes access to advanced education. The division is responsible for ensuring programs and financial supports are also available to help students and adult learners pursue educational pathways to develop the skills needed to participate

fully in the community and contribute to a growing economy.

The Immigration Pathways Division contributes to economic growth and strong communities through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program and working with partners to promote the province as a destination of choice for international talent to study, work and live. The division also works with regulators through the Fair Registration Practices Office to reduce barriers to employment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: Can the minister state how many vacancies there are currently in the department?

Mr. Reyes: Mr. Chair, as of the end of February, we had 39 vacancies. However, there is actually 10 in the process in March and April.

* (10:30)

Mr. Moses: I just want to clarify, you said there are 10 in the process of being hired? Is that right?

Mr. Reyes: There is 12 in active recruitment as we speak.

Mr. Moses: Thank you very much, Minister, I was—appreciate that information.

Just looking into the supplement of Estimates expenditure book, on page 29, it goes through the department expenditures.

I was wondering, in the expense type—can categorize other expenditures, the amount is \$4 million—\$4.7 million, basically. And it was decreased from 6.5 in the previous year.

I wonder if the minister can explain and detail what is considered other expenditures and why it has decreased from last year to this year.

Mr. Reyes: I want to thank the critic for the question in terms of—with respect to other expenditures.

And the reason why there's a decrease, the other expenditures involve—include day-to-day operations of the offices across departments, and there is a one-time reduction because—due to the IT scoping cost that we have within it—our departments—IT scoping costs.

Mr. Moses: So the IT costs were in the 2021-22 year and they're—and now that system is implemented, is that right? And now it's no longer needed—those costs are no longer incurred for this coming year.

Can you just provide more clarity on what that IT system was and what department it's in?

Mr. Reyes: The IT scoping costs for 2021-22 was scoping out the integration of the student IT program with the federal program—so, the loan systems.

And in 2022-23 we moved into implementing that which is capitalized. So we've, in this case, reduced the administrative cost—an administrative burden on students. So before, it—it's—it was a one-student-to-two-loans model which are now going to a one-student-to-one-loan model similar to other provinces.

Mr. Moses: I thank the minister for his question—for his response.

And I wanted to ask, speaking of that Student Aid system and merging it with the federal program, how much money do—does the minister anticipate would be saved by this integration, and will that money be reinvested back in to benefit students?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister—and I'll just remind the minister, just, if you're waving, just wave your hand a little higher because I—from the screen I'm seeing—there we go, that's great. Thank you.

Mr. Reyes: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I saw that pensive look on your face, so I apologize. I'll put my hand higher.

So the one-student-one-loan model that we're going into is going to reduce the administrative burden on the student. It's going to save time and effort on both the student and our staff, so it'll create a win-win for both parties and, ultimately, the province of Manitoba because we're going to a model of convenience for the students.

Mr. Moses: I thank the minister for the clarity on that.

It will save, you know, effort for students and for the department. There—in saving effort for the department, it must also have some sort of cost benefit. So I'm wondering if the minister can outline, what is this financial savings from this integration, and is there a plan to use that financial savings to reinvest and to benefit students in another way?

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, the honourable minister.

Mr. Reyes: I'm glad you saw my hand. That was very high enough there, Mr. Chair.

So, yes, well, it's going to save time and effort not only for the students but for the staff. And the staff will be able to prior—have other—he can address other priorities, and in this case a lot of these services will be a lot of the front-line services that students require,

because we have a lot of students that require these services and supports. And as I've always said, any time that we can enhance—improve and enhance government services, this is one of them.

So, with that one-student-one-loan approach that we are taking, it'll be convenient for both parties and it will definitely be useful for the staff and department to address other issues that students will require.

Mr. Moses: So I guess I'm hearing from the minister that there's no set financial line item, or there's a benefit gain because of this integration system. It's more just in terms of staff time.

Staff will, I guess—we assume the staff will now reinvest their time into benefiting front-line needs of students. In terms of an actual line item, we're saving this much dollars in the department. I can infer that's what the minister's saying as well.

* (10:40)

But I want to ask again, on this issue, from the students' perspective, will there be a clear, detailed breakdown in terms of when they receive their monthly billing for the loans as to what is part of the national student loan services and what is the Manitoba portion, and so that they can clearly identify whether it's from the federal or from the Province?

Mr. Reyes: In terms of the clear monthly breakdown, Canada, in this case, will be handling all the communications in terms of the federal support and provincial support.

However, this will—as I've said before, it'll be a convenience for the student to have a one-student-one-loan-approach system when it comes to Student Aid. Our government is committed to supporting these students, you know, in terms of post-secondary education costs. We're taking immediate action to ensure students' first line of information is going to be safe.

We recognize that in-person service is valued and that's why, you know, the staff will have that much more time with this one-student-one-loan system in order to keep students and staff members working together in a more convenient way so that they can be serviced more efficiently.

We continue to promote access to Advanced Education opportunities for Manitobans through strong, competitive post-secondary institutions providing the quality educations that they come to expect. So—and we're going to continue to also invest in—\$1 billion each year in post-secondary education.

These institutions in Manitoba have adapted throughout the pandemic to ensure that faculty, staff and students will remain safe; and they've adjusted accordingly, enhancing, also, mental health supports, because that's very important, especially during these past two years, and counselling services.

In my conversations with the PSI presidents, they continue to provide as much guidance and engagement with the students. I know that my department is routinely communicating with the PSI leaders because we have to adjust accordingly in this—in the type of world we live in.

We've learned a lot from the two years of the pandemic that we've had. We know that we are ultimately getting to that endemic, and we just want to ensure that the Student Aid aspect of the division goes to this one-student-one-loan system, which will convenient our post-secondary students across our province. It'll, as I said, free up the time for our staff, our—my—the hard-working staff that we have in Student Aid.

It'll also give them time to allow them to meet and discuss within the department on how we can continually improve addressing Student Aid. How can we give those—Student Aid in a timely manner? We always have to re-evaluate what we can do with our programs and services. Student Aid is doing that. They're continuing to do that.

We are listening to stakeholders; we are listening to stakeholders in terms of improving these services. And the best stakeholders to discuss this with is when the Student Aid staff have these one-on-one engagements when they're servicing these students, because we will—we learn always in terms of when they are inconvenienced. That does happen. This is not a perfect world, but that's why we're always trying to improve and enhance the system and, in this case, through a one-student-one-loan system—service for students.

So, thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question from the critic.

Mr. Moses: I thank the minister for his response to that.

The reason I'm asking about that monthly breakdown between provincial and federal is because, as the minister knows, the Manitoba Student Aid is interest-free, whereas there's interest on the federal one; it's not interest-free. So I want to know if that's going to be clearly identified to the students when they're making those payments so that they understand that the Manitoba program is continuing to

remain interest-free. And if it's not, I hope the minister can clarify that.

So I want to know if that breakdown's going to be able to show the difference between federal and Province, if that's going to be clear after this merger and clearly stated that one is continuing to remain interest-free and the other is—has interest associated with it and, you know, whether the minister will again commit to saying that the Manitoba Student Aid will continue to remain interest-free.

Mr. Reyes: Yes, I want to thank the critic for the question.

And yes, the Manitoba program has been interest-free, and with this one-student-one-loan program, the Canada student portion—the Student Aid portion—is indeed correct with his statements. And that's why we are going to go with the program of this one-student-one-loan program, so it's convenient and reduces the administrative burden on the student, will give more time for the staff to focus on other front-line services for students that are required, as we know, as I've said.

We have many, many students who depend on Student Aid. We want to ensure as a Province, as a government, to ensure that we have these aids in place for the students, because we know that post-secondary education is one of the variables, is part of the variables to ensure that we have a successful and growing economy, because we know that it is a crucial enabler of the economy. And that's why Student Aid, in terms of this one-student-one-loan process, is there for the student.

Mr. Moses: Thank you, Minister, for the clarity on that, that the Manitoba portion will remain interest free, the federal program will still continue to have interest.

And so just because, as you mentioned, the communications, I think, as you said, for the monthly billing will be done by—administered by the federal government—I think that's what you mentioned. So to answer this question, whether there will be clarity between the federal and the provincial portions of it, is that a question that I need to ask of the federal minister?

Mr. Reyes: I know Student Aid works really closely with the federal government. They actually have monthly meetings with them. Student Aid is committed to ensuring Manitobans have access to higher education by providing Student Aid and financial supports.

* (10:50)

Just to let the member know, last year, 20–last year, the department—actually, in 2020–21—dispersed approximately \$254 million on behalf of the Manitoba Student Aid program, so over 17,000 students in provincial and federal student loans, grants and bursaries. We increased the Manitoba bursary budget to \$21.1 million, as it is anticipated to benefit even more students.

We also invested \$15 million in the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative, and with the support of fundraising, this provided a record level of \$33 million to nearly 22,500 students.

Back to the last question—to be fair to my critic, the students will see on their portal page the breakdown between the federal and Manitoba loans. So, Student Aid—back to his question originally—has a close relationship with the federal government. They have monthly meetings with the other jurisdictions, as well, on how to improve and enhance services with Student Aid.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: I want to ask the minister, I know that there are still some students, I believe, who are waiting for their financial aid since the winter term because of technical difficulties that were being—that they were having with administrating—administering the figures, the amounts for students.

What will this merger have on those students who might still be waiting for some of the student loans from the winter term?

Mr. Reyes: We know that Manitoba Student Aid has experienced some technical difficulties with one of its IT platforms, and we had the similar type of issues back in December with the provincial and federal Student Aid systems experiencing a delay in confirming the enrolment of students with their schools.

We understand the important role that Manitoba Student Aid plays in supporting post-secondary students, and that is why are government has invested more than \$254 million to over 17,000 students in Manitoba.

We're going to continue to invest in the post-secondary institutions to support our students and—but that is noted. We know that we have to be up to date when it comes to these platforms. Last year, Student Aid processed over 22,000 Student Aid applications, as well, just to let the member know.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: I appreciate the minister's comments, and I, you know, I recognize and believe his sincerity with trying to resolve the issues with Student Aid.

I would like to know if the minister can provide clarity on exactly how many students are still experiencing issues and without the full amount of their, you know, their owed Student Aid as a result of this problem right now, and if any of those students would have issues during the merger to the federal program, the one-loan-one-student program?

Mr. Reyes: I'm glad that the critic is aware and is understandable that there have been delays because of the IT system, the technical difficulties that we've had.

To answer his question, as of April 29th, there were 238 students still waiting. But what I can tell him is that they are working on it to ensure that these students will get their Student Aid as quickly as possible.

But as I've said, we've invested more than \$254 million to over 17,000 students in Manitoba and we're going to—we're very cognizant of the issues that are happening, but I know that my department is working hard to ensure they expedite the services that they can so that we can ensure that these students get their Student Aid as quickly as possible.

Mr. Moses: I thank the minister for that response.

I'm wondering, just, can he provide either an estimated—or have the IT system provided a time when they think that it would be fixed? I know a lot of times with programs they can say, oh, we'll get this fixed by a certain date. They're working towards a certain target date.

Is the minister aware of when he thinks these issues will be fixed for the 238 students that he mentioned?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Mr. Reyes: I thought I put my hand too fast, and I looked down and then didn't know if you saw it, Mr. Chair, so I apologize. I'll put up extra slower. So—I guess it's Friday. I guess I'm just pretty excited it's the end of the week.

But I'm here to answer the questions from the critic. I just want to let him know that, as I said, last year, Student Aid processed over 22,000 Student Aid applications. We know that there's 238 students that are waiting. That's 1 per cent of the total.

However, we know that every student is important, and he can be rest assured and the students can be rest assured that Student Aid—the department is working every day with the IT staff to get that system going.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: I would just say I appreciate the member—or the minister for his enthusiasm in raising his hand. I don't have to have an apology for that.

The honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses).

Mr. Moses: So I just want to clarify: the minister doesn't have a date as to when he thinks the issue will be resolved for the 238 students? Or can he provide any more clarity on that?

Mr. Reyes: As the minister for the department—and I can assure you that this is very, very important because, you know, we don't want to leave any student behind when it comes to their aid. I know that the—Student Aid is working 24-7, seven days a week to get that system up and running.

What I can assure him that we are working as, you know, with a sense of urgency to get that—you know, to get that IT support there for the students for their Student Aid. So we are moving with a sense of urgency on that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: Moving away from Student Aid questions and moving over to the government's allotment for expenditures this year, I'm wondering if the government has made a provision in this year's budget to account for the \$19-million court judgment ordered as a result of the University of Manitoba strike—if there's a line item incorporated in the budget of the department to pay for that \$19-million judgment.

Mr. Reyes: As the member is aware, I believe he was in the House when this question was answered.

When he actually asked the question—I mean, he can go to Hansard, I believe—that when it comes to this issue, we, like everyone else, take legal advice and we listen to that legal advice just like the other parties have in this case. So we are seeking further clarity and we respect the integrity of the court's process to now, and to let that unfold in—and respecting the process.

* (11:00)

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: So, in other words, since the minister and the government is appealing the decision, there's no need to budget for that \$19 million. I suppose that means that they're assuming that they will win the appeal and not have to pay the \$19 million as a result of the strike at U of M. That's what I'm inferring by the minister's comments.

So I suppose if the ruling doesn't come—and the government's failure—there's going to be an additional \$19 million of expense coming out of the department. If that does happen, has the minister put any thoughts or made a plan as to where that \$19 million is going to come from, if it isn't already budgeted?

Mr. Reyes: As my critic knows, with respect to budgeted Estimates, we do plan accordingly. But, in this case, like everyone else, we will take the legal advice, as we're entitled to. And just like the other parties have in this case, we're going to be seeking further clarity.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: So, if I just get this picture right, the, you know, actions of the government caused the strike at U of M. They went to trial and lost in trial and now have to pay \$19 million back to the faculty association. They appealed that ruling and, instead of planning to actually pay the \$19 million, they're trying to appeal it and fight that in court, but yet have no contingency if they do end up having to pay that, in which case, they're likely going to have to, you know, take it or cut it from another part or portion of this—of the department.

It seems curious that that's the management strategy the minister is taking because it seems like there's a much cleaner, smoother path that would be available to them instead of taking such—one that would put such pressure on the—own department to find \$19 million halfway through a fiscal year if the ruling comes out not in the government's favour and in favour of the faculty.

It seems like, you know, there's a lot of expense going into the court trial in the first place, and so I'd like to ask the minister that: How much money has the—they spent on the court case already and how much does he anticipate will be spent as a result of this appeal and any further ongoing process?

Mr. Reyes: And I know that the member, you know, and is—the opposition have legal experts within that side of the opposition. However, as they are aware, as well, that we have to take legal advice and we want to listen to that legal advice, just like other parties have in this case, so we're going to respect the process.

What we're also going to do is we're going to—as we always have with departments—we're going to adjust accordingly. We're going to adjust accordingly in terms of how we operate things because, you know, just to let the critic know, when I did take over back in the last part of January, part of the plan was not having a war—a crisis in Ukraine. We had to adjust accordingly and we will adjust accordingly, in terms of the other divisions, and we will do what's best for the Province and for Manitoba.

I just want to remind the member that he voted against more than \$1 billion for post-secondary education. He voted against the \$33 million in the Manitoba Bursary Program that was in Budget 2022. He voted against the \$19.3 million to expand the nursing seat commitment.

He's—talks about about newcomer supports, but he voted against the \$5.1 million in newcomer support. He talks about adult education and literacy; he voted against more than \$20.3 million for the adult literacy program. And he's voted against much-needed tax relief for our students and newcomers to make life more affordable.

We will adjust accordingly. We will make life more affordable for Manitobans and, you know, we will respect the process.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for St. Vital. *[interjection]* Order.

Mr. Moses: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to ask the minister a little bit about international students, and if he could just provide maybe a total of enrolment in Manitoba of international students for 2021-22, and what he anticipates the enrolment of international students would be for 2022-2023.

Mr. Reyes: We know that international students is very important for our province, as we want them to study and staying here in our province.

In—for '20-21, we just had just under 11,000 international students come to the province of Manitoba to study. We don't have a figure yet in terms of 2022-2023 because that has yet to be started in terms of the total to get the—that number. But once the—that year is over, we can definitely get that in the number once that time arrives.

But when it comes to international students, I must say, you know, being the MLA for Waverley, we

have a lot of newcomers and we are at close proximity of the University of Manitoba. And I've also visited a number of post-secondary institutions, such as the Assiniboine Community College. When I walk into the facilities, and the first thing I notice right away is the many international students that are there.

The critic and I are—we are people of colour, so right away we see these folks in these post-secondary institutions, and there are many from places like India, Bangladesh, Nigeria. We both know that, you know, when we did watch the news in terms of the crisis in Ukraine, that there was a mass exodus of international students from Nigeria, from India, who are having issues when they were crossing the border. And we both agree that, you know, they were treated in a different manner, sort of, say—I guess that's what the reports said.

But what I can tell you is I've always wondered, myself, how—why do international students come to our province? How did a student from India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, China, choose Manitoba? Why? Like, why Winnipeg, Manitoba, of all places, right? And what I can tell you, very proudly as the Minister for Advanced Education, is that they've told me, Minister, it's because of the low tuition cost—one of the lowest tuitions costs that we have in western Canada.

* (11:10)

That one thing that I'm very happy and proud to hear when I talk with international students and I see their enthusiasm, their excitement in studying here, in staying here, in contributing to our economy, you know, because I've never experienced what they're going through. I mean, it's very, very admiral for a young individual coming from another country, going to a foreign land in a different environment, different culture.

But as we've always said, Manitoba is a home of hope, we are very welcoming. And sometimes I'll get a little bit emotional sometimes when I stop and think, because, you know, just this past Monday, we saw a bunch of Ukrainian citizens coming to our province who are very happy, feeling very welcome. I think of all the plights and the struggles of immigrants when they come here.

But international students choose to come to Manitoba, because when I've talked to them, you know, when you're at the grassroots level, when you go to these events or when you meet with them, they talk about how they're excited and how affordable our

province is, how they're excited to tell their friends back home, you should come to Manitoba to study.

And, you know, we've had thousands of international students come to our province who are success stories of their own now by studying and staying here. And that's why I'm very proud to have former international students that are part of my Immigration Advisory Council. They bring a lot to the table here and I'm very, very happy that our numbers are growing when it comes to that.

And I'm excited to promote all the post-secondary institutions because of the wonderful programs that they have that will benefit international students. And we will continue to ensure that we promote the low tuition costs that we have here in western Canada so that it'll attract international students so that they can study and stay here in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: I appreciate the minister's comments in regards to international students. It is very heartwarming to see international students come and settle in Manitoba and I'm so grateful for them deciding to continue their journey in Manitoba. But what we want to do is make sure that they have the supports they need to not only choose to call Manitoba home and study here but also to remain here and find jobs and be successful in Manitoba.

And, sadly, we see that there's barriers put up in their place, not only with, you know, a low minimum wage, so it's difficult for them to earn money while they're working here—of course, as the minister knows, there's a cap on the number of hours that international students can work. So if their hourly wage is low, then it's going to be—make it very challenging for them to afford living in Manitoba.

And, additionally, a big concern for international students is their health care. And as the minister knows, prior to 2018, international students were part of the health—the public health-care system, and that was changed by the PC government.

Is there a plan for the minister to reinstate international students onto the public health-care plan as they were prior to 2018? Because this is something that international students have been very vocal in terms of an issue that they are looking to see from this provincial government.

Mr. Reyes: Yes, we are both in agreement, for sure, that international students are a very important part of the equation of economic success when it comes to

the province of Manitoba, the home of hope. And that's why, you know, they've had a lot of aspirations coming here and studying here, and as I've said before, when I do see them, I see them and I talk to them and I ask them, why did they come to Manitoba? And they tell me, time and time again, it's because of the low tuition fees, one of the lowest tuition fees we have in western Canada.

We remain committed to supporting international students wanting to study and stay here in Manitoba. We benefit from the diverse perspectives of international students that bring to our—that brings to our classrooms and communities.

You mentioned about the number of hours worked and all that stuff there, and I must say, we have had some very fruitful conversations when it comes to my Immigration Advisory Council because we've talked about, you know, some of these issues when it comes to specifically international students. So I want to share that with the critic because the critic knows that my door is always open when it comes to sharing ideas, brainstorming on how we can improve and enhance our province. He knows that once students arrive—and they continue to arrive in Manitoba with an estimated 12,500 students studying in our province as of 2021 in the fall.

We've added 27 public and private post-secondary institutions to the federal government's approved list of designated learning institutions. And these institutions meet all provincial and federal Health requirements. He knows that, when international students come here, they do have health-care coverage; they are automatically enrolled once they're enrolled. They have health-care coverage through the post-secondary institutions and the plans that each institution provides.

So—but, specifically, when it comes to health care, you know, we have talked with Shared Health, we have talked to organizations—student organizations—when it comes to this issue. And that question—you know, take note of that, and I'll take note of that—it should be directed to our Health Ministry, and we'll work together.

I know that, as the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, I am the bridge and gateway when it comes to post-secondary leaders and our students. And I am here, at your service, to communicate this message, because at the end of the day—and say to my critic, we have the same goal.

The same goal is: How do we make lives easier for our international students when they come here? Because, also in my role as the Minister of Immigration, we want them not only to study here, but we want them to stay here, because we know as well that immigration is also a crucial enabler for the economy.

Our economy is recovering, our economy continues to grow, and part of that equation is international students; they are already here. And that's why I was very happy that, you know, last year, our Department of Immigration was able to process just under 63 applications through our Provincial Nominee Program, the most ever—during a pandemic, I may add.

So, and I've had constant—constant—engagements, meetings with international students myself, and I've met with some of these student groups. So, you know, I'm here to listen, my door is always open, as the critic is aware. We have the same goal; we empathize with international students coming from these countries. Again, as I say, it's very admiral of them to study in another country, learning the culture, learning the environment that they're in, learning the new systems that they're in.

But, at the end of the day, our Province wants to ensure that we take care of the international students when they come here to the province of Manitoba, not only to study, but to stay here.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: There's been a lot that the minister covered there, so I have a few points to touch on.

First, he said one of the great reasons that international students come here is because of the low tuition. Then why is the minister continuing to increase tuition at such a rapid rate? Doesn't that just make Manitoba less attractive to international students, who we ought to be encouraging, as the minister says, such a valuable asset for our province?

Second, I believe the minister mentioned that there are about 12,500 international students in his last response. His response before that, he said that there are about 11,000, so I want to get clarity about how many international students are there in Manitoba now. Two questions ago, he said 11,000; last question he said 12,500, I believe. If you could just provide some clarity on that.

* (11:20)

And then the other point is, for international student health care, we've—you mentioned speaking with the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon). The Minister of Health has consistently said that it needs to be the Minister of Advanced Education. We've had this shuffling back and forth between two ministers, and international students are being caught in the middle. They deserve so much better than to hear the Minister of Health say, go to Minister of Advanced Education, and the Minister of Advanced Education say, go to the Minister of Health. They deserve so much better than that.

And so I ask the minister again: Is he considering fully reinstating international students onto the public health-care plan?

Mr. Reyes: One thing that I can tell my critic is that our government is committed to having one of the lowest tuition fees in western Canada.

With respect to the numbers, the academic year for 2020-2021, there were 10,775 international students. For the fall of 2021, there was 12,000. And this year—the year has not been completed yet, so we don't have those numbers. But I—what I can tell the critic, as well, is that we are committed to improving programs and services, which includes international students in my department as well.

As I've said, you know, post-secondary is under my purview and, in this case, international students. And we will continue to communicate with the other departments with the issues that the critic is raising because we have to work together in terms of making sound decisions that will make—ensure that we are improving those programs and services and benefits for those who come to study and stay in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: In terms of operating funding, can the minister take me through how much operating funding is being provided by post-secondary institutions for the upcoming academic year? And can he express that in terms of percentages over last year?

Mr. Reyes: I just want to let my critic know that Budget 2022—the budget that he voted against—provides more than \$700 million to post-secondary institutions, plus additional funds to support priority maintenance to their facilities. We remain committed to supporting students so that they can pursue and complete a post-secondary education.

I also want him to know that part of that \$700 million provided to post-secondary institutions

also is directed towards interprovincial training agreements that we have as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: So, I'll ask the minister, you know, about—that we've heard about—a bit about the plans for differential tuition. We've heard some of that from some of our institutions.

Can the minister, you know, clearly outline for us what this plan looks like? What does this mean for institutions with programs that will see higher tuition? And has the government received any applications from post-secondary institutions regarding differential tuitions for programming?

Mr. Reyes: As the member is aware, we have ongoing consultations—ongoing—because we want to ensure Manitoba students have access to quality post-secondary education and it's a top priority for our Province for the 2022-23 academic year.

We know that tuition increases were kept to a maximum of 3.75 per cent for universities and \$250 per course for colleges, ensuring our post-secondary institutions remain competitive while providing the quality education Manitobans have come to expect.

So as I've said, we are consulting with our post-secondary partners, faculty associations, student associations, students and other Manitobans. Their input will provide invaluable information for the development of a new tuition and fees policy.

We are also providing an opportunity for all Manitobans—we have provided, you know, through consultation through EngageMB, which actually, this year, we actually recently closed on May 21st of this year, just a couple days ago. We've received approximately 607 responses to date. So we look forward to working with our partners. My department's very, very enthusiastic to see those responses.

Like I said, we look forward to working with our partners to develop a flexible and responsive policy that will ensure that that quality post-secondary education remains accessible and affordable for Manitoba students, while also considering the balance between student affordability, institutional sustainability and fiscal responsibility.

We are also committed to ensuring that Manitobans have access to higher education by providing student programs and financial supports. That's why back to—the one-student-one-loan initiative will free up time for Student Aid to provide front-line ser-

vices so that they can address the concerns that students may have, those other concerns that they may have.

* (11:30)

Our suite of programs include, as I've said: Manitoba student age, which provides interest-free loans—student loans; the Manitoba Bursary Program, which provides upfront bursaries to Indigenous students and low-income students; and the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative, which leverages institutional fundraising by providing matching provincial dollars for student awards.

So I just want to let the critic be aware that, you know, we are consulting EngageMB. As I said, you know, the survey closed on May 21st, and we're looking forward to looking at those 607 responses to date. And we're going to continue to engage with our stakeholders.

And, as I said, the department is routinely in touch with the post-secondary institution presidents because, as I said, we have to adapt and change to the ongoing environment that things happen sometimes at a whim. But we're here as a department to ensure that we service them as best as we can.

And as a minister, as a local MLA, I'm also there at grassroots, talking to students as well, getting their feedback and relaying it back here to the department as well. And, as I said, I welcome the critic, again, to sit down together, as we have in the past, to listen to each other, to brainstorm some ideas, because at the end of the day, we want to do what's best for Manitobans—and in this case, students and our post-secondary institutions, which includes faculty associations and the employees that are gainfully employed at these respective institutions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: So I know this—it sounds like the planning is still ongoing for the government's proposal for differential tuitions. Nothing is set yet, it sounds like, from the minister. They're still involved in consultation.

I know that the recent consultation that the government had with respect to this and differential tuition and performance-based funding included students but did not include faculty. And I don't think that—I hope the minister would agree that I don't think that just this survey would be sufficient consultation for faculty, who would have a great—would be greatly

impacted by performance-based funding and differential tuitions.

So I want to know, how is the minister going to consult with faculty, since they were not involved in consultation sessions I know he had a few months ago?

Mr. Reyes: I just would like to comment that the critic's comments of information are misleading because I can assure you that there have been letters sent to our stakeholders which include our post-secondary partners, faculty associations, student associations, students, including Indigenous students. We are even waiting for written submissions until May 31st.

So I don't know where the critic is getting his information from. Every stakeholder has been given the opportunity. We've advertised that on EngageMB. Every Manitoban has been given that opportunity. I think he is getting confused with a process that we have yet to start, and that is our Post-Secondary Accountability Framework, which will be commencing.

But, as I've told him that, you know what, my door is open if he wants to discuss issues. I want to just let him know that I've also met personally with Dr. Peter Miller of the University of Winnipeg Faculty Association. So, you know, I'm doing my part and constantly engaging with many, many stakeholders as much as we can. My department is doing—you know, doing their job in terms of reaching out to the stakeholders, as I've said, and they have 'til the end of May to submit the written submission.

What I can tell you as well, with respect to Dr. Peter Miller and the University of Winnipeg Faculty Association, that we've actually received a response from them as of yesterday. So, you know, as you can see, you know, the information that you provided was misleading and the information that I'm providing is factual.

And may I remind the member, again, that our Post-Secondary Accountability Framework has yet to be started. But we are looking forward to starting that process as well because we know that, you know, these processes are very important to ensure that we can improve and enhance the work of Advanced Education so that we can service our post-secondary partners, faculty associations, student associations, students, our Indigenous community of students as best as we can, because we want to remain competitive while providing the quality education Manitobans have come to expect.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: So how will the government decide if differential tuition amounts are to be permitted in post-secondary institutions? Will it be conducting analysis into the—that process and how that program will work?

I know the minister just mentioned the consultation, but I'm really talking about, will they be doing—looking at models in other jurisdictions, and, if so, which ones? Will they be doing analysis before applying such differential tuition fees in our system here in Manitoba?

Mr. Reyes: Developing a new Post-Secondary Accountability Framework is key—is a key action under our Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy, and I'm hoping that the member has read that document because it's a very, very informative document.

The Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy will ensure that our investment in post-secondary education is achieving the intended results. We know that universities and colleges have a role to play in shaping the new framework. They have direct influence in students achieving success and share our goals of enhancing accountability.

Our post-secondary institutions have told us that they want to demonstrate how they are helping students succeed and will work with us as we move forward to improve outcomes over time. We have looked at models in other provinces like British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta to inform this work, and will incorporate best practices from these jurisdictions while respecting the autonomy, size and diversity of our colleges and universities.

* (11:40)

We're committed to consulting meaningfully with our post-secondary institution partners and the public, as I said, including our post-secondary institution leadership, board members, student associations, faculty associations, students, business and industry and the broader public. The department will consult with stakeholders using various methods such as virtual events and online surveys, available as we did with, you know, various programs that we would initiate through EngageMB. Response from stakeholders will help us better understand post-secondary priorities and public opinion relative to the possible contents of the new Post-Secondary Accountability Framework to inform its development.

No decisions have been made about the framework at this time, as it is crucial, and these engagements result in an accurate reflection of the value that our advanced education system delivers now and how it might yet improve.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: So I see the minister is looking at other jurisdictions. There's certain analysis that he's doing to provide evidence that these will be successful—and I'm speaking specifically around performance-based funding.

What evidence does the minister have that he can provide for us that show that this strategy of performance-based funding would actually be successful here in Manitoba?

Mr. Reyes: The introduction of the Post-Secondary Accountability Framework is consistent with calls in recent reviews by KPMG in 2017, the Manitoba College Education Review in 2018 and the Office of the Auditor General—Manitoba in 2020 for improved provincial oversight and accountability of publicly funded universities and colleges. The reviews found that financial reporting accountability processes at governance frameworks were lacking in some form at various institutions.

Feedback from our stakeholders will be used to develop and finalize the overall framework and proposed performance metrics before we implement Post-Secondary Accountability Framework. So that is why—and we are, you know, going to go through with this Post-Secondary Accountability Framework by getting the feedback. And, as I said, through the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy, we are committed to improving our accountability system for post-secondary institutions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: There are a lot of ways that you can provide accountability through the system to meet some of the ways to strengthen our post-secondary system without going to a performance-based funding model.

Has the minister looked at other ways of increasing accountability in the system without performance-based funding? Or did he go directly to this approach? And what evidence does he really have that performance-based funding models would even work in Manitoba? Because they failed, quite frankly, in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Reyes: It's always good to compare ourselves with other jurisdictions. I'm looking forward—in the

beginning of July, I believe—to meet with other counterparts in the ministry that I represent, because it's always good to compare ideas.

That's why, you know, the introduction of this Post-Secondary Accountability Framework—again, we're—no decisions have been made. It's consistent with the calls we've had in recent reviews by KPMG, by the Manitoba College Education Review and the Office of the Auditor General for improved provincial oversight and accountability of publicly funded universities and colleges.

It's going to be great to get feedback from our post-secondary institutions and all stakeholders involved because, at the end of the day, we want to ensure that, again, we want to improve the accountability system for our post-secondary institutions. We want to ensure that, at the end of the day, the students have the best quality education they can have at an affordable cost, and we, as a government, remain committed to that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: The minister's plans to implement differential tuition fees and also performance-based funding—what school year does the minister anticipate those plans to be concluded and actually be implemented in Manitoba? Which school year would that—would this plan—these plans take effect for?

Mr. Reyes: As I've said, we are going through the process, and no final decisions have been made yet because we still have to go through the process and I am sure that my critic can appreciate that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: So, the 2022-2023 school year is just about to start in a few months from now, September, so it'd be certainly too early for that to be implemented for this coming September start of school year; earliest would be the 2023-2024 of school year.

Is that the window that the minister is looking at, the 2023-2024 school year, for this—these plans to take effect?

Mr. Reyes: The member is incorrect. My critic is, indeed, correct in terms of the 2022-23 year; it wouldn't be implemented that quickly.

However, because of the complexities in terms of the process in getting that back, because we know that the feedback that we're going to receive from some of these stakeholders is going to be, it's some—there's going to be some differences. But, at the end of the day,

the solutions will be ultimately on how to ensure that we have accountability from these post-secondary institutions.

So, in terms of a time frame, I can tell you right now, again, no decisions have been made because we have to ensure that we get the proper feedback and proper information from those stakeholders in terms of having these measures in place when it comes to accountability, when it comes to post-secondary accountability in terms of this framework.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: So, I thank the minister for that.

I think we were both saying the—suggesting the same thing, that the 2022-2023 school year would be too soon, that the earliest—and I think this is probably what, you know, I think, you know, rightfully, the faculty and students are interested to see what, you know, their future education is going to look like. So I think it's wise to, you know, give them a heads up and say, if a change—a big change like this is going to be happening.

And I think the minister mentioned, you know, this is really a matter of how we're going to do it, because the minister and the department really seem set on this is the approach they're going to be bringing in: performance-based funding, differential tuition fees. It's just a matter of how they do it, okay? So, I think that's—I—if I'm hearing you correctly, and it sounds like the earliest that you're planning on doing it is for that 2023-2024 school year.

I just want to ask, you know, in—kind of in relation to this, does the minister have, and could you name or give a percentage of Manitoba students right now that have degrees through one of our post-secondary institutions or diplomas, and what percentage of them are currently working and involved in our economy?

* (11:50)

Like, is there a fundamental issue the minister is trying to address with this, where our university graduates aren't being, you know, part of our economic system here? Is there a fundamental gap the minister is looking to address when it comes to the number of students—graduates, you know, failing to get jobs or something like that in our—in Manitoba?

Can he give us a percentage of Manitoba students with degrees that are working in Manitoba?

Mr. Reyes: We know there's a high percentage of graduates that are getting jobs but we also know there

are certain individuals who are not graduating—and why? Why?

So, direct from the report from the auditor—the Office of the Auditor General, it says here, you know, that the—that their audit objective was to determine whether an appropriate accountability framework was in place for the oversight of public post-secondary institutions by government.

Given the significant amount of provincial funding, they chose to audit the processes that government had in place to support and to provide oversight of the financial and operational performance of Manitoba's seven post-public—post-secondary institutions, the seven that include the Assiniboine Community College, otherwise known as ACC; Brandon University; Red River College; Université de Saint-Boniface; University College of the North; University of Manitoba; and the University of Winnipeg.

The audit criteria reflects leading public sector accountability practices and common expectations for a strong accountability relationship between any minister and the board-governed entities within their portfolio. A well-constructed and implemented accountability framework ensures overall accountability of an institution to government while empowering each institution its unique mandates and strategic priorities within the overall strategic objectives identified by government for the post-secondary education system as a whole.

These consultations may include questions related to the following aspects of the Post-Secondary Accountability Framework: performance metric selection and definition, relationship between funding and performance, implementation support and timelines, monitoring and/or reporting procedures, Post-Secondary Accountability Framework review processes and timing.

Virtual consultations will happen. The online survey will open. Our department will reach out to stakeholders for additional feedback as we develop the framework. The Post-Secondary Accountability Framework resulting from these consultations will take place. Post-Secondary Institutions branch will be reaching out to them shortly to arrange invitations for virtual consultation sessions.

We will share more information about the consultations and proposed post-secondary framework closer to the events. And if they have any questions, they can contact our senior director of Post-Secondary

Institutions and they can also copy our director of policy and performance as well.

These letters have been sent out to these respective stakeholders on behalf of my deputy minister.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: So, obviously, with performance-based funding, just the—you know, idea of it, obviously, there's going to be performance—you're going to measure performance, and, therefore, there has to be measurements.

So can the minister outline how many different measurements there are going to be to measure performance and what those measurements are that the minister will be using to judge performance in order to create his performance-based funding model?

Mr. Reyes: We still have to commence with the process and gather that information. It's called an information—

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, we'd just—there was a bit of a break in the sound there, so would you be able to—I don't know if it's just audio on our end or what it was, but if you could start your answer again, please.

Mr. Reyes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Is that better?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, that's good.

Mr. Reyes: As I was trying to say, we still have to gather information.

It's an information-gathering process. No decisions have been made. Why we have to commence the process first before we—before I can provide that factual information to the member, the question that he was asking.

Mr. Moses: So, moving on to a little bit about tuition and the revenue the Province is getting from tuition.

So, in 2016-17, the amount of revenue the Province received from tuition was \$290 million. In the next year, it increased by \$18 million. Then it increased by \$31 million, then \$25 million, then \$25 million again in—then \$23 million. Then this year, in 2022-2023 budget, it's increasing by \$35 million. So this is the largest single-year increase to tuition in Manitoba's history: \$35-million increase.

From \$290 million in 2016-17 up to \$447 million today, it's massive increase in just the last few years. And just this year alone, the largest in Manitoba's history, \$35 million. So does the minister have concerns that more and more of the costs of post-

secondary is being borne and put on the backs of students?

* (12:00)

Mr. Reyes: I just want to say that there are lots of factors when it comes to the member's questions, but lots of positive news as well. Lot of factors—part-time versus full-time students, international versus domestic—what I can tell you is that lots of factors that contribute to tuition revenues.

Enrolment has increased. We've had a record number of students enrolling, including international students, enrolling to our post-secondary institutions. That's why we're consulting with our post-secondary partners and faculty associations and student associations on how we can improve our post-secondary education as a whole.

And that's why we provided an opportunity for all Manitobans to participate through EngageMB, through the tuition fees and student fees policy survey. And, like I said, my department is looking forward to responding to the—those responses that we received with EngageMB.

And I'll revert back to international students again. The—they're here because of the low tuition costs. That's what I heard when I met with students from Bangladesh, students from Nigeria, students from India, students from China, students from Egypt.

And it's very welcoming and gratifying to know that we are attracting international students to study in Manitoba, and many of them have stayed in Manitoba. It's very gratifying to know that we've had these positive results in terms of them being gainfully employed, whether it's through public employment or private employment.

And our enrolment has increased despite the challenges of a pandemic. Enrolment is still up. The processing of Provincial Nominee Program applications has gone up, despite the challenges of a pandemic.

So, in terms of enrolment, you know, we are constantly engaging with all the stakeholders in terms of improving the government programs and services that we can provide through the whole scope within my department. Whether it's through Student Aid, whether it's through Advanced Education, whether it's through Immigration, we want to ensure that we are there, boots on the ground, listening to our stakeholders through the leadership of my deputy minister

and through the leadership of his division leaders, as well.

I'm very proud to say that they have been working tremendously hard despite the challenges of the pandemic. You know, I know that we have gone through a lot together, and it's—since taking over in the end of January. I'm very pleased of the progression of our department, and we will continue to ensure that we improve these issues and, in this case, enrolment.

We know the numbers are growing, and we will continue to remain competitive while providing the quality of education that Manitobans have come to expect. We want students to study and stay in Manitoba because we are the home of hope.

Thank you Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: So I'd like to know, with that rise in tuition recently over the last few years, it means that there's obviously—students are taking on a large portion of that burden for the cost of post-secondary. And as the minister mentioned, enrolment has increased, which also means that there's more students in school and more students for faculty to educate.

And without that—with the rise of tuition being so high, but without the rise in government grants being as high, it means—and enrolment continuing to increase, it means that faculty are often kind of squeezed there, where they have more and more students enrol in their courses and they don't have the same supports from the government grants, so that they don't have enough resources to actually do the same level, perhaps, that same level that they would if they had properly resourced programs, if the current government's grant was keeping up with at least the rate of inflation, or the rate of tuition increase.

And so, you know, as the minister mentioned, enrolment increases, and it seems like faculty are being squeezed there by not having as much resources due to a lack of government funding.

So is that the case, is that the situation the minister sees happening right now, where faculty is being squeezed because of an increase—increasing enrolment, as the minister said? And not as much funding increase to match?

Mr. Reyes: I don't know where the critic is getting his information from, because we as a department have not received that feedback.

But what I can tell you is that the former NDP government had 17 years to fight for post-secondary education in Manitoba, and they failed. We're proud

of our record. I'm going to remind the member opposite that there are now more—as I said before—students than ever enrolled at our fine post-secondary institutions, receiving scholarships and bursaries to help offset the cost of their education so they can graduate in a timely manner.

Almost 22,500 students received over \$33 million in 2021—the most ever. And we continue to make investments in our post-secondary students and our institutions.

When it comes to, you know, solutions, back when they were in government, they had the supposed short-term solutions which resulted in long-term pain for students now. So that's why our government is cleaning up the mess.

We have a strong plan. We have a plan with our Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy that focuses on aligning post-secondary education and training to anticipated skills needed for the labour market and the future and fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation while attracting and retaining talent in Manitoba.

We want our students to get quality education, Mr. Chair, good employment and opportunities to stay in Manitoba. We have a plan.

And the information that the critic just asked me about, we have never heard that. Enrolment is up. That's a great thing for post-secondary institutions. That's a great thing for Manitoba because we know that we have a high graduation rate.

And, you know what, the thing is, we are always going to constantly engage with our stakeholders. That's what we're doing now and that's what we'll keep on doing because we know that we have to adapt to this ongoing world of changes.

We just went through a two-year pandemic and it's slowly going to an endemic now. And we have to ensure that we have these solutions in place and the only way we're going to do that is to have these routine consultations and engagement with our post-secondary partners, which goes all the way down to the students.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: I think the fact that the minister said that he's never heard the increasing difficulties that faculty members have faced over the recent years, including a strike—including two strikes—just goes to show how little the minister actually speaks with and consults with faculty members.

* (12:10)

But I'll move on to ask the minister about the nurse training seats. Back in July of 2021, the government announced close to 400 new nursing seats would be added over the next few years. Then, in December, they were more specific and said that 259 nursing training seats would be starting this year.

So, can the minister be specific and tell us exactly how many nursing seats he anticipates would start—new nursing seats—would start this year, as in this September 2022?

Mr. Reyes: What I can tell the member is that protecting the health and well-being of Manitobans is our No. 1 priority.

I want to thank Manitoba's nurses and health-care providers, who are an essential part of my—of our health-care system. It's critical, and support—it's critical that we support those who want to get into the nursing field by making sure that they have access to the education they need to do so.

My wife's a nurse, and I value her work and her co-workers' work, especially during the pandemic. You know what, nurses are, you know, they're very, very caring individuals. We know that nurses are in high demand across our province.

It's why we are providing a paid, work-integrated learning experience for third- and fourth-year nursing students to help with health-care needs in clinical settings. The initiative builds upon our commitment to train and hire more nurses while providing student nurses an option to gain the skills and abilities needed for success. And the member knows we are moving forward with the commitment.

We have been able to add a total of 400 new nursing training seats to fill the identified nursing vacancy gap as part of the multi-phase plan that started in the—2021-2022. And Budget 2022 provides funding for up to—over 200 nursing seats to increase supply of nurses into the Manitoba workforce. So we're going to continue to work with institutions to get to 400 education seats over the next few years.

This expansion in training seats will ensure that our health-care system has the trained professionals that it needs to provide quality care to Manitobans. I was happy a month ago—or a month and a half ago to be at Assiniboine Community College to make these announcements on more seats. Our department will continue to work with institutions to realize further new seats over the next few years to reach that target.

I know the member—he is aware that this is not just a Manitoba-specific issue when it comes to the nursing shortage, it's experienced from Canada and globally. I was up one night—you know, we're up, sometimes we're working hard at night—I was up, midnight, and happened to be watching BBC morning, which is obviously a couple hours early, and heard one of the news reports that there is a global shortage of nurses—50,000, as a matter of fact. So it's not just a Manitoba issue.

But we are reaching for that target for 400 new seats, and the seat expansion directly relates to pillar 2 of the Manitoba Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy, labour market alignment and student success.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: So, can the minister take us through, institution by institution, of how many will be—of those new spots, specifically of that 259 new spots that he's previously mentioned, would be starting this year—how many of those spots will be at each of our institutions in Manitoba—those spots that are to start this year in September, just three months from now?

Mr. Reyes: So happy to respond to the member's question with regards to the breakdown of institutions of nursing seats. And I may add that more than \$90.3 million in Budget 2022 is to expand the nursing seat commitment, which the member voted against in the budget.

So, the breakdown is as follows: Assiniboine, ACC, 55 seats; Brandon University, 32 seats; USB, 15 seats; University College of the North, 37 seats; University of Manitoba, 120 seats. We have a total of 259 seats.

Again, we're happy again to let him know that \$19.3 million is used to expand the nursing seat commitment, which his party voted against.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: I appreciate the minister providing that breakdown by institution.

So that would—that I think 120 at U of M, 55 at ACC, 37 at UCN, 32 at BU and 15 at USB would make up the 259 seats. These—all these seats are due to start this year, in September? Just confirming that from the minister.

And when does he anticipate us getting to that 400 number? Would that be in the following school year—in the 2023-2024 school year?

* (12:20)

So, just the two questions: confirming those numbers and then confirming—seeing if the minister anticipates whether the remaining 141 seats would be—to make up to 400—would be open for the 2023-2024 school year.

Mr. Reyes: I just want to let the member know that this is a three-year phased plan.

And I'll just repeat the number of nursing seats again per institution so that he has it accurately: again, it's ACC, 55; Brandon University, 32; University College of the North, 37; and the University of Manitoba, 120. With—when it comes to the breakdown of the year for the nursing seats: for 2021-2022, 65 seats; 2022-2023, 184 seats; 2023-2024, 10 seats.

Again, this is a three-year phased plan. I believe we know that there are 141 seats remaining to get to that 400 seat—nursing seat commitment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: So, obviously, by creating these additional seats for nursing students, it also means that people who are currently working as nurses have to, you know, support them through training and through, you know, job shadowing and—part of their education.

Does the minister foresee that this puts an extra additional strain on current nurses to have to be working with students to train them as part of their education? And what resources are putting into place so that, you know, it doesn't put extra burden on our health-care system while these—our current nurses are helping to educate these additional people in nurse training seats?

Mr. Reyes: I'm sure the member, when we are in the Chamber, has heard many times that with—in terms of strengthening health care, we responded by investing \$7.2 billion in health care—again, something the member voted against. We know that protecting the health and well-being of Manitobans is a—the No. 1 priority.

Again, I'd like to thank the nurses and the health-care providers for an essential part of our health-care system. It's critical that we support them to get into the nursing field, those who are interested in going to the nursing field by making sure that they have access to the education and the need to do so.

So as the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, I know that, with respect to nursing seats and to ensure that we give the best quality education, and in this case nursing education, that we are

only going to function in a positive way by communicating with those stakeholders that are involved to ensure the success of nurses when they do graduate. And that is why we are investing more than \$7.2 billion in health care. It is over \$1 billion more than the previous government ever invested in health care, and we're ready to strengthen our health-care system.

But, again, a lot of these questions can be directed to our hard-working—my hard-working colleague, the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon), when it comes to these questions with regards to health. And we know that nurses are a very important part of that equation. We know that there is a shortage of nurses globally. As I said, you know, hearing the BBC news segment, BBC morning, when I was up midnight and it was 5 o'clock in the morning in the UK—in jolly old England—it was 50,000 nurses that they were short globally.

And, you know, we have to ensure that, in terms of the process, that, you know, we communicate with the post-secondary institutions to ensure that they're ready to take on more seats, which we have done here. Because we're proud to say there's 259 seats that are allotted to these respective post-secondary institutions. And we're going to have to communicate with—obviously, with the regulatory bodies that are involved.

We know that the health-care occupations are a priority within this province, and we're going to have to compete with other jurisdictions. We're going to—from a global standpoint, in terms of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, we have to be competitive. We have to be competitive on how to attract students coming to our province, not just to study but to stay here.

And with regards to specific occupations, in this case nursing, we're going to have to improve ways to streamline how nurses—whether it's students or internationally educated nurses—come to this province, because we know there have been challenges. We know—that's why we've been trying to clean up the mess of the previous government by implementing these programs, services and processes in place, so that we can streamline and have individuals gainfully employed in our province.

It's very, very assuring that, you know, we have a high enrolment, but we've got to ensure that we have high success when it comes to students graduating and to ensure that we communicate with industry and our PSIs—those constantly engage with them. That's

why it's very, very important that we implement the Manitoba Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy, which provides a vision, a set of critical actions for our education, training and immigrant systems in both the short and long term.

Over the next few years, this vision will guide us, enhance the quality of life in our great province, and collaboration has been a key to our success in Manitoba. And we will work with our partners across the province, including industry, community and educational institutions, as well as Indigenous leaders, communities, businesses and organizations to build on our strengths here in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: Minister have a plan to actually prevent burnout from our current nurses as they help to educate our future nurses?

We already have nurses burning out, so I wanted to know if the minister has a plan, or if the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) has shared that plan with the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Reyes: Mr. Chair, we've always had a plan, unlike the NDP who've never had a plan. We have a plan to improve our Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, and he can read the document—the Manitoba skills, talent and 'knowledge' strategy to ensure—

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The hour being 12:30 p.m., committee rise.

CHAMBER

INDIGENOUS RECONCILIATION AND NORTHERN RELATIONS

* (10:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber, and I would ask the minister and critic to please introduce their staff in attendance. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions. *[interjection]* Yes, staff are coming in.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Good morning and good morning to the minister online this morning. Just

to kind of pick up a little bit where we left off yesterday. We were discussing about the consultation policy, and I believe the minister had made reference to reaching out to the 63 First Nations.

I'm just wondering if you could clarify for us when exactly that consultation policy will be developed and be available?

Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): I believe yesterday when we were ending, the member had asked me specifically who have we engaged with. So I would like to provide him with that information first and then get on to the following.

So in 2016 to 2018, we engaged with the Southern Chiefs Organization, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, the Manitoba federation—or Manitoba Métis Federation, the Northern Association of Community Councils, the Mining Association of Manitoba, the Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce, the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation.

In 2019 to 2020, we engaged with Fisher River Cree Nation, Manitoba Métis Federation, Brokenhead Ojibway Nation, Peguis First Nation, Sapotawayak Cree Nation, Sagkeeng First Nation, Waywayseecappo First Nation, Manitou *[phonetic]* Sipi Cree Nation, Nichawayasihk *[phonetic]* Cree Nation, Manitoba USKE regional land association, Manitoba Hydro, Canadian Kraft Paper, the Mining Association of Manitoba, the Manitoba liaison community—or, committee on mining and exploration, the Premier Tech Horticulture, Sunterra horticultural Canada incorporated, and Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Association.

And I had said that on March of 2022, I had sent a letter to the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and all 63 First Nations, accompanied by the most recent draft of the framework, in inviting feedback on the framework and proposals from First Nations to work together on a renewed approach through the Crown's duty to consult and accommodate.

And in response to that, we have had some First Nations and the grand chiefs reach out to sit down and present a presentation as to their framework that they've worked on, so we can work on this framework together. Unfortunately, due to some governance changes in the last little while, some of this has been put on hold. But we're anxious to get back on track.

So, in order to give a definite timeline, it's important to recognize that we're working on it. We really

need to have the people at the table so we can help move this forward. I—we've been in a holding pattern for a little more than two months now, trying to move things forward, and hopefully, we can get some action soon and come down with a better idea of our—a time-line.

Mr. Bushie: The minister just alluded to governance changes and being in a holding pattern.

I'm just wondering: Can he clarify what he means by governance changes, and how long this holding pattern is, in fact, going to be in place?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Well, as I—as we had said before, that in working on this duty to consult, we wanted a broad opportunity from—for input from as many as we can. And I am committed to ensuring that there is ample opportunity for feedback on all proposals.

When I came to this role, I heard how the department would reach out and then not hear back, and I don't want to proceed with such an important policy without having active participation from rights holders. And in the spirit of reconciliation and the changing legal landscape, it is important for dialogue and shared understanding.

The changing governments I referred to was with AMC. They had requested an opportunity to present their thinking of how best to approach the Crown's obligation to consult. Unfortunately, that meeting had to be cancelled, and we've been trying to get AMC to have someone come and present to us. And, really, I want the benefit of this conversation and conversation with a few others prior to developing our next steps.

* (10:10)

Mr. Bushie: Just a follow-up on the consultation process. And, of course, the minister's well aware that recently, the government announced that delays to the Lake St. Martin channel project increased by \$60 million, and the cost is now \$600 million, which obviously, Manitoba taxpayers are on the hook for. In Executive Council, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) claimed that the project was delayed due to consultations taking place with Indigenous peoples.

My question for the minister is this: did the Lake St. Martin project cost increase by \$60 million because the Province failed to consult with Indigenous people in the communities in a timely manner?

Mr. Lagimodiere: So with respect to the outlet channel, I think it's important that everyone understand that the outlet channels project is subject to a provincial and federal environmental assessment process. And

this is an interactive process, as new information becomes available which requires additional time for consultation and engagement to occur.

Mr. Bushie: I'm a little confused with that answer, which actually, kind of, gives you a little bit more questions to ask. So, exactly what changes had occurred to delay this process, then?

Mr. Lagimodiere: This is a federal and provincial process, which is still undertaking data gathering, which will then require further analysis. The proponent is subject to provincial and federal requests for information and other requirements in order to ensure they meet their obligations. As new questions arise, the proponent is required to provide additional information. And no one wants to rush a process that impacts Indigenous and treaty rights.

Mr. Bushie: Yes, so to be clear, I guess there's nothing new in that regard. And, of course, former premier Brian Pallister had said this, in fact, would be done in his first term, which didn't—obviously didn't happen—which he didn't even kind of go two terms—or survive two terms.

I'm just wondering, of the \$600 million, and more specifically maybe, of the additional \$60 million, how much of that is specifically earmarked for Indigenous consultation?

* (10:20)

Mr. Lagimodiere: I just want to assure the member that Manitoba will continue to honour its obligation to consult and ensure both Indigenous and treaty rights are recognized. Manitoba will continue to provide resources to support community participation in the consultation and engagement process.

Mr. Bushie: So, the question, specifically, was in regards to the consultation process for the channel project: How much—what is the budget for the consultation process itself?

Mr. Lagimodiere: The Manitoba Department of Transportation and Infrastructure is the lead on this engagement and consultation, and they would have the specific info on this with respect to the budget.

Mr. Bushie: So, am I then to understand that the lead on the Indigenous consultation for the channel project is, in fact, the Infrastructure Minister?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Minister, did you intend to reply or did you need a moment more?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Sorry, I guess you didn't hear.

Yes, he understands correctly.

Mr. Bushie: I find that a little disheartening because when we ask in other departments of various—whether it be Infrastructure, conservation, Finance, in regards to Indigenous issues or First Nation issues, we're continuously referred to the Indigenous and reconciliation minister to be able to ask these exact same questions.

And, obviously, the minister has—is taking, I understand it anyway, to take a lead on the file in regards to Indigenous and community concerns and issues and consultations. So it's a little disheartening that, in fact, that's—that answer is now being deflected to a different department, and, of course, that department is yet to come. So we will ask that question there also.

But in further regards to the consultation process for the channel project itself, can the minister tell us, prior to this—changes that he speaks of, the governance changes, what was the status of the consultation at that point in particular during Brian Pallister's time in office?

* (10:30)

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, IRNR takes the lead on developing the provincial framework on duty to consult. Individual departments undertake consultation when they have a decision on action that impacts in Aboriginal or treaty rights, and IRNR assists departments and provides advice.

Transportation and Infrastructure, MTI at the time, has always been the lead on the channels on consultation, and IRNR continues to provide support as needed, including in the secondment of staff at times to ensure appropriate resource support.

Mr. Bushie: So, just to be clear, I guess, for our purposes here and on the record this morning about the consultation process and the duty to consult.

So, the minister had referred to various departments taking the lead, depending on what the issue may be, whether it be infrastructure or conservation or such, and Indigenous Reconciliation is just a follow-up and support to that? So they are not the lead, is that correct?

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, for department-specific decision, that particular department is responsible for undertaking engagement activities to fulfill the provincial obligation to meet our section 35 obligations. Of—the duty to consult is a Crown responsibility.

Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations provides support to ensure the provincial policy is followed.

Mr. Bushie: So just to be clear, major projects around the province, whether it be Manitoba Hydro, the outlet channel, or any Infrastructure, Conservation major projects then, so just to be clear, then the lead is the department that's responsible for that project. And Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations is not the lead on that.

And why I'm seeking clarification is when those issues arise, including the channel project, Infrastructure is referring the First Nation and Indigenous communities to the Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations department in regards to the consultation process.

So I think I'm just looking for clarity and I think the minister has attempted to give clarity on the fact that that consultation process is not then led by this department, and his department is, in fact, led by the various departments that are there, which I think just, on its face, needs to change. Because you continuously have First Nation and Indigenous communities refer to the minister's department, Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations Department, on any issue. And at the end of the day, the minister is saying that's not where the decision is made. Rather, his department just ensures that, in fact, that process is being followed. In fact, they're not taking the lead on that.

So that's a little confusing and it's a little confusing for us here in the Chamber, but it's also—can potentially be confusing for First Nation and Indigenous communities because they want to talk to the departments that, in fact, are in charge of making the decisions and can truly move that consultation process forward and not just go to a different department just simply because they're a First Nation and Indigenous communities, and so happens the department has that name in their title. So that's a little discerning to—a little disappointing to see that. In fact, that's not the lead department on this issue, or, if it is, it's going to be the lead department that it takes a more prominent role to ensuring that that consultation process is, in fact, fulfilled and not just kind of necessarily maybe, potentially slap the hands of the other department for not fulfilling their obligations.

So, specifically back to the consultation process, and I understand there is a specific line item in the budget for the Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations department of consultation and

reconciliation. Now, last year, was it the \$2.3 million was underspent by over \$500,000, and this year is earmarked on \$2.6 million. And I'm just wondering if the minister can provide that breakdown of that \$2.6 million in this year going forward in consultation and where that's going to be expensed.

* (10:40)

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, first of all, I want to address the budget item brought forward by the honourable member. The budget item, or consultation of reconciliation going from the 2.4 to the 2.65, this increase is related to normal salary increases within the department. And then I want to put on the record that the member does understand correctly that departments responsible—all departments are responsible for leading in the consultation and this isn't new. This is consistent with policy that's been followed for many, many years.

Reconciliation and advancing relations with rights holders cannot be achieved by one department alone, and I know that my colleagues in departments are actively engaged on many files that impact Indigenous and treaty rights. I know chiefs that are directly involved with the departments and the ministers in that department, and that's how it should be because reconciliation is an all-of-government approach.

Mr. Bushie: So the minister made reference to the increase in the budget item for consultation, reconciliation from last year to this year, up to \$2.6 million. But the question was also part that last year was \$2.3 million. And albeit, the minister did mention specifically how important this file and reconciliation consultation is, but yet the department underspent that by over half a million last year. I'm just wondering how the minister can explain and show us why it, in fact, was underspent.

* (10:50)

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, with respect to the—being underspent, the COVID impacted some activities that this budget is traditionally allocated to. A small portion of the under-expenditure was due to salaries.

A larger part is due to normal operations when staff would have traditionally travelled to do their duty to consult or other engagements requiring expenditure of dollars on mileage, on hotels, on rooms. We had to—because of COVID, we had to transition to remote engagements and, in some cases, postpone or cancel engagements, especially at the height of the

pandemic when lockdowns occurred in the northern regions.

So, some of this budget line is also allocated to supporting our work with communities, Leaf Rapids and MKO. So COVID did impact the ability to hold in-person consultations, which was slowed down considerably.

Mr. Bushie: Just to kind of revert back to the consultation between the departments. The minister had made reference to the fact that he's not the lead department on major projects. The department responsible for that project is, in fact, the lead, and the minister's department is, in fact, responsible to ensure that that process is in place and that duty to consult is in place.

So, just to be clear, the minister is not the lead on those files. In fact, he's—his role and his department's role is to follow up to ensure that that is happening.

So I just wanted that to be on the record because the First Nations and Indigenous communities are regularly, as a first step, referred to his department on the consultation process. So, in fact, the department is not the lead; it's just a follow-up to ensure that other departments are fulfilling their obligation and their duty to consult.

So, is that an accurate assessment, then, to say that these projects would not proceed, then, until there is—the duty to consult has been fulfilled?

* (11:00)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Chairperson: Hey, I'd just like to take a minute to welcome students from St. Gerard School in the constituency of Concordia.

Welcome to the Manitoba Legislature, grade 4s and 5s. Great to see you guys.

So you're going to be watching what's happening here, and I'll be honest with you, it's a little bit boring because—[interjection] I know, it's—because there's a lot—there's questions and then there's some gaps and then there's answers and then there's questions, and then—so, we're talking about pretty detailed stuff.

But this is part of what we do here, so you're more than welcome to watch, but I know what grade 4s and 5s like, and we don't have recess outside here. We do have a thing called recess, but it's very different to the recess you guys enjoy.

So anyway, I hope you enjoy it and maybe someday, some of you will come and work in this place, so.

* * *

Mr. Lagimodiere: I, too, would like to welcome the grade 4 and 5 students to—here today. Yes, sometimes, we have long periods of silence when we're answering questions here.

But, with respect to the last question, our department works with and engages with Indigenous communities on files and initiatives that are outside of projects that trigger the duty to consult. But there are cases where IRNR is the lead with respect to engagement. IRNR leads on MMIWG, the September 30th engagement with Indigenous communities, the Leg-ground Indigenous engagements, the duty-to-consult framework.

We also lead on some section 35—those that are the responsibility of the department, such as the settlement agreements—for example, the Norway House Community Council Settlement Agreement.

And during COVID, the Province continued to meet its duty to consult across government and made adjustments to how communities were able to participate and adjust to timelines, recognizing the impacts of the pandemic.

I see the Chair waving. I hope my statements didn't scare our grade 4s and 5s away.

Mr. Bushie: To the minister, I believe they were a little disheartened because they thought they were going to get an answer, according to the Chair. That's not happening.

So it's interesting that the minister had referred to being the lead department for September 30th and yet yesterday gave no support to actually making that a statutory holiday so we can address and have that dialogue amongst all of Manitoba. So that was a little disappointing.

The minister had referred to the duty to consult, and there's a lot of confusion—and I've been hearing it for a lot of years, more than just my time in this Legislature, as to whether or not the duty to consult—is it an actual consultation or is it just kind of going through the motions and just saying, you know, we're checking a box, we're fulfilling that responsibility—so-called responsibility—of consulting with First Nations but not actually having First Nations and Indigenous input in the decision-making process.

So I'm just wondering, in some cases, does the minister also think that, if the duty to consult from the Province breaks down, do the First Nations and Indigenous communities have a right to say this project isn't going to proceed?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Mr. Chair, would it be okay to take a five-minute health break?

Mr. Chairperson: Is it the will of the committee to have a five-minute health break? [*Agreed*]

We'll come back in five.

The committee recessed at 11:09 a.m.

The committee resumed at 11:14 a.m.

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, are you there?

Okay, we will now end the recess and resume consideration of Committee of Supply for Indigenous, Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

The honourable Minister, I believe you had the floor. Just give me a wave when you would like to speak and I will recognize you.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Well, I want to thank the member for his comments.

And this is exactly why we have not finalized the duty-to-consult framework, so we can continue to consider and integrate feedback from First Nations leaders and Indigenous leaders.

And I want to point to our province's Path to Reconciliation Act and our commitment to being guided by the Calls to Action, the principles of UNDRIP, and the calls to justice. Manitoba's duty-to-consult process aims to advance reconciliation, ensure communities are informed of government decisions and actions and respect and protect Indigenous and treaty rights.

Mr. Bushie: Again, I mean, it—there's the confusion, of course, the duty to consult versus informing. And I believe the minister just touched on the issue and the problem with this government's duty to consult is it isn't, in fact, an actual consultation; it is more just informing of what the government intends to do.

So that's—and thank you for clarifying that, to the minister, that in fact, it's more about informing and not really a consultation process because we are now in the five or six years of this government now and still just in the developmental phase of having discussions which should have happened from day one as they had promised Indigenous communities here in Manitoba.

So, I do want to touch base on a specific issue, and the minister had referred to the fact that their department ensures that other departments are, in fact, fulfilling their duty to consult on Indigenous issues.

So I do want to make reference to a specific project that's happening on the Wanipigow River. There was—a sign had gone up within the last couple weeks about a—the Wanipigow Dam structure replacement.

And the flags were raised by the First Nations communities there because first off, the word dam is in—is right on the sign, and it says replacement, and there was no such dam there at any point, anyway. It was, in fact, a walking bridge that had flow-through water and—which was not controlled in any way.

It was specifically a flow through, and it was more like a campground kind of rest area. So now, it is, in fact, going to be a dam—a water dam project is how I should say it. I don't want to say dam project in that regard.

But now, it is now categorized as the Wanipigow Dam Structure Replacement Project. And the federal—it is estimated to be \$1.4-million cost and—a \$700,000 joint cost between \$700,000 from the federal government and \$700,000 from the provincial government.

And this is absolute news to the First Nation community whose—this is the community's water source. Miles downstream, in the Wanipigow River, which has no dams on it in that regard, now, their water source is going to be regulated outside of the First Nations boundary—reserve boundary, but still within the First Nations traditional area.

So, I guess the question I'm asking the minister is, in fact, are you aware of this non-consultation that went on?

And the federal funding is also conditional on the consultation requirements being met. So I'm just wondering how the minister can respond to the fact that there has been no consultation on this matter when he had referred to the fact that his department is there also to ensure that other departments fulfill their duty to consult.

So I'm just wondering how the minister can explain the fact that there's been no consultation on this matter.

* (11:20)

Mr. Lagimodiere: Before I go into the Wanipigow project here, I just want to further state that, with respect to ongoing engagement—and, you know, this is why we are engaging with First Nation and Indigenous leaders on the development of the final duty-to-consult framework, so it will be developed with—in collaboration with the First Nations and the government. So it's more of a collaborative project in

defining the duty to consult than a government unilateral approach to duty to consult.

With respect to the Wanipigow Dam Structure Replacement Project, the \$1.4 million split, 50-50, between the federal government and the provincial, I am going to be honest here, I'm not aware of this project. I will commit to getting informed with regard to the project and the Province's duty-to-consult obligation on this.

Mr. Bushie: I guess that just goes to speak to the disconnect within the departments in regard to who's taking a lead and who's actually ensuring that this duty to consult is happening.

Because signs have gone up. There's a posting right there—or right at the site of where this construction's going to be happening, and I spoke to leadership at—just before 10 o'clock. We're sitting here on May the 27th, sitting here in Estimates on May 27th, and there's still been no consultation on this matter. But the fact of the matter is now the imposition is happening, saying we're going to, in fact, go ahead with this project.

So that's a little disheartening to be able to see that go on, especially when it not only specifically involves the First Nation communities in their traditional territory, but it specifically directly involves their water source for the community.

So that is very concerning that the minister does not even—is not even aware of the project for one, considering in earlier questions and responses, he had talked about his department not necessarily taking a lead but ensuring that, in fact, the duty to consult was followed through by various departments. So, obviously, that's not happening and there's a breakdown and a failure in that regard somewhere along the line.

So the minister also, in his response just to this past question, also went back again—once again to revert to the duty to consult. So—and that is an ongoing process.

So I do want to ask the minister: What date do you have in mind to have some kind of progress made and be made available—maybe not a final draft, but at what point in time will you have details available as to what that framework may look like, or are we just going to consistently be talking about it like it's still in the developmental stage on an ongoing basis? Because it's now been—going on six years of this government, and we're still not seeing anything on paper.

And realising the reconciliation process is not entirely paper-driven, but at the same time, as a government, there is still documents that you have to have in place to be able to show that this policy is, in fact, there, and not just a verbal discussion on an ongoing basis.

So I will ask the minister: What is that timeline to develop and share, at least to this point, what that framework looks like?

Mr. Chairperson: Just before I recognize the minister, I just want to ask members in the Chamber to keep chatter to a respectable and quiet volume level if—or, please, that's my request.

Minister, when you nod or turn on your mic, I will recognize you. Let me know when you wish to answer the question.

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, just for the member's clarity, the department has circulated near-to-final draft consultation policy documents and a proponent guide to engagement with Indigenous communities.

The new framework includes several improvements over the 2009 interim policy: there's direct reference to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action No. 57 and No. 92; clear direction to staff on communications from the lead department to the Indigenous communities throughout the consultation process; designated consultation levels with respect to processes; new tools, training and resources for staff; clarity on the proponent's role in early engagement and Manitoba's ability to delegate procedural aspects of consultation; clarity on Manitoba's approach to accommodation; clarity on the distinction between engagement and 'consultation'—consultation; encouragement to engage with Indigenous communities when the duty to consult is not triggered, as a matter of good governance; and direction regarding community consultation protocols; and modernized language and terminology.

* (11:30)

And as I had said, we continue to look forward to further engagement on the latest duty-to-consult framework that was sent to the 63 Indigenous First Nations, as well as Indigenous leaders throughout the province, including our grand chiefs; and in particular, AMC, who would like to show us their duty-to-consult framework, as well as the Red River Métis.

Mr. Bushie: I'm wondering, can the minister undertake to share those documents and that duty-to-consult framework that he's referencing with the committee?

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, did you intend to answer? I see your mic—I think your microphone is on. I see your lips moving. I can't hear you.

Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Lagimodiere: How about now?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, we can hear you. The honourable minister, go ahead.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Yes, I believe, in yesterday's discussions, we had agreed to share the latest letter that was sent out to First Nation and Indigenous communities, as well as the framework that was provided.

Is the member also asking for copies of the previous frameworks, the drafts that were sent?

Mr. Bushie: Yes.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Yes, thank you for that.

Mr. Bushie: I wanted to switch to another topic. It is, specifically, the tragedy in Pimicikamak First Nation. And I understand the minister as well as the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) had had the opportunity to visit after the tragedy, the house fire, in the First Nation.

And, of course, there was a number of issues that were raised by leadership and community people in—not only in the community there but across the North and across Indigenous communities overall.

And my understanding is, is the minister was—I don't want to say tasked, but the minister had written the federal government—in particular, the Minister of Indigenous Services and the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion—to ask about this issue and to speak about this issue, and talk about the importance of the poor housing conditions, the structural problems in the communities, the lack of fire suppression, fire services.

And I'm just wondering: has the minister received any response to that correspondence that he shared with the federal government?

Mr. Lagimodiere: I would like to thank the member for his questions with respect to Pimicikamak First Nation and the tragedy surrounding the events, and the loss of three individuals who had their lives ahead of them.

And I did attend the community with the Premier, along with the AMC grand chief and MKO grand chief. We did have an opportunity to meet with the family members, express our condolences. It was a very tough day for everyone, I must say.

And at one point in, I believe it was question period last week, a member brought up that no one on our side of the House would be able to relate to the events that occurred or to the fact that the size of this house was quite small. I can assure the members opposite, I can relate to living in a house that size.

Our first home was—there were two granaries that were pulled together; the granaries were eight by 10, so we ended up with an eight by 20 home for two parents and six children. And I was responsible for ensuring that the fire was kept going, the coal-burning fireplace. And I woke up one evening to the home being filled with smoke. And luckily, having no running water—I think everyone knows, at that time we had barrels of water, and we were lucky enough to be able to spill that, I think it was a 35- or 45-gallon drum of water onto the area where the smoke was coming from, and put the fire out. So I can relate to living in a home that size and knowing the threats that exist from that.

But, with that, I did have an opportunity to tour the community with council members, and we talked about housing and the poor housing conditions on the reserve, the lack of fire suppression in the community and what could we do to help move this forward.

And before we got on the plane that evening—we had talked with the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) about sending a letter to our federal counterparts to ask them to come on board and work with the community to address housing and fire extinguishers and whatnot—so following that, I did draft a letter that was sent to the honourable Patty Hajdu and to Ahmed Hussien at the time. That letter did go out in February. To date, I have not received a formal response, or an informal response, back to that letter.

We have meetings set up next week with Grand Chief Garrison Settee as well as Chief Monias, and at that meeting, we will be talking about the potential for drafting a follow-up letter to the federal government, co-signed, hopefully, by myself, the grand chiefs of MKO, SCO, AMC and Chief Monias, as a follow-up to our federal counterparts, again asking them to come to the table. This time, we would like to put a lot more detail in the letter with respect to all the areas that we would think need to be addressed. But that letter will be drafted in consultation with our First Nations leaders.

Mr. Bushie: Thank you for that answer, Mr. Minister.

And you used a term, come on board to the issue. So I assume you mean by that that that's an issue, and

these issues are something that should be a non-partisan issue. We should be looking for support across all levels, and the more voices to this issue is important.

So I will ask and I will request and—could the member from Flin Flon whose constituency, Pimicikamak, is in fact in, could he also be a part of those discussions and those meetings?

* (11:40)

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, did you want to respond to that?

I see your lips moving, but I'm not hearing anything. No, can't hear you.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Okay, thank you. Yes, I agree that issues around community safety should be non-partisan issues and I would be more than happy to invite the member from Flin Flon to have meetings, and I will try to continue to inform him as to when they occur, and hopefully, we can co-ordinate meetings that he could be at.

Mr. Bushie: Of course, when it comes to issues on First Nation—meaning on-reserve versus off-reserve—there's always that confusion or maybe deflection of the responsibility that either level of government, whether it be federal or provincial, has in that regard. But there's a number of things that could kind of overstep those boundaries.

Smoke detectors, for example, is something that can be done from the provincial level, and I believe that question was posed a few different times in the Chamber here as to whether or not that's something that the Province would be able to take on for First Nation communities.

I'm just wondering: Has the minister advocated within his government to be able to at least, at the very least, install smoke detectors in First Nation communities?

Albeit, and I will say this, while they are, quote unquote, on-reserve, they are still in the province of Manitoba, so I will ask the minister: Has he advocated the department responsible on this file to ensure that First Nation homes on-reserve are equipped with a smoke detector—a working smoke detector?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Okay, I want to say I'm looking forward to the conversations that we will have with Chief Monias and Grand Chief Garrison Settee, and now the member from Flin Flon, with regards to these issues.

It's important to note that working with First Nations, we first of all need their consent to come and work with them in the communities. We continue to work close—as closely as possible on all files with Indigenous Services Canada and communities, particularly with respect to fire protection, which includes both public education and fire protection. In the communities in areas where we have neighbouring communities—northern relations communities and First Nations communities next to each other—we try to work together as much as possible on an emergency response and preparedness programs.

Mr. Bushie: Thank you for the answer. It actually leads into my next question because there is a number of communities—Cross Lake, OCN, Norway House, Berens River—that have neighbouring townsites and in some cases, neighbouring fire departments. So those jurisdictional issues still are very prominent during these times of crisis. A fire situation is a prime example of that.

And I'm just wondering: what is the minister doing to ensure that those agreements, especially when emergency services, fire, health services, are—that those agreements are being made so that there is no disruption of service in the time and there's no confusion. Because there has been a number of instances where there has been a fire, whether it be in the townsite or whether it be on the First Nation, where the department—the various departments just won't go because there's no agreement in place. And it's unfortunate that it comes down to just kind of a paperwork agreement when we're talking about lives at stake and the tragedies that can be avoided if the communities work together.

So I'm just wondering: can the minister tell us how he is going to ensure that these agreements are in place so those jurisdictional issues do not become issues when emergency arises, in particular, with the fire departments?

* (11:50)

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, the communities that the member is referencing have elected representation and, as so, they are autonomous, And we can't force independent elected leaders to sign agreements that they don't see are in their best interests, although we continue to try to facilitate agreements through drafting agreements, through presenting the agreements through communities for ratification and try to explain to the communities the benefits of working together. We continue to try and encourage these partnerships wherever we can.

Mr. Bushie: Can the minister confirm which communities already have agreements in place or what's just—simply have an MOU, a memorandum of understanding, or which communities are working towards agreements, or are there no agreements in the communities?

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, with respect to engagements, a lot of these agreements are more or less handshake-type of agreements. Many communities have these informal agreements to support each other.

For example, the communities of Cross Lake and the communities of Norway House have a—had a co-ordinated COVID response agreement.

The community of Waterhen and area of the Skownan First Nation and five northern relations communities have agreements.

Berens River First Nation and a northern relations community have an agreement for solid waste and water treatment, just as a few examples.

Mr. Bushie: I just wanted to ask a couple questions about the flooding situation in and around the Peguis area.

I'm just wondering, has the minister been the lead on discussions and consultation with Peguis in regards to updating them on the flooding situation?

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, provincially, there is an Emergency Measures Organization that oversees a multijurisdictional table to respond to and to co-ordinate these events. Indigenous Services Canada is represented at that table and is the primary lead in responding and communicating with First Nations.

The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure will still have ongoing communication with First Nation leadership and Indigenous Services Canada. We know that Manitoba has provided technical expertise and additional supports to address this emergency event; for example, we provided Tiger Dams and technical support for the Tiger Dams. We also helped co-ordinate with the Red Cross the evacuations of residents from the community.

Mr. Bushie: So, in that response, then, I'm hearing that the minister had zero to do and zero involvement with Peguis on their flooding issue. Is that correct? Is that accurate?

Mr. Lagimodiere: No, that statement would not be correct. I have had numerous texts and engagements with Chief Hudson with respect to how things were going, any assistance that he needed to reach out to us.

I did have a Zoom meeting with the federal minister, Hajdu, with respect to the community, at the request of Chief Hudson.

And the last communication that we've had—that I've had with Chief Hudson was that the water levels were going down; the community appeared to be maintaining things very well; they had the resources and supports they needed; and there was a request to follow up once the flood waters have receded so that we could get together and do a debriefing of the event and tour the community and see what's—what may need to be done for future flood mitigation in this area. He was quite happy that that would be the plan.

So as soon as the floodwaters are at a point where he feels it's safe to enter the community and start doing the review and take stock of exactly what happened, he will let us know and we'll attend to the community and work together with the—our federal counterparts and the First Nations community to see where we go moving forward.

Mr. Bushie: So, I kind of heard two different answers there: (1) it was somebody else in some other departments and other governments had done a lot of the communication, and then the follow-up answer was numerous other poor communication from the minister in terms of texts and stuff. So I did—do want to ask the question—is: when was it relayed to Peguis and the leadership in Peguis, the severity of the flood that they were to expect, and when exactly and what communication took place to relay that message?

Mr. Lagimodiere: So the Emergency Measures response, especially to events like this—rain events, hydrological of flood forecasting—all those are best answered through Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Did you hear my last response?

Mr. Chairperson: As in the last 90 seconds?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: No, we did not hear you in the last 90 seconds. If you could repeat that—we did have a technical glitch at our end here.

So, honourable Minister, if you could repeat the answer you gave in the last two minutes or so, that would be appreciated. The problem was at our end.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Mr. Chair, can you hear me all right now?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, we can. Go ahead, honourable Minister.

Mr. Lagimodiere: I just said that the Emergency Measures response with respect to rain events, hydrological flood forecasting, those are all best answered through Transportation and Infrastructure.

* (12:10)

Mr. Bushie: I have a couple questions about the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative. We know how important access to affordable healthy food is in Manitoba, especially in the North, especially in rural and First Nation communities. However, the 2020-2021 annual report shows that the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative was underspent by \$244,000, or 19 per cent.

Can the minister explain why?

Mr. Lagimodiere: I thank the member for bringing up a very exciting area for me, and especially with my ministerial department here: the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative. I believe the member is referring to the year-end report of 2021, with respect to the \$244,000 that he referenced.

I just want to say how important this initiative is. I'm a big proponent of land-based teachings and learning. And my family made it through the Depression without being impacted. And when I asked my elders how they were able to do that, they told me, because they knew how to live off the land. They knew how to harvest and process the foods at that time.

We don't do it now, but at that time, sturgeon was a big part of a community's diet; moose were a big part of the diet; deer were a big part of the diet. Home-grown vegetables: potatoes, root crops of all kinds—potatoes, onions, carrots—were all big—all those types are products that, today, a lot of individuals—not just in the northern communities but throughout Manitoba—have lost their connectivity to. And I think it's important that we support programs and initiatives that help encourage production of locally grown foods in communities.

The Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, right now, supports local—both local and regional projects that contribute to the development of culturally relevant healthy food systems. While they do that, they improve the health and well-being of the individuals in those communities. The Northern Healthy Foods' goal

is to increase access to food by working with communities and co-ordinating efforts aligned with the program's goals and objectives.

So I'm happy to report that over the life of the program, approximately 284,000 pounds of healthy food has been accessed since 2010-2011, when recordkeeping initially began. And the projects have accessed over \$8.8 million in funds from external sources to support and complement activities. In-kind support and other stakeholders have been valued at approximately \$3.5 million.

And just the other day, I had a company reach out to me and was asking me about this Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, and asked me if there was an opportunity for them to maybe work with the communities, do a soil assessment and say, these are the nutrients your soil is lacking to be able to produce these types of commodities in your area; and asking about whether we ever—years ago, I know we used to do this, we used to use the byproducts of the fish. We'd keep the fillets and use the rest of the fish as fertilizer for the crops.

* (12:20)

But going back to the question, the smaller projects were underspent partly due to COVID and partly due to the fact that some never made it to fruition even though they were in the planning stages. They never made it to the point where they were completed.

Mr. Bushie: I thank the minister for spending most of that response advocating as to why it shouldn't have been underspent in the first place. But at the end of his response, he did make mention of the fact that it was due to COVID and, of course, we're all very well aware—I'm sure the minister is also—that food insecurity increased across the board during the COVID pandemic.

I'm just wondering why, first off, why wasn't there additional funds invested in the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, and further to that, if there was not to be additional funds, why weren't the other projects that, perhaps, as he mentioned, didn't kind of come to fruition—why wasn't there other projects brought forth to be able to actually spend all that money. Again, relating to the minister's response as to how important the program is, yet he underspent the program.

Mr. Lagimodiere: I would like to say that the—that we fund the Northern Manitoba Food, Culture and Community Collaborative, which also provides support to healthy foods in the North. The Northern Healthy Foods Initiative is a founding member of the Northern Manitoba Food, Culture and Community Collaborative and it is innovative partnership of northern community people, northern advisors, funders and organizations. The partners work together to foster healthier and stronger communities in northern Manitoba and improved access to healthy foods and the development of resilient local economies. It's comprised of a wide variety of funders, including the Winnipeg Foundation, the J. W. McConnell foundation, Health in Common and the save the Lake Winnipeg foundation.

I also want to put it on the record that, additionally, a one-time grant of \$193,000 was provided to the five Northern Healthy Foods Initiative regional partners to help alleviate acute food security pressures in northern Manitoba due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Bushie: And, again, just proved the point as to why this should not be underspent in terms of the programs and the incredible programs that are potentially out there and need to be able to see these funds be made available.

So, the Estimates book released to us in April coincided with a press release, also for the minister in April, announcing \$1.3 million in the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, so basically, just announcing something that they've already been doing—or supposedly already been doing.

I'm just wondering if—can the minister then commit to not underspending on the 'northern' healthy foods initiative in this year and in future years?

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 12:30 p.m., committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hour being 12:30 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

Have a good weekend, everybody.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, May 27, 2022

CONTENTS

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

(Continued)

Committee of Supply

(Concurrent Sections)

(Continued)

Room 254

Health

Asagwara 2471

Gordon 2471

Gerrard 2484

Room 255

Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration

Reyes 2486

Moses 2488

Chamber

Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern

Relations

Bushie 2506

Lagimodiere 2506

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>