

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

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The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 27, 2023

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Good afternoon, Jets fans. Please be seated, and go, Jets, go.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 39—The Residential Tenancies
Amendment Act (3)**

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): I move, seconded by the Minister for Justice, that Bill 39, The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act (3); Loi n° 3 modifiant la Loi sur la location à usage d'habitation, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Teitsma: I'm pleased to introduce Bill 39, which will clarify evidentiary considerations, with respect to applications or orders of possession to evict tenants that are engaged in unlawful activities.

This bill aligns with government priorities to improve community safety while addressing stakeholder feedback and promoting greater understanding—understanding and transparency. And I'm pleased to present this bill to the House for its consideration.

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

COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Standing Committee on Justice
Second Report**

Mr. Dennis Smook (Chairperson): I wish to present the second report of the Standing Committee on Justice.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on—

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Justice presents the following as its Second Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on April 26, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 11)** – *The Reducing Red Tape and Improving Services Act, 2023 / Loi de 2023 visant la réduction du fardeau administratif et l'amélioration des services*
- **Bill (No. 17)** – *The Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act (2) / Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur les professions de la santé réglementées*
- **Bill (No. 26)** – *The Limitations Amendment and Public Officers Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les délais de prescription et la Loi sur les officiers publics*
- **Bill (No. 34)** – *The Police Services Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services de police*

Committee Membership

- *Hon. Mr. GOERTZEN*
- *Hon. Ms. GORDON*
- *MLA MARCELINO*
- *Mr. MARTIN*
- *Mr. SMOOK*
- *Mr. WIEBE*

Your Committee elected Mr. SMOOK as the Chairperson.

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

Public Presentations

*Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 34)** – The Police Services Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services de police:*

Mike Sutherland, Manitoba Nurses Union

Michael Anderson, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

Written Submissions

*Your Committee received the following written submission on **Bill (No. 17)** – The Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act (2) / Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur les professions de la santé réglementées:*

Pamela Gregoire, Remedial Massage Therapists Society of Manitoba

Your Committee received the following three written submissions on **Bill (No. 34)** – *The Police Services Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services de police*:

*Kam Blight, Association of Manitoba Municipalities
Cathy Merrick, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
Crystal Brown, Southern Chiefs' Organization Inc.*

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 11)** – *The Reducing Red Tape and Improving Services Act, 2023 / Loi de 2023 visant la réduction du fardeau administratif et l'amélioration des services*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 17)** – *The Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act (2) / Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur les professions de la santé réglementées*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 26)** – *The Limitations Amendment and Public Officers Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les délais de prescription et la Loi sur les officiers publics*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 34)** – *The Police Services Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services de police*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Smook: I move, seconded by the honourable member for McPhillips (Mr. Martin), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Further committee reports?

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Third Report

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Chairperson): I wish to present the third report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development presents the following as its Third Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on the following occasions in the Legislative Building:

- April 24, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.
- April 25, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.
- April 26, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 35)** – *The Education Administration Amendment Act (Teacher Certification and Professional Conduct) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration scolaire (brevets d'enseignement et conduite professionnelle)*

Committee Membership

Committee Membership for the April 24, 2023 meeting:

- Mr. ALTOMARE
- Hon. Mr. EWASKO
- Mr. ISLEIFSON
- Mr. MICHALESKI (Vice-Chairperson)
- Ms. NAYLOR
- Hon. Mr. REYES

Your Committee elected Mr. ISLEIFSON as the Chairperson.

Committee Membership for the April 25, 2023, meeting:

- Mr. ALTOMARE
- Mr. BRAR
- Hon. Mr. EWASKO
- Hon. Mr. KHAN
- Ms. NAYLOR
- Hon. Mr. REYES

Your Committee elected Mr. MICKLEFIELD as the Chairperson.

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

Committee Membership for the April 26, 2023, meeting:

- Mr. ALTOMARE
- Mr. BUSHIE
- Hon. Mr. EWASKO
- Mr. ISLEIFSON
- Hon. Mr. JOHNSON
- Mr. MICHALESKI

Your Committee elected Mr. MICHALESKI as the Chairperson.

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

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

Non-Committee Members speaking on the record at the April 24, 2023, meeting:

- Ms. LAMOUREUX

Non-Committee Members speaking on the record at the April 25, 2023, meeting:

- Hon. Mr. GERRARD

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following 46 presentations on **Bill (No. 35)** – *The Education Administration Amendment Act (Teacher Certification and Professional Conduct) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration scolaire (brevets d'enseignement et conduite professionnelle)*:

April 24, 2023 meeting

Desirée Pappel, L'Association des éducatrices et des éducateurs franco-manitobains
 Karine Rioux, Private Citizen
 Jim Parry-Hill, Private Citizen
 Katie Hurst, Private Citizen
 Jonathan Waite, Seine River Teachers' Association
 Tom Schioler, Private Citizen
 Vicky Isleifson, Private Citizen
 Brett Dow, Prairie Spirit Teachers' Association
 Lindsay Brown, Private Citizen
 Nathan Martindale, The Manitoba Teachers' Society
 Katie Hurst, Private Citizen
 Catherine Hart, Private Citizen
 Cynthia Taylor, Private Citizen
 Amber Lewicki, Private Citizen
 Tara Law, Private Citizen
 Chris Darazsi, Private Citizen
 Roland Stankevicius, Private Citizen
 Cari Satran, Private Citizen
 Tammy Tutkaluk, Brandon Teachers' Association
 Noni Classen, Canadian Centre for Child Protection
 Cathy Pellizzaro, Thompson Teachers' Association
 Cathy Pleskach, Interlake Teachers' Association
 Shawna Dobbelaere, Western Teachers' Association
 Marcela Cabezas, Louis Riel Teachers' Association
 Lise Legal, Pembina Trails Teachers' Association

April 25, 2023 meeting

Arianne Cloutier, Private Citizen
 Joy Smith, Joy Smith Foundation
 Joel Swaan, Garden Valley Teachers' Association
 Scott Durling, Private Citizen

Amy Warriner, Private Citizen
 Gabriel Hurley, Private Citizen
 Sam Zurzolo, Private Citizen
 Augustine Watanabe, Private Citizen
 Rachelle Dunlop, Private Citizen
 Jay Ewert, Evergreen Teachers' Association
 Sean Giesbrecht, Private Citizen
 Elizabeth Bourbonniere, Private Citizen
 Gregory Walker, Private Citizen
 Cameron Watson, Private Citizen
 Sonja Blank, Private Citizen
 Nicole Bobick, Swan Valley Teachers' Association
 Karla Rootsart, Private Citizen
 Mike Urichuk, Private Citizen
 Jon Bettner, Private Citizen
 Shelagh McGregor, Private Citizen
 Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following 40 written submissions on **Bill (No. 35)** – *The Education Administration Amendment Act (Teacher Certification and Professional Conduct) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration scolaire (brevets d'enseignement et conduite professionnelle)*:

April 24, 2023 meeting

Andrew Dryden, Private Citizen
 Amanda Jonker, Private Citizen
 Carine Brandt, Private Citizen
 Sarah Coates, Private Citizen
 Norman Cable, Private Citizen
 Crystal Rachul, Private Citizen
 Lindsay Lepla, Private Citizen
 Leslie Singer, Private Citizen
 William Taylor, Private Citizen
 Russ Patterson, Private Citizen
 Sofiene Loumi, Private Citizen
 April Pulak, Private Citizen
 Heather Ladoski, Private Citizen
 Royce Murray, Private Citizen
 Sari Targowmik, Private Citizen
 Carla Bouchard, Private Citizen
 Anita Van Kits, Private Citizen
 John Hasenack, Private Citizen
 Shawna Stevenson, Private Citizen
 Jennifer Loewen, Private Citizen
 Lisa Siddall, Private Citizen
 Kevin Rogerts, Private Citizen
 Vanessa Lylyk, Private Citizen
 Kevin Kehler, Private Citizen
 Fiorella Lavergne, Private Citizen
 Lin Ruttan, Private Citizen
 Amanda Jonker, Private Citizen

Pam Spitula, Private Citizen
Jeff Hoepfner, River East Transcona School Division
Nathanael Watt, Manitoba School Boards Association
Kelli Wiebe, Private Citizen
A.J. Hrychuk, Private Citizen
Kristen Fallis, Private Citizen
Mathieu Nolett, Private Citizen
Lindsay McDonald, Private Citizen

April 25, 2023 meeting

Beth Burrows, Private Citizen
David Wall, Private Citizen
Jennifer Engbrecht, Private Citizen

April 26, 2023 meeting

Kristy Frohwerk, Private Citizen
Anne Marie Robinson, Stop Educator Child Exploitation

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 35)** – *The Education Administration Amendment Act (Teacher Certification and Professional Conduct) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration scolaire (brevets d'enseignement et conduite professionnelle)*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill with the following amendments:

That Clause 5 of the Bill be amended by renumbering it as Clause 5(1) and adding the following as Clause 5(2):

5(2) The following is added after subsection 4(1):

Consultations re proposed competency regulations

4(1.0.1) *The minister must consult with, and seek advice and recommendations from, representatives of teachers, employers of teachers, teachers, and any other persons the minister considers appropriate in respect of each proposed regulation under clause (1)(c.1).*

THAT Clause 8 of the Bill be amended in the proposed section 8.22 as follows:

(a) *by renumbering the section as subsection (1) and replacing the section heading with "Notice of decision";*

(b) *by adding the following as subsection (2):*

Exception

8.22(2) *Despite subsection (1), information provided to employers or posted on the registry must not include any information that has not been made public under section 8.21.*

THAT Clause 8 of the Bill be amended by adding the following after the proposed subsection 8.25(2):

Right to appear and be represented

8.25(3) *The commissioner and the investigated teacher*

may appear and be represented by counsel or an agent at the hearing, and the panel may have counsel to assist it.

THAT Clause 8 of the Bill be amended in the proposed section 8.32 as follows:

(a) *in subsection (2), by striking out "subsection (3)" and substituting "subsections (3) and (4)";*

(b) *by adding the following after subsection (3):*

If disability affects capacity to teach

8.32(4) *If a finding has been made under clause 8.29(1)(d), the commissioner, when making information available to the public under subsection (2), must not make available any personal health information (as defined in The Personal Health Information Act) about the investigated teacher unless the commissioner is satisfied that the public interest in making the information available substantially outweighs the teacher's privacy interests.*

THAT Clause 8 of the Bill be amended in the proposed section 8.34 as follows:

(a) *by renumbering the section as subsection (1) and replacing the section heading with "Notice of decision";*

(b) *by adding the following as subsection (2):*

Exception

8.34(2) *Despite subsection (1), information provided to employers or posted on the registry must not include any information*

(a) *that has not been made public under section 8.32; or*

(b) *about which an order has been under section 8.33 preventing public disclosure.*

Mr. Michaleski: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Mental Health Week

Hon. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): This year, the Canadian Mental Health Association's Mental Health Week is May 1st to 7th, with Child & Youth Mental Health Day falling on May 7th.

This week, and every day, I would like to commend mental-health-care providers and organizations for their dedication in supporting Manitobans impacted by mental health issues and for the valuable role they play in Manitoba's health-care system.

A strong mental health system with prevention and early intervention services is a key component of our health-care system.

In honour of Mental Health Week, I encourage all Manitobans to speak openly about mental health and check in with family, friends and colleagues.

For those of you struggling today, please know that you are not alone. Reach out to someone you trust and know that support and resources are available to everyone in Manitoba.

Thank you.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Next week is Mental Health Week and Child & Youth Mental Health Day.

Sadly, we know that there is still a stigma against mental health issues and those—and accessing treatment for them.

Mental health is a time to counter this stigma by remember though—by remembering those that—by remembering that we all have struggled at some point in our lives. It's important that we support one another in seeking the help that we need and that the resources are there for those who need them.

As next week is also child and youth—Mental Health Week, it is also important to remember that many Indigenous children and youth on First Nations are struggling with mental health.

We saw the consequences in Tataskweyak with the suicide epidemic a couple of years ago. I was fortunate enough to go out and support that community and work alongside and saw the amazing community come together to support, and I'd like to see that also in Manitoba here.

It's crucial that we ensure young people in First Nations have the supports, as well as here in Winnipeg. Fortunately, there are many organizations in our community are working every day to support those:

Canadian mental health society, and the Manitoba NDP—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been requested for the member to conclude her statement. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Leave has been granted.

Mrs. Smith: Fortunately, there are many organizations and individuals in our community are—who are working every day to help those who are struggling. One of those is the Canadian Mental Health Association, which provides programming, events, research and other supports to promote mental health and help those who are struggling.

The Manitoba NDP also passed a bill to recognize Eating Disorders Awareness Week each year. This affects many children here in our province.

To everyone who works on the front lines providing mental health care, I want to thank you all for the incredible life-saving work that you are doing. We see you, we recognize you, we stand with you and we acknowledge you and uplift you for all of your work.

And for those struggling, know that you are not alone. Many of us struggle with you.

Miigwech.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to talk about mental health and, in particular, the mental health of children, and to thank all the professionals who provide care in these areas.

Mental wellness is as important as physical wellness. The absence of mental well-being can be associated with the development of physical illnesses. Indeed, this is one of the reasons that Manitoba Liberals have, for many years, advocated for putting psychological therapies under our medicare system so they can be publicly funded as are help for physical health issues.

The pandemic drastically increased the incidence of mental health conditions in children. Indeed, we need a task force to address backlogs and wait times in mental health areas as well as physical health,

especially for things like addictions and eating disorders, where there are major shortfalls currently.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Further ministerial statements?

The honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes' notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 27(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

National Day of Mourning

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Labour and Immigration): The National Day of Mourning is held and recognized every April 28th by over 100 countries around the world and is an opportunity to pause and reflect while honouring those Manitobans who died while on the job and those workers who suffered workplace injuries or illnesses performing their duties.

In 2022, 21 of our fellow Manitobans lost their lives as a result of work-related incidents and occupational diseases. Many more Manitoba workers were hurt seriously enough to cause permanent injury or require time away from their jobs.

Those lost were much more than workers. They were also our family members, friends, colleagues and neighbours.

* (13:40)

Tomorrow, there will be many events occurring throughout the province in commemoration. I encourage my colleagues, and all Manitobans, to take part in the SAFE Workers of Tomorrow Leaders' Walk, starting at 11:30 a.m. at the Union Centre on Broadway and proceed to Memorial Park, where'll be—where we gather for a commemoration ceremony organized by the Manitoba Federation of Labour. At that time, I will read a proclamation to recognize the Day of Mourning on behalf of the Province of Manitoba.

Our government will continue to prioritize and be steadfast in our ongoing commitment to work with our partners in labour and management to improve occupational health and safety policies, procedures and conditions in the workplace. And we want to ensure that when workers go to work at the start of their day, they come home safely to their loved ones at the end of each day.

Let's continue to work together to support workers in the workplace—including here at the Manitoba

Legislature—and ensure that—and to ensure that no injury, illness or death occurs at our place of work or any workplace.

Madam Speaker, as we won't be in the—in this place tomorrow for the National Day of Mourning, I would like to ask that all members stand for a moment of silence to honour all Manitoba workers who suffered a workplace illness or injury or who were killed in the workplace.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Today, we take a moment to reflect and remember members of our community who we have lost as a result of injuries or illnesses related to their work. April 28 is National Day of Mourning, and it's time we dedicate to those who were killed, injured or made sick because of their work.

I would like to use this opportunity to say thank you to the unions and advocates for the significant progress that has been made over the years to protect workers. Continuous improvements to workplace health and safety laws are necessary as new issues are identified.

Instead, the PCs have cut safety measures protecting apprentices. PCs have cut staffing levels and enforcement activity at Workplace Safety and Health. And workers are still waiting for the government to fulfill its duty to include a list of deadly diseases in The Workers Compensation Act we know to be occupational killers.

Health-care workers, our health-care heroes, are asking the government to commit to SAFE work certification programs. This would greatly reduce the very high number of injury rates happening to health-care aides, home-care workers and others in the health-care sector.

I hope my colleagues across the Chamber will listen when I say we need to strengthen our resolve to establish safe and healthy conditions in the workplace.

At this time, I'd like to recognize the Barrion family from the Notre Dame constituency. I'd like to give them my heartfelt condolences, because they lost their son, John Lloyd, in February 2022 due to a workplace homicide.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to respond to the minister's statement.

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

Ms. Lamoureux: I rise this afternoon to speak to the National Day of Mourning.

Every year, we take this time to step back and reflect upon those who have lost their lives from being injured on the job. According to the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada, in 2021, there were 1,081 workplace fatalities recorded in Canada. Among these deaths were 18 workers between the ages of 15 and 24.

Madam Speaker, we need to continue to strive for worker safety and ensure it is taken seriously in our workplaces. This is something all levels of government can work towards improving. For example, our city government has a role to play with transit and bus driver safety. Our federal government has a role to play with air traffic—specifically, airport security, staff and pilots. They all deserve to be safe on the job.

And lastly, Madam Speaker, provincially, we can look to the ratio apprenticeship programs being reinstated, and ways to alleviate burnout in our health-care system, as often accidents happen when we are not getting enough sleep or we are not doing well mentally.

With respect to mental health, we need to regulate psychotherapy in our province. Regulation would better ensure people can access mental health resources and would better ensure those providing these services are properly trained to do so.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the government for recent legislation that expands workplace injury claims for wildlife firefighters, as it is a positive step, but we need to do more.

Lastly, we want to extend our condolences to the many friends and family members who may have lost someone due to a workplace injury, and I'd like to ask this House for a moment of silence to recognize this day and all those we have lost.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for a moment of silence? [*Agreed*]

Please rise.

A moment of silence was observed.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Bake Oven

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Madam Speaker, I rise to honour the legacy of the Bake Oven, which after 67 years, served its last customers on April 15th.

The Bake Oven is a family-owned bakery, store and cafe which announced, to the sadness of area residents, its closure to facilitate the much-deserved retirement of its owner, Marty Posthumus Jr., who joins us with his wife, Judy, in the gallery today.

The Bake Oven was started by Marty's father, Marten Posthumus Sr., and his wife, Sally, who immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands in 1951. Their first location opened in 1955 as a corner bakeshop in the North End. The Bake Oven then moved to Munroe Avenue in 1960, and in 1978 Marten sold the business to his son, Marty.

In 1986 they opened their Edison Avenue location, and in 1990 added a restaurant to this location called The Bruin Cafe. In 2000 they closed the Munroe Avenue location, leaving the Edison Avenue location as the Bake Oven's home in Rossmere these last 23 years.

Madam Speaker, earlier this month I visited the Bake Oven one last time and met with Marty and his staff to congratulate them on 67 years of serving Winnipeg.

Over the years many have enjoyed the international flavours offered at this landmark North Kildonan bakery: various baked goods, cakes, cheeses, sausage rolls or meat pies, or just a cup of coffee and friendly conversation. The Bake Oven will be missed by many, especially in Rossmere's European community.

We are joined today by Marty and his wife, Judy. And I invite all members to join me, not only in welcoming them to the Legislature, but thanking them for The Bake Oven's 67 years of service.

Congratulations and all the best on your retirement.

Indigenous Youth Leadership

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): I'm honoured to welcome the Louis Riel School Division Indigenous youth leadership as our guests at the Manitoba Legislative Assembly today. Their group was created so that they had the opportunities to learn more about Indigenous cultures, enhance their sense of belonging and develop leadership abilities so they can become agents of change.

As a leader, we are all responsible for creating a better life, a better future for all Manitobans. The consequences of colonization have impacted Indigenous communities and the effects are ongoing. This is why, in part, they are here today.

I am pleased to present some of the requests from the Louis Riel School Division Indigenous youth leadership team. They write: We are here to ask you to consider our ideas for lasting changes and reforms that will permit true reconciliation and a better future for all, especially Indigenous peoples living within Manitoba.

We ask that the government reform the justice system and work towards eliminating racism and seek to incorporate Indigenous solutions.

We ask the government to respect, commemorate, and honor residential school survivors by pronouncing September 30 as a mandatory holiday for all.

We ask the government to authentically integrate Indigenous ways of knowing in all subject matter from kindergarten to grade 12.

We ask the government to recruit and train more Indigenous educators and health-care providers.

We ask the government to reform the health-care system by eliminating systemic racism and seek to incorporate Indigenous solutions.

We ask the government to further respect and honor the treaties that were signed on this land.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

And thank you to the Louis Riel School Division Indigenous youth leadership team. I ask all members to join me in thanking the students here today for including the Manitoba Legislature on their journey.

Brian Chrupalo

Hon. Kevin E. Klein (Minister of Environment and Climate): Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize an exceptional member of our community, a leader, a role model, a Winnipeg police officer, a father of three, a community volunteer, a Bear Clan volunteer, a sports hall of famer, and a person that I am proud to call a friend: Brian Chrupalo.

* (13:50)

Born and raised in Winnipeg's North End, Brian holds treaty status through the Pine Creek First Nation. He is married and a father of three adult boys.

Brian is a 29-year member of the Winnipeg Police Service at the rank of staff sergeant, and is a director with the Bear Clan Patrol.

Brian is the first status Indigenous official in CFL history, having officiated 278 games and five Grey Cups throughout his 19-year career, and he's still

going. He also participated in the league's official exchange program with the NFL, officiating a Jacksonville Jaguars pre-season game in 2017.

On September 30th, 2022, Brian became the first CFL official to announce a penalty in an Indigenous language, making calls between the Saskatchewan Roughriders and the Winnipeg Blue Bombers in Ojibwe.

On April 12th, Brian was inducted into the Manitoba Aboriginal Sports and Recreation Council hall of fame.

On January 2nd, Brian was inducted into the North American Indigenous athletic association hall of fame for the 2023 class. Brian is the third official inducted, joining long-time NHL referee Danny McCourt and Minnesota basketball referee Michael Thomas. He is the first CFL alumnus to be enshrined in any category.

But more than all of that, the Brian that I know inspires many, many people, including myself. His dedication and his passion for helping the community, and his work with the Bear Clan, are remarkable and unmatched. But Brian will totally disagree with that statement. He will deny it and he will credit everyone else around him.

In recognition of Brian Chrupalo's outstanding contributions to the province, I ask all members of the House to join me in thanking him and his wife, Lori [*phonetic*], for their dedication, passion, vision and commitment to making the lives of others, including my own, better.

Pay Discrimination

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Many women in this province continue to face pay discrimination by their employers.

Women and racialized people are paid considerably less for doing the same work as their co-workers. Women facing pay discrimination have described feeling humiliated and demoralized at work due to this. The economic effects on yearly and lifetime income is also pronounced and contributes to the feminization of poverty in old age.

This morning, the CCPA released a report called *Tired of Waiting: Rectifying Manitoba's Pay Gap* that focuses a statistical analysis of the pay gap in Manitoba across race, occupation, industries, education and age. Prior to this report, we could only point to federal statistics on pay discrimination, but now there is

evidence that pay discrimination in Manitoba is a lot worse than in other provinces.

Within the CCPA report, it is shown that Manitoba women earned 71 cents to every dollar men earned. A discriminatory pay gap exists between men and women in every occupational grouping and in every industry, with women largely working the lowest paid jobs.

Under the leadership of NDP—of the NDP in the 1980s, MLAs like Muriel Smith pioneered efforts to end pay discrimination for women working in the public sector. In addition, many women and racialized folks working under union-negotiated collective agreements are also afforded protections. The federal government has also recently worked towards eliminating pay discrimination in federally regulated workplaces, but Manitoba has yet to update laws for workers who don't fall under these regulations.

I've recently introduced bills multiple times in an attempt to end this discrimination, but this PC government consistently rejects them without offering any alternatives to advance women's economic rights.

In my work on this topic, I found broad consensus among all those consulted, from workers to employers, that pay discrimination exists in Manitoba. This consensus is now underscored by CCPA's research.

I once again urge this PC government to take an important step today and pass The Pay Transparency Act.

Elaine Stevenson

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, today I recognize Elaine Stevenson, who has played a major role in—to create awareness of eating disorders, spending thousands of hours meeting with people and appearing on many media shows advocating to improve treatment in Manitoba. She's in the gallery with us today.

Elaine says: I am personally aware of the carnage, pain and nightmare that many families and those with eating disorders go through. Her involvement started when her daughter Alyssa was diagnosed with an eating disorder. She was a bright girl who loved sports, particularly fastball, playing on teams for Sir John Franklin, River Heights, Smitty's Terminators and The Maples. She struggled for 12 years with her condition and sadly passed away in 2002. Elaine has continued her involvement in Alyssa's memory.

Her advocacy has been important in the development of new health services in Manitoba and an improved quality of life for many. Since the mortality rate for children with eating disorders is one of the

highest of all mental health issues, it is likely her work has saved many lives.

In the late 1990s, Elaine was a founding member of the Eating Disorders Association of Manitoba, EDAM. In May 2001, following her advocacy and that of EDAM, the provincial government established an eating disorders program and treatment centre. But the wait times for help for those with eating disorders are still far too long—unacceptably long. As of April 4th, the Women's Health Clinic provincial Eating Disorder Prevention and Recovery Program had 145 clients waiting for 16 to 18 months.

Waiting lists for all eating disorder programs need to be public, published on websites and accessible to Manitobans, and they need to be much shorter than now. A residential treatment program for eating disorders should also be established in Manitoba.

I say thank you, Elaine Stevenson, for all you have done for our province.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: We have some guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce to you. Seated in the public gallery, we have Jade Vanderlinde, Darius Schriemer and Rylan Veenendaal, who are the guests of the honourable member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Rural and Northern Manitoba Broadband and Cell Services

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): People in rural and northern Manitoba deserve to have access to fast broadband Internet and cell service. Now more than ever, it's essential for everyday life.

That's why it's so disappointing that the PC government and this Premier has failed to deliver on this file. For years, they've made announcement after announcement, and yet, nothing happens; nobody gets connected. Instead, what they do is privatize our important fibre optic assets while rural and northern Manitobans wait for service.

So will the Premier explain why the government has failed to deliver broadband and cell service for people in rural Manitoba and the North?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Madam Speaker, we want to ensure that all Manitobans have access to Internet services no matter where they live in the

province, and that's certainly is a priority for our government.

Madam Speaker, we take this issue very seriously. We have spoken to those out in various remote communities to see how we can help them make sure that they get access to those services.

So we'll continue to take action in this manner, Madam Speaker, and continue to get things done for those who live in remote communities in our province.

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

Mr. Kinew: Unfortunately, that's not true; there's no action taking place.

I'll read from a letter from Manitoba Hydro sent earlier this week that says: Fibre work associated with the rural broadband expansion program continues to remain on hold at the request of Xplore. End quote.

Now, Xplore is, of course, the private company that this government tried to sell off our fibre optic assets to.

I'll continue reading the quote here: Xplore is disputing payment of project costs and has directed Manitoba Hydro to cease fibre work until the dispute is resolved. End quote. That's the situation right now, and it means that folks are not being connected to broadband Internet.

* (14:00)

So, just to review: a private company is telling Manitoba Hydro, our Crown corporation, to cease work on an asset that the people of Manitoba own through Manitoba Hydro.

Hydro says it's unknown when the situation will be resolved.

Why has the government ceased all work on rural broadband in Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Manitobans know that when it comes to Manitoba Hydro, we continue to clean up the \$4-billion boondoggle that was left to us by the Leader of the Opposition and other NDP members, Madam Speaker. We continue to clean up that mess. They left Manitoba Hydro riddled with debt. Very significant.

We are taking action to make sure that life is more affordable for Manitobans through Manitoba Hydro, Madam Speaker. We'll continue to take those actions on behalf of Manitobans.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, this is a very serious issue for people in rural Manitoba, as well as in the North, so I'll share more information from this very concerning letter.

Again, this letter says that this private company, Xplore, has ordered Manitoba Hydro, which we all own collectively, to stop working on assets that we all own collectively, which were supposed to be connecting more people to broadband Internet.

This letter goes on to say that Hydro says, quote: At this time, it's unknown when a resolution will be reached or when the project will resume. End quote.

So the government does not know when work is going to resume to connect people to high-speed Internet. In fact, the letter also says that this Telecom staff have now been redeployed to work on other issues.

No plan to resume service, no plan to connect Manitobans—and in the interim, these important public employees are being sent to work in other areas.

I'll table the letter so the Premier can see what's happening under her watch, but why has she failed to connect Manitobans to broadband and cell service? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: I would just indicate to members in the public gallery that there is to be no participation in the proceedings on the floor, and that means that all members in the public gallery are not to applaud.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, we, as well, take this issue very seriously on behalf of those who work in very remote communities in Manitoba, and that's why we are taking action through Manitoba Hydro and other ways to ensure that they get the services that they need.

What we won't do is take a chapter out of the NDP book, which is to riddle the—Manitoba Hydro with record debt, with the boondoggle that they left us to clean up their mess, the \$4 billion in cost overruns in Manitoba Hydro. That does nothing, costing, you know, charging the rates to go up—causing rates to go up for Manitobans, Madam Speaker.

We don't believe that that's the right future for Manitoba Hydro. That's why we've taken action to make life more affordable for Manitobans, by ensuring that their hydro rates remain low.

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

New School Construction Use of P3 Model

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, according to the MLA for Steinbach, the PC government did their, quote, research, end quote, on P3s and found that they were a bad idea for building schools. In fact, he had the government pay some \$300,000 to look into this and provide that research.

But now, this government is throwing that all away. The problems with P3 schools are well known across the country: Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Alberta; many provinces have had problems with these P3 schools.

The Premier owes Manitobans an explanation.

Why is her government ignoring the facts and pushing ahead with P3 schools in our province against the advice of the MLA for Steinbach?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition's question, and all the new schools that we're going to be building across the province of Manitoba.

In fact, we have a significant number of them, I think nine, that are in the process of being built. We've committed to more than 23, Madam Speaker, in communities right across this great province of ours.

So, where they failed in building schools, we will get it done.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, it's clear that not many people on that side of the House have much credibility these days. In fact, the minister responsible for this file said he, quote, does not have much context on why the Province ruled out P3s in 2018. End quote.

I guess the minister responsible doesn't talk to the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) very often, but I guess that's a sign of how things are on the PC side of the House these days.

Here is the context, Madam Speaker: Nova Scotia P3 schools cost—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —tens of millions of dollars more. Again, Conservatives in Alberta, of all places, have abandoned P3 schools in that jurisdiction. And yet, the Premier is going in the opposite direction.

Why is the Premier doubling down on this P3 approach, even though the MLA for Steinbach says they're a bad idea?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, when it comes to the credibility of our Cabinet minister, we certainly will—we support our Cabinet minister. While—I'm not sure how many of his own caucus colleagues of the Leader of the Opposition actually support him, but I can tell you that we support our colleague, the member for Steinbach.

And, Madam Speaker, what I will say, and what is important here, is the fact that we are building more schools in the province of Manitoba. Unlike the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite, who have no plan whatsoever when it comes to educating our kids in our province, we are committed to building 23 more schools right across this great province of ours.

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

Mr. Kinew: So, Madam Speaker, is this another flip-flop by the Premier? Because she now says that she supports the member for Steinbach, and he opposes P3 schools. So, Manitobans would be forgiven for not following the PC train of thought these days.

What we on this side of the House say is that these nine schools could be built through a public process. They would be built cheaper, they would be built more quickly and they would be built putting hard-working Manitobans to work on construction projects in our province.

But, of course, the PCs want to contract it out, and they would like—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —to pay more money to pursue an approach of privatization.

So I'll ask the House again, for the Premier to tell all of us here today, why is she moving ahead with these P3 school construction projects, against the advice of the MLA for Steinbach?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, I know the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite are so concerned about their own ideology, they'll let their own ideology get in the way of actually building schools in our province.

We won't allow that to happen, Madam Speaker. We will ensure that all 23 of those schools get built, unlike members opposite, who are so focused on their own ideology no school will ever get built in the province of Manitoba.

Health Staff Working Conditions Status of Draft Report

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, at the start of this week, it was revealed that the PC government has been sitting on a draft report showing that over half of Manitoba health-care workers considered quitting because of their working conditions.

Incredibly, days after it's been made public, this Health Minister says she hasn't seen nor read the report, Madam Speaker.

Will the minister commit to Manitobans that she will actually read this report over the coming week, which is constituency break week?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, what are the facts is that a report was commissioned by Shared Health, not by government.

It was a draft report that the writers have said are confidential; they would not be releasing the draft report. It was never finalized. Somehow, the members opposite got their hands on it, Madam Speaker. Probably while they were lurking in the back lanes, someone opened a door and slipped them a draft report.

That is not how we operate on this side of the House. We wait for reports to be finalized, and a—properly presented to the entity that commissioned the report.

* (14:10)

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, it is really sad that this Health Minister continues to confirm that she doesn't think she needs to be accountable for the current state of health care in our province. Given the terrible state of health care under this government, you'd think she might be even a little bit curious what health-care workers really think about the job her and her government are doing in regards to health care.

Will this minister confirm that, after this report has sat on a shelf collecting dust for that past year, if she's actually even asked for this report to be finalized?

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, again, the facts are that the writer of the report said it was confidential, something—a word that the members opposite don't understand. It was confidential and not to be released,

but it was leaked and the members opposite got their hands on it.

But on this side of the House, we don't need reports—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon:—Madam Speaker. What we did was go to the front lines and listen to workers, develop a health human resource action plan, implement incentives for nurses alone—\$123 million.

That is listening and responding, not lurking in back lanes.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, I suppose I shouldn't be surprised at that kind of wildly outrageous accusation. The minister has a pattern of accusing me of all kinds of wildly outrageous things.

Manitobans are correct in their assessment that this government and this minister cannot be trusted when it comes to health care. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: They're keeping negative reports in draft form so that they can just simply pretend these reports don't exist.

But while she hides in her office, she's ignoring the concerns of health-care workers across our province. We are long past the point, Madam Speaker, of plausible deniability.

When will this PC Health Minister listen to health-care workers regarding their working conditions and their very real concerns?

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, I did listen to front-line workers at Health Sciences Centre, St. Boniface Hospital, Grace, throughout the rural communities. I did a tour last summer and listened to front-line health-care workers.

You know what I heard, Madam Speaker? In the 17 years they were in power, not one single time did any member of the NDP ever go to the front lines to speak or to listen to health-care providers. I know that they don't want Manitobans—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon:—to know of their failures, Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: –but we listened, we responded with our health human resources action plan, \$200 million. We listened, not depending on someone to leak a report—a draft report to our government.

Manitoba Student Aid Wait Time for Services

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): For months, we've been calling on the PC government to take action and fix Manitoba Student Aid, and for months, they've done nothing. Students continue to wait far too long for aid, and when they try to call Manitoba Student Aid over the phone, they're waiting for far too long on hold.

The minister, in fact, shared in Estimates the average amount of time that a Manitoban waits is a whopping 34.7 minutes on hold before they even talk to anybody.

Can the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) explain why she has failed to fix Manistoba [*phonetic*] Student Aid?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Again, the member opposite and I had a great discussion during Estimates where we talked about the increased number of students that we have processed who are applying for Student Aid as well as the budget this year that increased Student Aid to help more students as they pursue post-secondary education.

Madam Speaker, this is a process that we have hired more FTEs to help out with the increased demand, and the member opposite was actually quite impressed with the information that was coming through Estimates, the answers that were given. And coming from the member opposite and an NDP team who ignored the Student Aid and the struggles that students had, I don't think that today he's going to give us any lessons.

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, 34.7 minutes on hold. That's the facts right now. And that's just the average, actually. Manitobans have to wait just that long to speak to anybody at Manitoba Student Aid. And once they pick up the phone, of course, it's going to take them longer.

The reality is that students don't have that much time to wait. They can't spend all day just to get the help that they need. The PCs clearly need to do more to fix Manitoba Student Aid.

So I ask the minister today, can she explain to students why she has failed them when it comes to Manitoba Student Aid?

Mrs. Guillemard: I do want to clarify there are 24 hours in a day, not 34 minutes.

But the member opposite is bringing a good point, that we will increasingly improve our services to students in Manitoba, unlike what the NDP did by ignoring the student needs. Their wait times were much longer under the NDP. We are continuously improving our services.

And, Madam Speaker, I would like to take a moment to thank all of the departmental staff who are dealing with students who are calling in. They are assisting them. They are helping them access student loans so that they can pursue excellent education right here in our beautiful province.

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

Mr. Moses: In Estimates, the minister said that there are a record number of Manitobans applying for student aid: 19,341 applications to Manitoba Student Aid. But what the minister fails to realize is that when more people require student aid, it means that tuition is unaffordable for Manitobans.

And when they try to get the aid from Manitoba Student Aid, they have to wait on hold for 34.7 minutes on average just to talk to somebody. That's not an efficient use of student time and it creates additional stresses and headaches for students in Manitoba.

Can the minister explain to Manitoban students why she has failed to fix the—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Moses: –problems at Manitoba Student Aid?

Mrs. Guillemard: I would counter those arguments that the member has brought forward in saying that Manitoba has the lowest tuition rates in western Canada. He knows this to be the truth. We've said it on the record multiple times. I know it's difficult for the members opposite to listen and to hear the good news of Manitoba's student fees. That's what attracts a number of students to our province.

And I will say that it's the word of mouth and our government's ability to inform students of the supports that are available to them, including the student bursary programs—that that has driven up applications. That's why people are reaching out to receive this support.

Where the NDP kept it secret and didn't tell anyone about the supports necessary, we are happy to share with all Manitobans.

Thompson General Hospital Lab Technologist Shortage

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): The state of health care in Manitoba is outrageous. And too often, the North is completely ignored.

Earlier this week, allied health-care professionals revealed that—a critical shortage in laboratory staffing at Thompson General Hospital which could threaten to shut down the emergency room services altogether.

My question is for the Health Minister: What specifically is she doing today now that she knows of the vacancy crisis at TGH?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I'm pleased to rise to answer the member for Thompson's question. It gives me an opportunity to share, again, the incredible work that is being done by the health human resources action plan task force to add 2,000 additional health-care professionals to the health system, Madam Speaker.

* (14:20)

There are three pillars: retain, train and recruit, Madam Speaker. And we are seeing great results under that plan, and I look forward to sharing them very soon.

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

Mr. Redhead: That does nothing to address the crisis today, right now.

The staffing situation at the Thompson lab has steadily worsened in recent years. Since 2020, six medical laboratory technologists have left positions in Thompson. Currently, there are only three technologists out of 12. That's a total of a 75 per cent vacancy rate.

Workload assessment data obtained by MAHCP show that laboratory technologists in Thompson have been forced to work 47 hours straight. *[interjection]*

This is dangerous. We need these lab techs to provide services to patients and—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired. *[interjection]*

When I say a member's time has expired, that means you're supposed to sit down and not keep talking.

And there—and I would add, there really is no point in yelling in here, especially when we have students. I think they want to see professional behaviour on this floor, that we can demonstrate that democracy can work.

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, the health human resources action plan aims to support health-care programs all across the province. There are several positions within that health human resources action plan that is being targeted for increases: physicians, nurses, allied health professionals, support workers.

I look forward to sharing the results of the great work that has been done by the task force very soon.

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

Mr. Redhead: Not even a mumble of Thompson in that answer.

Madam Speaker, these are basic health-care services necessary for a hospital to function. Access to lab services is necessary for rapid diagnosis and treatment of patients in car accidents, heart attacks, pregnancy complications and other emergencies.

Will this PC minister apologize to health-care workers in the North for her government's failure to recruit and retain technologists in Thompson?

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, Thompson is a concern as well for our government in terms of the services they need.

We are pleased to be around the table of solutions with many stakeholders in the North, Madam Speaker, looking at the challenges and the needs of the various northern communities.

We will continue to work with those stakeholders on solutions, Madam Speaker. Some of those solutions are contained in the health human resources action plan, and I look forward to sharing the results of that plan very soon.

Thank you.

Drug Overdose Death Reporting Request to Pass Bill 221

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): After months of the PCs refusing to release the numbers of overdose deaths in Manitoba in 2022, we finally received the preliminary data. And this data makes it clear that the addictions crisis in Manitoba continues to get worse under this PC government.

Madam Speaker, 418 Manitobans died from an overdose in 2022. That's 418 Manitobans too many.

This is a crisis, Madam Speaker, yet this PC government continues to do nothing. That's shameful. The PCs should do the right thing and commit to being transparent and pass Bill 221.

Will they do so today?

Hon. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): I first want to begin by thanking all the front-line workers for all the work that they do, all the support they provide for all the individuals seeking support for their needs and for the families as well, and to say that individuals are able to see all numbers if they go onto the website.

Preliminary numbers have been posted. And contrary to her comment, the numbers posted for 2021 were higher than 2022.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Point Douglas—[interjection]

Order.

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

Safe Consumption Site Request for Facility

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): When we're pointing out numbers here, I want to remind that member that these are Manitobans. These are loved ones. These are people who have lost their lives, and this government continues to do nothing to support these families.

They won't open a safe consumption site. They tried to bring a bill forward that would stop organizations who are doing life-saving work from doing their work. And now, you know, they take credit to say that, oh, the numbers are lower. These are people's lives.

So I'll ask the minister again: Will they do the right thing? Will they open a safe consumption site today and help save Manitobans' lives and ensure that these numbers decrease and Manitobans' lives can be saved here in Manitoba?

Hon. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): Madam Speaker, our condolences go out to all fam—families, sorry—who have lost members to overdose.

That is why, in 2022, under the Mental Health and Community Wellness, a road map was created for improving mental health, substance use, addictions and programs throughout the province.

Madam Speaker, \$17 million was invested to help families and individuals who were seeking the supports they need to ensure that their families were feeling and doing better.

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

Mrs. Smith: If this government was doing better, these numbers would not continue to increase. We wouldn't have more families joining, you know, Moms Stop the Harm, coming to this Manitoba Legislature, begging this government to do something to help save their lives because there's so many that are struggling in our province today.

Thankfully, our NDP government was able to stop Bill 33. So many organizations approached us and said what this government's doing was bad because it would stop the work of saving lives and Manitobans.

So I'll ask the minister again: Will she do the right thing? Will she open a safe consumption site here in Manitoba and help save Manitoban lives?

Ms. Morley-Lecomte: On this side of the House, we stand up for Manitobans and provide safety for them.

Bill 33 was providing safety through providing sites that would assist individuals—vulnerable individuals—to seek the supports they need with medical professions, pathway to recovery and a continuum of care to ensure that their recovery was long term.

Health Workers Without Collective Agreement Back Pay and Resignation Timeline Concerns

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We're more than concerned that the Health Minister says they haven't read a Manitoba Health report from a year ago that states in no uncertain terms that over half of all employees, two thirds of nurses and half of doctors, considered quitting due to burnout.

The report spells it out. The current state of employee well-being poses a risk to employees, to patients and to the health system. Burnout isn't covered. And we've heard directly from people in the system: they want to do their work, but they're quitting as an act of professional and personal self-preservation, many after years of wage freezes.

Are people who worked for years during this pandemic without a contract being denied their back pay by this government if they resigned before October 2022?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): I appreciate the member finally getting to the point of his question, and certainly we want to ensure that there's a fair deal reached for all Manitobans—or for all workers within our health-care system.

We want to make sure that that deal is reached as quickly as possible, and our encouragement is for the employer, which is Shared Health, and for the unions to work together at the bargaining table to get that done.

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

Mr. Lamont: This government dragged its feet on contracts and froze health wages for years on end—in law. The Deloitte report says it drove people to burn-out and to quitting.

I table a Shared Health memo dated November 3rd, 2022, that makes it clear that retroactive salary increases don't apply to many people who worked in health care if they resigned, even if it were due to burnout. Under No. 3., who is eligible, it says, and I quote: Employees who are no longer employed with an employer or organization through designation or termination as of October 12th, 2022.

I heard from a worker today who said they were affected by this. The people who put in the work deserve their full back pay.

*(14:30)

Why is Shared Health and this government engaged in wage theft, and will they reverse it and make it right?

Mr. Teitsma: I think the member is clearly confused. He seems to think the Clerk's table is the negotiating table, that he's somehow the union representative, and that I'm how—somehow Shared Health. None of those things are true.

What we have here is a union negotiation, and it should be allowed to occur at the proper table, not in this Legislature.

So, appreciate that the member may have a particular concern, and those particular concerns are things that, you know, the union that represents those workers should be representing and should be interested in, and surely they can work together and come up with reasonable plans for all the individuals concerned.

That's what a negotiation table is for. That's where negotiation should happen. The member wants to it here in the Chamber; it's not appropriate.

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

Eating Disorders and Addictions Request for Treatment Facility

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): The provincial government has not released any findings related to eating disorders and addictions here in Manitoba. We know the priority needs to be on reducing wait-lists and getting people into treatment.

As of April 4th—just a few weeks ago—there were 145 clients waiting for an estimated 16 to 18 months for the Women's Health Clinic. And to add to this, Manitoba is one of the few provinces without an eating disorders residential treatment centre.

Madam Speaker, when is this government going to bring forward some solutions to address these long wait times, and will the government consider creating a task force with a primary focus on eating disorders and addictions?

Hon. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): On this side, we know that investments into eating disorders are very important. We need to provide areas for families to be able to go and seek support for themselves and for the individuals who are.

And in February, we invested money: \$224,000 into the child, adolescent eating disorder program at Health Sciences Centre; \$610,000 into the ongoing, annual funding expansion of the Adult Eating Disorders Program at Health Sciences Centre; and \$300,000 into the continuing funding support for Provincial Eating Disorder Prevention and Recovery Program.

We are supporting family members. There is a lot more that we could do, but we are starting.

Thank you.

Early Learning and Child Care Wage Increases for Educators

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Child care has been a priority for our government, and I am proud to see real, meaningful change in the industry under the leadership of this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and this Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning. This includes \$10-a-day child care and many new

child-care spaces so that families can find accessible and affordable child care.

Well-trained, dedicated staff are the other part of the equation.

Can the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning elaborate on how our government is helping support early childhood educators?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I'd like to thank my good friend and colleague from Portage La Prairie for that fantastic question, Madam Speaker.

It is ECE week this week in Manitoba. Early this afternoon, I was happy to announce increased wages for the early childhood education workforce and funded child-care facilities by \$56.1 million, Madam Speaker, which will be—which will come into effect July 1st, 2023.

This increase, on top of last year's increase, totals \$93.1 million over two years. This PC team is increasing seats. We've made child care more affordable and now we are paying proper wages, Madam Speaker.

We've got more work to do, but we're getting it done, as opposed to that team over there.

Pay Transparency Act Request for Support for Bill 228

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): As life gets more expensive for working families, we can't ignore gender discrimination on the pay scale, but a new CCPA report released just today suggests that the province lags behind other regions when it comes to legislation holding employers accountable.

The data is alarming, and it's going in the wrong direction. Women in Manitoba are paid, on average, only 71 cents on the dollar when compared to men.

Will this PC Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and her colleagues now join us in support of Bill 228, The Pay Transparency Act, today?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): I do appreciate the member opposite bringing forward a private member's bill, and I was disappointed that she didn't bring it to the Legislature for further debate this morning, especially this morning after receiving that report that shows that there is a widening gap and that we know that economic development for women needs to be a focus. So I look forward to that member bringing that bill back to the Legislature for debate.

Meanwhile, our government is committed to advancing women's empowerment through many initiatives. We are funding women in trades; we are funding other economic opportunities, entrepreneurs, in the province of Manitoba and ensuring that all women have the opportunity to achieve their full destiny and succeed in the workforce here in Manitoba.

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

MLA Marcelino: Madam Speaker, I have brought this bill forward twice. It's been rejected twice by that minister and the rest of her colleagues, and I brought this bill forward as early as three weeks ago.

Madam Speaker, everyone deserves equal pay for equal work, but the pay gap increases even further when factoring other forms of discrimination based on race, age and ability. In Manitoba, racialized and Indigenous women earn 59 cents and 58 cents for every dollar men earn.

Given the abundance of data and a continued lack of progress in closing this pay gap, will this PC government act now and pass Bill 228?

Ms. Squires: It's very disappointing to see that that NDP caucus does not have unanimous support for that bill, because otherwise they would have brought it forward for discussion and a debate and a vote right here on the Manitoba Legislature floor. *[interjection]*

But while the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine) continues to shout me down, I would like to tell the House about an important initiative that the Premier and I were at in terms of enhancing women's empowerment earlier today. We are ensuring that we've got opportunities for all women to achieve their destiny, and we're also making sure that our economy grows and that we're lifting women out of poverty by raising the basic personal exemption, expanding the workforce and creating new opportunities where none existed under the previous NDP government.

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

MLA Marcelino: I'd love to kindly remind this minister that this does not have to be an us-and-them dynamic. This could be together that we work towards the economic advancement of all women in this province.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba used to be a leader in pay equity. Pioneering pay equity legislation was passed right here in the 1980s, when it was revealed that

women were paid 20 cents less than men in similar jobs. That was wrong then and it's wrong today.

It's now time for Manitoba to be a leader again and address pay discrimination that exists in society, because everyone deserves a fair paycheque.

Will the PC government support our bill today?

Ms. Squires: I look forward to the time when all NDP caucus members can unanimously support pay equity, like on this side of the House. We all support better jobs, a better economy and no pay gap and gender discrimination in between women and men.

That is why we've worked very hard to ensure that women have a level playing field, including bringing in anti-harassment policy so that women could work free of discrimination, free of harassment, whether they're in the civil service and being a leader throughout this province—something the NDP never did.

They never brought in anti-harassment when they were in government and they should have. Instead, they told women to shut up and suck it up. That's their *[inaudible]*

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

* (14:40)

PETITIONS

Madam Speaker: Are there any petitions?

Provincial Road 224

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Provincial Road 224 serves Peguis First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation and surrounding communities. The road is in need of substantial repairs.

(2) The road has been in poor condition for years and has numerous potholes, uneven driving surfaces and extremely narrow shoulders.

(3) Due to recent population growth in the area, there has been increased vehicle and pedestrian use of Provincial Road 224.

(4) Without repair, Provincial Road 224 will continue to pose a hazard to the many Manitobans who use it on a regular basis.

(5) Concerned Manitobans are requesting that Provincial Road 224 be assessed and repaired urgently to improve safety for its users.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure to complete an assessment of Provincial Road 224 and implement the appropriate repairs using public funds as quickly as possible.

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

Ekosi.

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

Security System Incentive Program

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Cities across Canada and the United States, including Chicago; Washington, DC; Salinas, California; and Orillia, Ontario are offering home security rebate programs that enhance public safety and allow for a more efficient use of their policing resources.

(2) Home security surveillance systems protect homes and businesses by potentially deterring burglaries, reducing homeowners' and business insurance costs.

(3) Home security surveillance systems can also be remotely monitored with personal electronic devices such as smartphones.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to work with municipalities to establish a provincial—a province-wide tax rebate or other incentive program to encourage residents and businesses to purchase approved home and business security protection systems.

This petition's signed by many, many Manitobans.

Drug Overdose Reporting

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

(2) Three hundred and seventy-two Manitobans died from an overdose in 2020; and that's over one a day, and an 87 per cent—and 87 per cent higher than in 2019.

(3) Manitoba is expected to exceed over 400 overdose deaths in 2021, but the data is not publicly available since the last public reporting of opioid deaths was published in 2019.

(4) The data for drug overdose deaths from 2020 to—and 2021 was compiled through media inquiries, and this needs to change.

(5) Access to timely data on the harms of drugs helps to inform both government and stakeholders on where to take action and targeted resources needed in various communities.

(6) Manitoba is the only province not providing regular, timely data to the federal government opioid information portal.

(7) Manitobans deserve a government that takes the growing drug crisis seriously and will report the data publicly in a timely matter to target actions and allow for accountability.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to enact bill 217, The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act (Overdose Death Reporting), to require the Province to publish the number of drug overdose deaths, as well as the type of drug, on a government website in a timely fashion.

And this has been signed by Bernard Catchaway, Deanne Patrick and Tracy Berens.

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of those in this age group require medical necessary foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and the surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and the region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need of foot-care service extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Any further petitions?

If not, grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Madam Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen)—[*interjection*] The honourable member for Elmwood first.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Chairperson, Standing Committee on Public Accounts): On House business, in accordance with rule 111(3)—sub 3, I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts will meet in the Chamber on the following days:

(1) Monday, June 5th, 2023, at 1 p.m. to consider the following reports: Province of Manitoba Annual Report and Public Accounts, dated March 31, 2022; the Auditor General's Report, Public Accounts and Other Financial Statement Audit, dated December 2022. The witness to be called is: the Deputy Minister of Finance.

(2) Tuesday, June 6, 2023, at 1 p.m. to consider the following reports: Auditor General's Report, Aging Information Systems, dated February 2022; and the Auditor General's Report, Audit of Information Systems Privileged Access, dated October 2022. The witnesses to be called are: Deputy Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services; and the Shared Health CEO.

(3) On Wednesday, June 7, 2023, at 1 p.m. to consider the following reports: Auditor General's Report, Quarry Rehabilitation Program Investigation, dated May 2020; the Auditor General's Report, Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations, dated March 2023, Quarry Rehabilitation Investigation Program. The witness to be called is: the Deputy Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the following committee on Public Accounts will meet in the Chamber on the following dates:

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* (14:50)

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I want to commend the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) for his historic announcement. I think it's the first time—I'm told by the Clerk's table—that the PAC chair has been able to call the actual PAC meetings as a result of rule changes and the enhancement of our PAC

process here in the Legislature. So, congratulations to the member for Elmwood.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Could you please, Madam Speaker, resolve the House into Committee of Supply?

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

NATURAL RESOURCES AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): 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 Natural Resources and Northern Development. Questioning for this department will continue in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I think we ended off yesterday, I had asked the minister a question about forestry. So I think that's probably where we will pick up this year.

Does the minister have information on the number of trees that were planted last year?

Hon. Greg Nesbitt (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development): In the last planting season, which was last spring and summer, I guess, Manitoba planted 1,651,035 seedlings, and that's up from the previous year, where we planted one—just over 1.5 million.

Now, that includes the trees planted by Manitoba and our contractors, which the Peguis First Nation was one of our contractors in terms of planting there.

We also have industry planting trees, and we don't have the final numbers for 2022 yet, but CKP in The Pas and LP at Swan River, in 2021 they planted 3.6 million trees. So we expect those numbers to be relatively close for 2022. They're just compiling those numbers now and haven't sent them to us yet.

* (15:00)

MLA Lindsey: Can the minister tell us how many trees were cut down or otherwise lost in, like, forest fires, things like that?

Mr. Nesbitt: Our department doesn't report on number of trees; it's by area and volume harvested.

So, these are preliminary numbers for '22-23. We think they're pretty close, but they're not completely final yet.

We harvested trees over 7,976 hectares of land across Manitoba, and the company's harvested 1,116,579 cubic metres.

MLA Lindsey: So, we keep track of the number of trees we plant, and we keep track of the area of trees that are lost, so can the minister explain how we know if we're keeping up with the number of trees lost as opposed to the number of trees planted?

Mr. Nesbitt: I'm going to try to convey the information I was just told. Again, we set limits of harvest by geographical areas based on the ecological capacity of the forests in those areas. And that becomes annual allowable limits for forest companies to cut.

So, from 2016 to 2020, over 27 million trees were planted throughout Manitoba and 80,000 hectares received certificates of forest renewal. That's ensuring that those forests have trees planted and in order to renew what they had harvested.

So, we—I guess the bottom line is, we are planting more trees than we're harvesting but we don't have a number of trees we're harvesting, just cubic metres and volume.

MLA Lindsey: I'll have to digest all that and then maybe come back to that for further clarification, and maybe the minister needs further clarification, too, as we go.

So, can the minister tell us if his department is currently in talks to sign more revenue sharing agreements with any of the Indigenous communities, First Nations?

Mr. Nesbitt: So, just for a little background here, in April of 2022, the Department of Natural Resources and Northern Development began negotiations with First Nations in Manitoba here towards a pilot timber dues revenue sharing agreement. The mandate our department had was to allow for up to 45 per cent of timber dues revenue to be shared under the agreements.

So, in—after year 1, we—well, in year 1, we focused on areas with large forestry operations, as well—or at the time, and with long-term licences pending.

* (15:10)

So, we—total of two, four, six, eight, 10, 12—we offered a revenue sharing agreement to 13 First Nations. And to date, we've signed six—seven MOUs. We've signed six agreements. So, the MOU precedes the memorandum of agreement. So, seven MOUs, six agreements.

We've also had discussions with two other First Nations and we're looking forward to hearing back from them. Again, this is something that's certainly not forced upon First Nations. It's sharing timber dues with First Nations as a sign of reconciliation, recognition that these trees were harvested on their traditional territories.

MLA Lindsey: Can the minister tell us what First Nations he's got signed agreements with and which ones are still waiting? Or still in progress?

Mr. Nesbitt: Certainly, I'd be happy to share the information of the ones we've signed agreements with. It's public information and I think they're very proud of the fact that they signed with us.

Where possible, we were up at their First Nations and were welcomed with open arms. Had some ceremonies and things like that. And treated to some good hospitality and food while we were up there. So, we're looking forward to signing more.

So, agreements we've signed is with Chemawawin Cree Nation—do you want me to go slow so you can write? Opaskwayak Cree Nation; Minegoziibe Anishinabe; Mosakahiken Cree Nation—I know you'll know the spelling of all these, too, so; Sapotaweyak Cree Nation; Wuskwi Sipihk First Nation. That should be the six that we signed MOUs and MOAs with. We have an MOU signed with the Norway House Cree Nation.

MLA Lindsey: The minister said in his previous answer that you had seven signed MOUs. So far you've given us the name of one of them.

Mr. Nesbitt: I just want to be clear that with the six that you wrote down there, the first six, we signed MOUs—memorandum of understanding. We did more discussions with them, hammered out the memorandum of agreement, which was the triggering document to send the timber dues to those First Nations.

So there's six that have signed both. Norway House Cree Nation has just signed the MOU at this point.

MLA Lindsey: Thank you for that. My misunderstanding.

Which nations have you not got any kind of MOUs or signed agreements with?

Mr. Nesbitt: As I indicated in one of my other answers, there was 13. And I think the member will appreciate, though, those 13 nations are basically in the North and west of Manitoba, where a lot of the work is being done on traditional lands.

So I'd be happy to give him the other—the names of the other six if he'd like to write them down. We've sent them letters. We've followed up with letters. We're having ongoing discussions with some of them. And, you know, we certainly—it's our intent to sign MOUs and MOAs with any First Nation that wants to sign with us.

But, again, it's no pressure. It's tailoring the MOU and MOA to their liking as well. I mean, our offer is to share revenue dues if they have some other things in there that they—wording that they don't like or whatever. We're always open to changing wording and things to ensure that our First Nations are satisfied with anything before they sign it, so.

Are you ready to go? We got the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation. Misipawistik Cree Nation. Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. Pimicikamak Cree Nation. Sagkeeng First Nation. And this is a tough one: Tootinaowaziibeeng treat reserve; TTR for short.

MLA Lindsey: Thank you. Appreciate that.

So, we've talked about some revenue sharing agreements in regards to forestry. Has there been any discussion on revenue sharing agreements with any other resource things particular to First Nations communities? Mineral, one thing and the other.

Mr. Nesbitt: Well, we're certainly interested in expanding our revenue sharing on timber dues with, you know, First Nations in the Interlake, the eastern area of Manitoba here, moving forward. It's an encouragement to them, as well, to help support the forest industries that might want to establish in those areas, if they know that the—they're—they got some economic benefit coming back to them besides the jobs and things like that.

So, as the member will know, I'm—my department is not responsible for mining anymore, so I certainly can't speak to mining. I mean, I think it's—you know, I

think this model has shown that it works. And it's certainly been appreciated by every First Nation that I've met and talked to about this.

And, you know, I want to say that I have a great relationship with all these chiefs and councils now. And, you know, have their personal cellphones on speed dial. It's kind of nice to be able to talk to them about common concerns as well.

* (15:20)

And, you know, a lot of these First Nations are considering how they're going to lose their—how they're going to use their timber to use money, whether it's for economic development or for the good of their citizens. I mean, they're always looking for jobs for their people, and a lot of them have thoughts of, you know, creating businesses and things like that to help support the forest industry.

So we're really excited by this, and we think it's a model that, you know, is a—like I said to them, it's been a long time coming. It should have happened before, but it's happening now. And I think that Manitoba's being recognized on the national stage here for what we're doing in terms of sharing with our First Nations.

So I'm very proud of the work our forestry department's done, and our government's done in terms of recognizing the fact that we need to share revenues with First Nations on their traditional lands.

MLA Lindsey: So, one of the things in the Estimates book for your department, under key initiatives, is to continue to support the drafting and development of mineral-development-consultation-protocol agreements with First Nations in Manitoba.

So, is the minister now saying that that's not his department or is it just that that hasn't been done yet? Is someone doing it? Is it fallen off the map? What's happening with that?

Mr. Nesbitt: So, when the reorganization happened in February of this year and mining moved over to Economic Development, Investment and Trade, parks came into Natural Resources. But what was left with us was the consultation unit that works with First Nations in terms of, you know, doing work on consultation and things with First Nations.

So that unit, under our department, still works—does work for EDIT in terms of the mining industry. But NRND does not have the mining industry under our portfolio. You would have to talk to Minister Wharton in Estimates about mining and what their plans are moving forward in terms of any type of

revenue sharing in mining, you know, when mines are eventually built here in Manitoba on traditional territories.

So what I'm saying is, our consultation unit supports the work of NRND in terms of consultation with, you know, fish, wildlife, forestry, things like that, and also supports EDIT in terms of mining.

MLA Lindsey: Well, that seems somewhat confusing. The consultation unit is part of your department, but you only consult on some things, not on others. Is it that you don't consult on mineral revenue sharing agreements or anything to—somebody else does that? Is that what I'm understanding?

Mr. Nesbitt: I guess the easiest way to explain it is the consultation unit is shared between EDIT and NRND, but the consultation unit falls under my purview. But they do work for the mining sector under EDIT, which is not under my control at all; nothing to do with mining is—I'm not responsible for anything.

But if we need to consult with First Nations on forestry, wildlife, anything like that, we call on the consultation unit. If EDIT needs to consult on mining, needs to have them consult with First Nations, that unit's at their disposal as well.

That unit had to be put somewhere. It had to be under some minister. It was under my ministry; it stayed here. So, like I say, the mining branch moved over to EDIT in the February reorganization.

MLA Lindsey: This question may be 'amov'—above the minister's pay grade, but why did mining go from the resource development portfolio to something else?

Mr. Nesbitt: I think the member's likely correct. It was above my pay grade, but I think it certainly made sense, moving forward. Mining is much more than just exploration and things, and it's going to need plenty of horsepower to develop mining in the North, and I think it's better suited under Economic Development.

We worked hand in hand with Economic Development, anyways, when I had mining, and I think moving over there was a natural fit. And in return, you know, we receive parks, which I think was a natural fit into Natural Resources.

So, it's—yes, it was, I guess, a marriage made in heaven.

MLA Lindsey: Well, apparently it was a marriage made somewhere.

So, just one more question, I think, on the forestry end of things—no, maybe a couple.

What about peatlands? Does that fall under this ministry or is that somewhere else? So, if peatlands is part of this ministry, how many consultations have you had? And are there any MOUs in place, particularly with First Nations on peatlands development?

* (15:30)

Mr. Nesbitt: Yes, we are responsible for peatlands here in Manitoba. The Peatlands Stewardship Act was recently proclaimed.

You know, as the member likely knows, you know, most of the peat production is in the Interlake or eastern Manitoba here, and there hasn't been a lot of industry expansion over the years. I mean, it's certainly a product that we do produce in Manitoba and we do export as well.

You know, if there is any expansion on this, you know, we certainly have a duty to consult with our First Nations on any expansion of the industry there. What we have done is put in place a couple of provincially significant peatlands, protecting them, so that there's, you know, no harvesting of peatland in those areas.

We've worked with Wuskwi Sipiik First Nation on the one, which is called Moswa—'meadols'—Meadows. And the other one that we've protected recently, or deemed a provincially significant peatland, and it has protections, is Fish Lake Fen. So, these peatlands have the ability to store carbon and are a very important part of our ecological network here in Manitoba, I guess.

MLA Lindsey: So, I assume from the minister's answer then, there's no plan to enter into any kind of discussion about revenue sharing with existing peatland operations; only if there's some expansion of peatland operations?

Mr. Nesbitt: I'm certainly learning a lot about peatlands in the last little while. I've focused, as you can see, I focused on forestry a lot and then mining in my first eight months as minister. So peatlands are kind of, you know, something that I'm getting familiar with here, and I hope to go out to some peatlands this spring and just see how they work.

And it's kind of interesting; I've lived in Manitoba 65 years and I've never been to a peatland. So it's going to be an eye-opener for me, I think.

So I just want to tell you about a few companies we have here in Manitoba: we've got Sun Gro; we got Tetrault [*phonetic*]; we got Reimer; we got FPM; we got Jiffy; we got Berger; we got Sunterra; and we got Lambert. There are all those companies here in

Manitoba and, you know, in 2022, I guess, total volume was 1,548,149 cubic metres of peat. And that would fill a lot of garden centres, I imagine, with bags of peat moss, right, as you can appreciate.

I'm sure the member for Flin Flon's (MLA Lindsey) a gardener, like me, in his spare time up there, and likely buys some of this good Manitoba product from time to time, so.

But, you know, Manitoba only got a total of \$167,200 in royalties off of all that peat. So, I mean, we—you know, we're certainly not against sharing revenues moving forward. I mean, I think that's something that's open for discussion especially as the industry expands and First Nations may perhaps get more involved in this on their traditional territories and things like that.

So, you know, again, it's—I mean it's—the volume is significant. The royalties Manitoba collects really isn't, at this point. So, in fact, I was talking to my staff and saying, you know, it likely just pays for our staff people, basically, these royalties.

So, you know, we're looking at expanding the industry where possible, and I guess everything's on the table.

MLA Lindsey: So then the answer is there's no plan to have any kind of revenue sharing discussions with any First Nations upon whose land somebody's existing peat operations presently exist?

Mr. Nesbitt: I think I just said that everything's on the table and I certainly—you know, that, certainly, that we'll consult with and decide what we're going to do.

We've been—certainly, we got a good start in forestry here, and there's certainly—you know, there's certainly an opportunity here moving forward that we'll investigate, and we'll work with our First Nation partners and, like I say, everything's on the table.

MLA Lindsey: I do believe, let me just check—what's the current vacancy rate within the Forestry and Peatlands division of your department?

Mr. Nesbitt: The current full-time equivalent vacancies is—sits at 14.

MLA Lindsey: Well, there's currently 14 vacancies. What's the total complement of full-time equivalents?

Mr. Nesbitt: The '23-24 budget Estimates show that there's 46 full-time equivalents in Forestry and Peatlands.

MLA Lindsey: Has that 46 number been constant over the last few years or has the budgeted number of workers in that department gone down, gone up?

Mr. Nesbitt: Year over year, the 46 number has remained consistent.

MLA Lindsey: I thank the minister for that.

So, just one quick question before we leave forestry: Where does the Province procure all the seedlings that it uses?

* (15:40)

Mr. Nesbitt: So, I'm told here that we put it out to open tender back in, I guess, 2022, and a company by the name of PRT won the tender—a five-year tender. A lot of their trees are grown in Saskatchewan, come here into Manitoba.

I think it's important that we had a long-term contract for trees. As you know, you know, we entered into an agreement with the federal government, too, as part of the 2 Billion Trees initiative here in Canada, where we'll be planting trees, working in conjunction with municipalities and hopefully the City of Winnipeg and things like that in terms of planting trees as well. So, we need a certainty of tree supply, because a lot of other jurisdictions in Canada want trees too.

So, we thought it advisable to go out to tender. And I'm pleased that we have a five-year tender, and we'll have supplies until 2027.

MLA Lindsey: Once upon a time, the Manitoba government owned a tree nursery that this government privatized into oblivion, because it no longer produces anything.

Is there some reason why it was felt that getting rid of a provincially owned entity that grew trees when we have a commitment to plant more trees—why was it gotten rid of, and now we're forced to tender to other jurisdictions—supply employment, income and everything else to out-of-province entities?

Mr. Nesbitt: I think if the member wants to tart-start talking about privatizing here, maybe he could explain to me, as well, if I gave him an answer on why he decided to privatize the property registry under the previous NDP government.

Houses are still being sold, land is still being transacted in Manitoba. Obviously, it was a business decision at that point—I assume, unless the member wants to give me an answer for that.

MLA Lindsey: It's unfortunate that the minister takes exception to questions about privatizing things. I get that previous governments also privatized things like the minister's alluded to; however, those jobs are still in Manitoba.

In this case, the minister's government privatized an entity that shut down, produces absolutely no revenue for Manitoba, provides absolutely no jobs for Manitoba and, instead, contracts out what could have been a very good business in Manitoba; privatizes it, contracts it out to an out-of-province entity that hires workers not in this province, pays taxes not in this province, the workers pay taxes not in this province.

How does that make a—business sense, looking at what the government wants to do—or, claims to want to do, around economic development? This seems to be completely the opposite.

Mr. Nesbitt: I think the member will know that I was not the minister when there was any decision to not continue to move forward with the Pineland nursery here in eastern Manitoba.

It's my understanding that, you know, there was a lot of capital expenditures that would be needed to keep that operation going when we came into government in 2016. And, you know, I think that it was inefficient. And we decided that, you know, the right way would be to go to market, make sure we had a certainty of supply.

And, of course, the member knows that, you know, we can't just put out tenders here in Manitoba and give preference to Manitoba suppliers. We're in a world-wide marketplace here. We're part of the New West Partnership, meaning it's required that tenders go out to any suppliers. And, you know, Manitoba suppliers could bid on this contract as well.

So, the tendering doesn't preclude anybody from bidding. It was—so happened that PRT won the contract and uses trees from Saskatchewan. Our department's very happy with the certainty of supply to ensure we have trees to fulfill our obligations to our First Nations and to the federal government as part of the \$2-billion tree initiative.

MLA Lindsey: To my way of thinking, and I understand the minister wasn't the minister at the time that some of these decisions got made, but would it not have made more sense to invest some in an existing resource that we had here?

Potentially even create a business opportunity for some First Nations to expand what was there previously so that a made-in-Manitoba solution could have been found, even within the confines of the New West Partnership that—I'll point out to the minister—that was his government that signed on to the New West Partnership, which is one of the things that previous government was concerned about was the loss of jobs that would come along with that. And now, here's a prime example of that.

Would it not have made more sense to do the economic development in Manitoba, for Manitobans, to create jobs, to create wealth, to create everything that we need in Manitoba?

Mr. Nesbitt: It's good to hear the member recognize the New West Partnership because I remember—I don't know if it was him, but a lot of his colleagues back there in '16 or '17 were indicating that it didn't even exist. Now the member has said today the previous government was concerned about signing on to it. So, obviously, it did exist, so I'm pleased that he's acknowledged it today.

I think the New West Partnership works all three ways here in the prairies because, you know, Manitoba firms can bid on contracts in Saskatchewan. There's no preference giving to certain provinces. I think it's a wide open, you know, western Canadian market now for products. And we're helping each other as neighbours in terms of, you know, the contracts that are won in each province.

So—and again, you know, I wasn't privy to discussions on the nursery at the time and, you know, I just know that I'm sure a lot of due diligence went into that decision before it was made and a lot of things were considered.

So, I mean, we're talking history now. That's five or six years ago. Our forestry service has moved on and signed contracts here that ensure that we have trees today, tomorrow and into the future.

MLA Lindsey: Can the minister tell us what all other private entities put in for this tendered position of planting—or supplying trees? Was there any Manitoba entities that were part of that process?

* (15:50)

Mr. Nesbitt: I think that, you know, when bids are put out here in Manitoba, they go out through our procurement arm, through Consumer Protection and Government Services. That might be a better question to ask them at Estimates, in terms of, you know, if you want

to know the bidders on certain contracts. I think it's a question for Minister Teitsma when you have Estimates in—with CPGS.

Mr. Chairperson: I would just like to remind all members that we must refer to members by their title or their constituency.

MLA Lindsey: I can't say that I'm exactly satisfied with that answer, that the minister seems to know that a company from Saskatchewan won the tender, but can't tell me if there was any Manitoba companies actually in the process; can't tell me if there were any other companies in the process. I mean, that's—it's somewhat lacking, that answer, sorry to say.

I had hoped that maybe the minister, maybe another day, can provide more clarity on that particular question, but for now I think we'll shift over and talk some about parks.

So, my first question is: Does the minister plan to raise park fees?

Mr. Nesbitt: I certainly had an easy answer for that, but I wanted to remind the member of the December 22nd news release that was issued by our government. I don't know if he has a copy of that there. If so, he can go back in like we just did and find it.

The fourth paragraph, this is talking about the Travel Manitoba report that we commissioned MNP to do on provincial parks with—it comes with lots of recommendations and things, but the previous minister has a basic—I guess you can quote him here in the fourth paragraph. He says: The Manitoba government is not considering any changes to park entry and camping fees at this time.

Further to that, I'm going to say, to be clear, parks fees are not going up this year. The parks evaluation study was received by government but hasn't been endorsed or promoted as policy yet. And, you know, we've certainly been consistent all along that there's no changes to camping or park entry fees.

But what the Travel Manitoba study does show is that Manitobans enjoy less expensive access to parks than in many other jurisdictions here across Canada.

MLA Lindsey: So, the minister talked about things like entry and camping fees.

Will there be any increase in other fees or will there be fees charged for other things that are presently free in the parks?

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Nesbitt: So, I don't know what the member's getting at by any other rates or things like that. I mean, we have park entry fees, we have camping fees, we have commercial lease fees for our operators there. There's no changes to commercial lease rates.

I think the member will note that last week we signed a very important MOU with the Manitoba provincial parks cottage owners association, which represents 6,200 members here across Canada.

Certainly exciting to sign that MOU with them that will take a look at working in collaboration with them in terms of figuring out fair and transparent lease fees, service fees, things like that moving forward. And again, I say in collaboration; this isn't a top-down approach, this is working together with them. That's what that MOU signifies.

The current lease deal, I guess, expired a couple years ago, and in the interim, we did increase their fees by 2 per cent a year in '21 and '22. This year, with the signing of the MOUs, we've frozen the rates so that we can certainly discuss with them in good faith, moving forward, what should be done in terms of lease fees for properties in provincial parks and for service fees like garbage collection, you know, water, sewer, things like that.

So, very excited to work with this fine group of individuals at MPPCOA. They're always—they're open to discussions and they understand that, you know—they love the park, obviously. They have their, you know, seasonal residence, sometimes full-time residences in the park.

And so, like I say, we look forward to working with them over the next little while to come to an agreement that's satisfactory to both parties.

MLA Lindsey: One of the things that I know, particularly in the North, we've seen in the last couple years is firewood used to be supplied free of charge in the parks in the North. Now there's a fee attached; you have to pay for firewood.

So, are there other things like that that the minister's department is contemplating charging fees for? And is there any sense that that is spread throughout the entire province, or is that specific to northern Manitoba?

* (16:00)

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Nesbitt: You know, our park fees, like I said, are certainly amongst the lowest in Canada. I think that

so-called FIPPA document you gave me the other day reflected that. I think that the FIPPA of the public document showed that these fees were pretty low and, you know, I think for—I think the member was maybe misleading the House a little bit there in terms of saying we were going to do increases to park fees and things where all it was showing was a differential between the average in Canada and what we charge.

So, you know, we certainly want to keep our park fees as low as possible to encourage more Manitobans to visit our provincial parks, and, you know, that's our goal moving forward. We're looking forward to, you know, to budgeting more money for repairs and infrastructures—our infrastructure in parks—to provide more opportunities for Manitobans to get out and enjoy the parks, moving forward.

MLA Lindsey: I guess one of the other things that was in that freedom of information that I tabled in the House the other day and in the actual report itself that I read when it was publicly available was—and don't quote me; this is not a direct quote—but it talked about fees being competitive with private parks, which the minister would probably agree that private parks, private entities, are there specifically to make money, so they charge more.

Is it the intent of this government, of this department, to change fees for various things, whether it's park entry, campsites, yurts rentals, cabin rentals, any of those other things we've talked of? Is it the intent, as was alluded to in that report, to make those fees competitive, in quotation marks, with the private system?

Mr. Nesbitt: I think, you know, any good government would be remiss if they didn't do their due diligence and, you know, take a look at other jurisdictions across Canada, look at private entities and things to see what they're doing in the private space compared to the public space. And I think that's what that report from Travel Manitoba indicates, is that, you know, Manitoba's camping fees, various fees in there, are much lower than some jurisdictions and I guess lower than the Canadian average. And that's why you commission reports, to take a look at things like that.

And there's much more in the report, though, than just talking about fees. There's certainly—it talks about opportunities and things moving forward.

So, you know, we're going to digest that report and take a look at it. I think you're going to see some, you know, a lot of good news here over the next few weeks coming into parks, and I think that what our

goal is, is to ensure that we have the best possible experience for Manitobans and, indeed, Canadians or US visitors that come to Manitoba, that they can explore our beautiful parks and ensure we have the infrastructure—campsites, yurts and things like that—available when people want them.

Because I think the member knows that, you know, there's a huge demand, especially for certain commodities within our parks, like yurts and service campsites and things like that. And I think that, moving forward, we're going to consider—we're going to continue to expand those services for the good of the province so we can serve our citizens to the best of our ability.

MLA Lindsey: The reason I'm asking this line of questions, and certainly the minister and I have had conversations about such things, is I want to ensure that Manitobans have the best possible experience for camping. But it can't be just for those people that have money. It has to be the best possible experience for all Manitobans, which is the whole basis of these questions.

And I know already, I alluded to the fact that you have to pay for firewood now.

Are there other things within the parks that presently are provided at no charge that the minister is contemplating charging a fee for?

Mr. Nesbitt: Well, I completely agree with the member that we want to keep our parks cost effective so any Manitoban can visit a park and not feel like they, you know, they're having money ripped out of their wallets and things like that. And to that end, our park fees are amongst the lowest in Canada right now, and we want to continue keeping them low.

There's certainly no indication here that, you know, we're going to start charging for anything else at this point. I mean there's—no, I would say no, there's nothing else. I mean, firewood, you talked about firewood; but I mean, I guess—but our—again, I just think that Manitobans want the ability to enjoy our parks, like you say; it shouldn't be something for the elite. It should be the average Manitoban that can go out and enjoy their park, and we want to continue to create better experiences in parks for Manitobans, whether that be interpretive programs or more campsites and more yurts, things like that.

The demand is there, and we want to satisfy that demand.

MLA Lindsey: Does the minister have any plans to sell off any of our publicly owned parks?

Mr. Nesbitt: I think the previous minister must've answered this question a dozen times in the House, likely, last year, before I became minister. And the answer was always parks are not for sale.

I've kind of added a tagline to that. I said, parks are not for sale, but they're open for business.

MLA Lindsey: Well, we know that this government, and prior to this minister being the minister responsible, did lease a park to a private entity, which then immediately cost people more money to go and tend to—*[interjection]*

Campground? I stand corrected, it was a campground. Campground.

So we know that that's already taken place. Does the minister contemplate leasing any other services—entities within a park, such as a campground, to any private entity?

* (16:10)

Mr. Nesbitt: We certainly have no plans to enter into any commercial leases for campgrounds.

MLA Lindsey: What about services or entities within the campgrounds? Does the minister have any plans to lease out or contract out things like boat docks, or anything like that?

Mr. Nesbitt: Sorry for taking so much time on that answer; I wanted to be clear on it, that we do have partnerships in place with certain, you know, private entities here in Manitoba for certain things like a campground, like you say.

There's no plans to further that at this point. I mean, we're always open to looking at the possibility of, you know, expanding services for Manitobans at places where it makes sense.

So, I mean, there's no plans at this point, but I think any of the partnerships we've created so far have made sense in terms of, you know, whether the campground be isolated and better operated by a private operator, things like that.

I mean, it's—there's no great grandiose plan here to privatize anything—any major portions of Manitoba parks at all. We want to keep them public. We want to expand our parks in terms of infrastructure expansion and improvements and ensure that the public has a great experience when they're in these parks.

MLA Lindsey: So, I know that in at least one park in Manitoba, a boat launch where local citizens used to go and launch their boat, was free access. Then the lessee of the area put a chain across. And then you had to go and pay the lessee to launch your boat at a boat launch that was built and paid for by the people of Manitoba.

Does the minister see that as problematic? And is there a plan to do more of that leasing that costs Manitobans more money when it didn't cost the lessee any money because the infrastructure was already there?

Mr. Nesbitt: Can the member maybe provide more detail on what lake or what campground or park he's referring to at this point? So I can, you know, try to find some details for you today or get back to you with an answer.

MLA Lindsey: Yes, I certainly can. It's Bakers Narrows park, Lake Athapap. And the chain went up a couple of years ago. A goodly portion of people refused to pay, and rightfully so.

* (16:20)

Mr. Nesbitt: So, you know, certainly we want parks to be accessible here in Manitoba and, you know, my staff's trying to find out specifics about the one park you're talking about out of our 92 here, where you say this incident is happening.

I'm not sure. I can't give you an answer at this point, but I don't know if you want to move on at this point and we'll see what we can find before 5 o'clock.

MLA Lindsey: The minister can take it as an undertaking and get back to me whenever, but while he's in that process, perhaps he could have his staff look and see if there's any other instances of something similar to that taking place.

And then, so, then my next question would be, are there any plans to allow lessees to limit access to things within a park like that, other than what's already there? Is it the intention to allow a lessee to make money off of infrastructure that was put in place by the Manitoba government for Manitobans, in order for that lessee to make a profit?

Mr. Nesbitt: So, I do know—I haven't been to, you know, a large percentage of these parks, which I hope to get to this summer as many as I can, spring and summer. But you know, the parks I have been at, you know, there's a concession stand in the park; we lease it out to an operator. You know, it was publicly built in a lot of cases, I'm sure, and it's leased out to them. They

maintain and operate it for the season, for the length of their lease and things like that.

So, there are facilities in parks that are owned by the Manitoba government, of course, and leased out.

So, there's certainly no plans to restrict access or anything like that moving forward. We want parks to be open and enjoyable for all Manitobans.

MLA Lindsey: And lest the—it comes across as any kind of condemnation of the people that are running Bakers Narrows Lodge, I just want to make sure that it's a matter of record that they're doing some pretty good things. They're trying to expand their business; they're trying to make sure that there's a better experience for people at Bakers Narrows Lodge than there's been for a while. They've introduced several new and innovative things, which I congratulate them for.

It's specific to that one instant—well, maybe another one, too, but I'm sure they're only doing that which is allowed. So, if not, then I'd be shocked.

So, I just wanted to make sure there was no hint that I was trying to do—say anything bad about the operators of that particular lodge because I think they are doing some good things.

Does the minister have a list of the number of visits to each park in the last year?

* (16:30)

Mr. Nesbitt: So, you want to know how many visitors there was into our parks, right?

So, the latest number we have is 2021. We're showing 6.8 million visited provincial parks in Manitoba. And that's based using traffic counters, same as you count traffic on roads and things like that.

At an average of 3.5 people per vehicle, to come up with that number.

MLA Lindsey: The minister doesn't have a breakdown of park-by-park kind of visits that he could undertake to provide?

Mr. Nesbitt: I think the member can appreciate that we don't have gates at every provincial park here in Manitoba. There's 92 of them.

I think the member can likely appreciate that a large majority of those visits are at some of our larger parks here in eastern Manitoba and also, perhaps, in central Manitoba, western Manitoba, that sort of thing.

So, I mean, this is an estimate based on traffic counts at parks and things. I don't know that—I mean,

obviously, our parks in the Whiteshell, things like that, are extremely, extremely busy, you know, between day traffic and camping traffic and things.

So I don't have the numbers right at my fingertips here on each park. Like I say, it's an extrapolation based on traffic counts.

MLA Lindsey: Thank the minister for that.

Is there any plans to create new parks, new campgrounds, or to expand any of the existing ones?

Mr. Nesbitt: This is where it gets exciting to be the minister responsible for parks.

In Budget 2022-23, which is—you know, this paragraph I'm going to read is included in the—this book, here. Basically, the department has developed a new multi-year Manitoba parks strategic investment capital plan, with a capital investment of an initial \$10 million beginning in this fiscal year.

The increased funding is going to use—be used to improve infrastructure, construct new facilities and provide the necessary equipment to support programs, tourism activities and service in our parks across the province. The highlights of the plan are going to include expansions to yurt villages and other glamping developments: campground infrastructure, electrification projects, significant trail improvement projects and the redevelopment of the 'norsh' Whiteshell museum at Nutimit [*phonetic*] lake.

Further to that, I think if the member stays tuned, I'll give him a day's heads-up when our announcement's going to be. We're planning an announcement here in May to announce our capital program here for '23-24. Many exciting announcements; I know, you know, our commercial operators, our cottage owners' associations and everything, are very excited about hearing the details of our announcement, and I'm sure you'll want to pay close attention to the announcement, as well.

MLA Lindsey: So, just to go back for a minute or two to the memorandum of understanding that the department has signed with the cottage, cabin owners' association, can the minister share any information on what is in that memorandum of understanding, or better yet, supply a copy of said memorandum?

Mr. Nesbitt: That document is publicly available on the Manitoba Parks website, if the member would like to go and take a look at the—I think it's, you know, five or six pages long.

So—I think I summarized it before, that we're going to work in collaboration with the cottage owners' association and cottage owners across Manitoba on, you know, lease fees, service fees, things like that. And, like I say, it's working together, it's collaborating, it's ensuring that, you know, the government has the best interests of the cottage owners at heart, with the cottage owners having an understanding that, you know, provincial parks are treasured entities here in Manitoba and that they are—they've been—always been willing to pay their fair share of fees and—lease fees and service fees here in Manitoba.

So, it's going to be an open and transparent process. That's basically what the memorandum states, and I look forward to work on this over the next—you know, the next couple years, to come to a satisfactory agreement so that both sides are extremely happy.

MLA Lindsey: Does this memorandum apply only to cottages, cabins that are in parks, or does it apply to any cottage, cabin that's on Crown land?

Mr. Nesbitt: The agreement was signed with the Manitoba provincial parks cottage owners association. It applies to cottages in provincial parks.

MLA Lindsey: Are all cottage, cabin owners' associations in the province associated with that group?

* (16:40)

Mr. Nesbitt: So, the member's certainly correct that not every cottage owner is a member of an association here in Manitoba. But the MOU sets out a framework for ongoing discussions with MPPCOA representatives towards a determination and implementation of new cottager lease and service fees. And this process will also include public engagement opportunities for all provincial park cottagers and cottage associations to have a say in the development of any new fee models.

MLA Lindsey: So, currently, I know there are some cottage owners' associations that are not a part of the provincial association. So does this memorandum of understanding affect those associations, even though they haven't been a part of the discussions or signing of said memorandum of understanding?

Mr. Nesbitt: All—I guess I want to reiterate that the—all the M-L-U does is spell out that, you know, we're—both sides are going to work in an open, transparent manner to ensure that any proposed increase to lease fees or to service fees for cottage owners in Manitoba, whether they're a member of the association or not of MPPCOA, that it's done in a fair and transparent

manner. And that's where we're going to have public engagement with, you know, cottage owners that aren't part of an association that has membership in MPPCOA.

So, I guess—I think MPPCOA represents a majority of cottage owners in Manitoba, I'm assuming, and I think that—you know, but we don't want anybody to be left out. We want to make sure that everybody's fully informed before any changes are made to the lease and service fee models here in Manitoba.

MLA Lindsey: So, there are some cottage, cabin owners' associations that are not within provincial parks. Will there be any change to their Crown land lease fees or anything of that nature? Or—they going to be treated differently? Is there going to be some open and transparent discussions with some of those associations that are outside of parks?

Mr. Nesbitt: Well, this MOU just applies to cottages within provincial parks at this point. There's been no discussions about cottage developments on Crown lands or anything at this point. You know, there was a need to come to this MOU based on, you know—the lease fee arrangements had basically expired, and we needed to come up with a new model—or we wanted to come up with a new model, I guess is a better way to put it—with cottagers. *[interjection]* Bless you.

So, you know, we want to work with these people in an open and transparent model, knowing that we need them in parks, and they need to work in conjunction with parks to ensure that, you know, they have the services they need as well.

So, like I say, I'm looking forward to our discussions moving forward. This agreement was—you know, it took a while to hammer it out. But, you know, we did it. And everybody's satisfied and looking forward to discussions moving forward.

MLA Lindsey: I just want to clarify that, knowing that there are some cabin owner associations that are outside parks, there's also individual cabin owners, in particular, that aren't part of an association, that are outside parks. There's remote cabins that are on Crown lands and all those kind of things.

Is the intent that this memorandum of understanding will somehow apply to them somewhere in the future, even though they haven't been a part of the discussion?

If, for example, the group that you've been talking to decides that, well, they're going to increase lease fees, does that mean that it'll automatically apply to

ones that aren't part of an association, aren't in a park, have different services that may not be supplied by the Province? Like, maybe some of them don't have—they don't have roads, so there's no such thing as snow clearing or grading or things like that. Other ones, through their own association, pay for those type of services without any cost to the government.

It's—so, is there any intent to include all of those types of entities into this memorandum of understanding, or whatever comes out of that memorandum?

Mr. Nesbitt: I just want to make it clear to the member that this agreement is an MOU with the Manitoba Provincial Parks Cabin Owners Association—has no effect on any—anything outside the park in any cottage developments or anything like that.

This MOU is strictly to talk about lease and service fees within provincial parks in Manitoba. Any associations or cottagers that aren't members of MPPCOA will still be consulted as part of this open consultation process before any decisions are made.

MLA Lindsey: I thank the minister for that.

One of the things that I'd asked about, and maybe I didn't get the fulsome answer to it, was about—maybe I didn't ask the question right, because I can't even find it now. So—it was about any other areas being designated as protected for parks—or, is there any plan to look at other areas that aren't presently designated as parks or anything like that—or, protected areas, I guess?

Mr. Nesbitt: Just ask the member to bear with me here as I read a document to him, and—you know, I think will explain what we're trying to do.

So, Manitoba's dedicated to working with organizations, Indigenous communities, and other partners to build and maintain a network of protected and conserved areas to conserve biodiversity across the province, with associated ecosystems and cultural values over the long term.

Manitoba has had a long-term commitment to establish a network of protected areas. The province became the first jurisdiction in Canada in 1990 to commit to permanently protecting its diverse landscapes.

Manitoba's current network of protected and conserved areas is just over 7.2 million hectares, or approximately 11.1 per cent of Manitoba.

My department is also working with other jurisdictions and levels of government to collaboratively

advance area-based conservation efforts in Manitoba and across the country.

Canada signed the post-2020 global biodiversity framework at the UN's 15th convention of the parties in Montreal in December 2022, committing to conserving 25 per cent of land, freshwater, marine areas by 2025, and 30 per cent of each by 2030. Manitoba will certainly support Canada where it can, as we determine goals aligned with the province's need.

* (16:50)

We are working with partners to identify other effective area-based conservation 'asures', which is OECMs. They're managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for conservation and biodiversity on site; may include associated socioeconomic and other locally relevant values.

We use various legislation to make protected areas in Manitoba based on what is being protected and why. So, protected areas are made by order-in-council, including ecological reserves, provincial parks, wildlife management areas, provincial forests and traditional use planning areas.

In January 2023, as I mentioned earlier, our government designated the first ever provincially significant peatlands in Manitoba to ensure the biodiversity of Moswa Meadows and Fish Lake Fen.

Wildlife management areas, which include both protected and unprotected portions, encompass approximately 2-million hectares of valuable wildlife habitat throughout Manitoba. And, as the member knows, WMAs also play an important role in biodiversity conservation.

MLA Lindsey: I thank the minister for that rather lengthy answer that didn't really answer the question. But, you know, I realize it's getting late in the day and the minister's tired, wants to get out of here. Would've been nice to be able to wrap up today. I'm not sure we will now.

I—well, I do have a whole bunch of questions that I could spend the next month asking the minister about when it comes to wildfires and wildfire suppression and—does the minister have a trail strategy, and if so, when will it be implemented?

Mr. Nesbitt: We're certainly working on a trail strategy here in Manitoba. As the member will know, I think, that, you know, we've certainly been working with Snoman on snowmobile trails and ATV Manitoba on trails, and I think the—maybe the member's alluding to more walking trails, biking

trails, things like that. So that's certainly, you know, a part of our plan.

I think back in 2020, you know, our government provided a historic \$10-million investment to promote and build trail networks throughout a new endowment fund here in Manitoba. So, that work continues. In 2022, 30 projects were funded, and we look forward to more good work on trails moving forward.

MLA Lindsey: At this time, there's no more questions, so I suggest we move on to resolutions.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions. At this point, we will allow the virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the questions—I don't believe we have any.

Resolution 25.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$20,241,000 for Natural Resources and Northern Development, Stewardship and Resource Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 25.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$38,123,000 for Natural Resources and Northern Development, Resource Management and Protection, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 25.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$51,299,000 for Natural Resources and Northern Development, Manitoba Wildfire Service, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 25.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$35,830,000 for the Natural Resources and Northern Development, Parks and Trails, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 25.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$15,949,000 for Natural Resources and Northern Development, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 25.1. At this point, we request the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Lindsey: I move that line item 25.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development's salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on this motion?

Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of this motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

The motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 25.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,811,000 for Natural Resources and Northern Development, Finance and Shared Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Natural Resources and Northern Development.

The hour being 4:59, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Committee rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

ROOM 255
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): 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 Transportation and Infrastructure.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Welcome back to everybody for the day today.

When we were wrapping up the day yesterday, we had the—begun some questions on the Lake St. Martin-Lake Manitoba channel project. We were citing, on page 19 of the Estimates book, the stages of consultation, and I had asked the minister—and I'll ask the question again, as we wrapped up the day yesterday: What stage of the consultation are we in?

As I said, on page 19, it states that there are six steps to the channel project's environmental approval. And the—can the minister explain how many steps have been completed, broken out by year? For example, you know, which year, whenever it was completed, and last year was there any completed, and where are we at today.

Hon. Doyle Pivniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Just want to—thanking the member for the question.

The—I'll just go through the six environmental access—assessment process, six steps. The six steps of the federal environmental assessment process is follows.

Step 1 is a project description review. So, MTI submitted the project description in January 2018.

Step 2: Determination of the environmental assessment. This stage included a public comment period on the project's description. The agency determines if the environmental assessment is required and issues a notice of determination. And then, of course, the next completed—it was completed in 2018.

So, then, there was step 3, which is the environmental assessment commencement. The agency issues a

notice of commencement and provides the opportunity for public comments on the draft and environmental impact statement guidelines, and then the agency issues final environmental impact statement guidelines to MTI, issued May 2019, it was completed.

So now we're on step 4: Analysis. This is the current stage. MTI submitted a project environmental impact statement in August of 2019; technical and public review ongoing throughout this stage.

On June 2020, MTI provided initial response to technical information requests, revised responses, submitted in December of 2020, and May, into June of 2022, MTI submitted responses to 134 round 1 informational requests, submitted more than 11,000 pages of documentation.

August 2022, the federal agencies issued 34 round 2 information requests, and MTI is currently working on the response to the round 2 information requests with plans to file by May 31st of 2023.

So now there's going to be step 5, which is the environmental assessment report. Agency prepares draft environmental assessment report, public comment period on draft environmental assessment report, and the agency finalizes an environmental assessment report.

And then, at stage 6, the environmental assessment decision, the minister issues an environmental assessment decisions statement with conditions.

So, this is kind of how these six steps are—the processes work. And, like I said, we're on step 4, and now we're just trying to wrap up, towards the end of stage 4—is to complete the 34 round 2 information requests. And right now we're hoping to get, especially with the Indigenous social economics information, we're going to file this on May 31st, 2023, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bushie: I thank the minister for that answer. So, on completion, then, of step 4, what the minister had mentioned was going to be, hopefully, for May—end of May of this year.

What is then the timeline for step 5 with the environmental report and step 6, the environmental decision?

Mr. Pivniuk: Mr. Chair, when it comes to the member for Keewatinook's (Mr. Bushie) question, right now, when it comes to the federal government, you know, we are going to be sending on May 31st, the round 2.

And then, it's—once the submission is set in, it's the clock. They have the opportunity to review all this information and so, it's—they have a period of time that they have to approve this.

And if they don't approve it, they do have an opportunity—like, if there is more questions that they maybe require, then they may go with round 3.

We're hoping that they don't. Hopefully, that they will actually—we've given them so much information. We've given so much input from First Nation communities, too, and the Métis Federation.

We're hoping that now we can get this approved, so that hopefully, by the end of October, if we can get construction started, but it has to be approved by fall or—if not, then we have—well, we have to wait for another year of construction.

* (15:00)

Mr. Bushie: So, for clarification, then, the environmental report, or step 5, has been—round 2 of that has been submitted, and the federal government has until October of 2023?

Mr. Piwniuk: The thing is, they—we were going to submit it by—we are hoping to submit it by the end of May, but it's up to the—it's the prerogative of the federal government to take as much time as they can if they want to review this. That—it's all in the hands of the federal government once we get all these questions and answers—the questions that they give us, the answers in the submissions, were all going to be sent in on May 31st. That's our goal.

And we're hoping that it won't be as long to—now that they have all the information—our staff worked really hard, met with so many First Nation communities. Cynthia Ritchie, who sits just beside my deputy here, her and her team have been out for many, many meetings—they probably put a lot of miles on their vehicles and—to have these meetings with First Nations.

So, we're really hoping that, with all the work and all the homework that our department has worked very, very hard on doing—and, again, I want to thank them for all the work they have done—I'm just hoping that the federal government knows what the priority is for flood mitigation.

And the thing is, are we in another wet cycle? We get—it seems like we get, every seven years, wet cycles and dry cycles, and this last two or three years have been a—kind of a wet cycle now.

Mr. Bushie: So, I'm looking for clarification on some dates, then, as the minister had mentioned hoping to get all the provincial reporting on step 5 in by the end of May.

And assuming that is the case, is there, then, a window that the government—that the federal government is committed to respond by? The minister had mentioned that, you know, they could take as long as they want, but is that, in fact, the case? Or is there a timeline of, you know, for example, days, weeks, months that they have to get back to the minister in regards to a decision or whether or not there is additional submissions that need to be provided?

Mr. Piwniuk: For the member, the—again, we are on step 4 when it comes to the process and we are submitting our submission of the round 2 in May 31st. That is our goal is that—around that time.

And the thing is, when it comes to—if there's any more questions—we'll send that it, if they have any more questions, the clock doesn't start ticking there, it would actually—there would be—we—there could be requirements of more information if they've made requests.

But once they get the information, if they say that it's complete, then they—the clock will be starting and we'll find more information as we're researching here of how long would that clock tick.

But when it came to—right now, with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act extension—we actually got the extension in the—Canadian environmental assessment act of 2020–2012. And so that's—there's an act that gives us extension on when we applied for this project and they gave us the extension until February 2024. So we're hoping that's actually the magic day that—minimum, the longest that we would have to wait until the licensing is required.

I just want to also share some information that when projects, much like the—you know, of course, back in the day, Calgary was flooded—when they had their severe flooding event that happened, you know, probably more than 10-plus years, it really devastated the city of Calgary to a point where even their Saddledome was damaged because of the flood situation that occurred there. They had to wait four years and they're—they were actually on their round 3 by the time their licensing was approved by the federal government.

And then there was also the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 which, again, has just been approved last week or late last week. On Friday, I got the text from

my deputy to say that it's been approved and—but, you know what? That project had waited for 10 years for an environmental approval.

So this is why we want to make sure the environmental assessment approve—base—we were hoping that we have provided them with enough information that they will approve it, at the latest, of February 2024.

Mr. Bushie: I appreciate the minister going to undertake the timeline that the federal government would have to, as he referred to it, the clock ticking necessarily on when they would have to respond back and provide any—either a decision or whether or not there's more information as required.

* (15:10)

And, as the minister mentioned, they're on step 4, and I apologize, I thought—I understood that to mean they were already on 5 with the environmental report.

So then, being on step 4, how long once—if everything is approved and you complete that step, how long then is step 5 and step 6, and what's the timeline for that?

Mr. Piwniuk: When it comes to the Canadian environmental assessment act, extension—2012, they—we've actually already gone to 206 days of the 365 days that they have given, and there's still 159 days remaining.

That is all really up to the department—like, the federal government. And it's up to them how many days they actually take, but that is kind of the—with the extension, it does put us at about—159 days would put us toward the end of the year.

But we're hoping that—like, again, we're in stage 4. We're—stage 4 is going to be wrapped up by the end of the month of May. And the thing is, once we put Senate in, as soon as they have another question, that clock stops and we have—if there's any more required questions, we would have to submit that at that time, and then the clock starts again once they feel that they have all the questions answered.

But, like I said, I'm really hoping that we've—but—we've done two rounds already. This is our second round, and we want to make sure that—I think we've been very thorough, and we've asked a lot of questions. Our staff have put many, many hours of research and we have a dedicated department that—actually dedicated employees that are working on this project.

That we—that's how important it is to our government, to make sure that this project goes forward

because, again, it's like the federal minister of E-M-O had said—Bill Blair: For every dollar we spend, we save 20-some—was it 25? Eleven dollars. Eleven dollars for every dollar we spend in savings of damage or flood-related damages, so we want to make sure that this investment that we do on the two—the channels will save us in the future many, many billions of dollars in the future.

One of our biggest floods in—on history, even after—even 1997 was—the 2011 flood was the all-time highest, and it was because of that area that was flooded. It was not just the western side of the province, it was also Brandon, it was along the Assiniboine Valley, the Souris Valley.

Many communities had to prepare, build brand new ring dikes; I know Melita did. But I think the biggest loss of property in 2011 was the long—Lake Manitoba, lake—long—Lake St. Martin, and those were the two areas that were very impacted because of the amount of rain and water that we received in that western region, and in Saskatchewan too.

Mr. Bushie: The minister had alluded to the extension of the environmental assessment, and they applied for the extension to possibly go, and it would take until February 2024.

Can the minister, then, explain why the province applied for the extension specifically?

Mr. Piwniuk: When it came to the Canadian environmental assessment act of 2012, it was going to be replaced by a new act in 2021. So, the reason why we went to get the extension so that we didn't—if we didn't do the extension, and the new act came in, then we would have to start all over again.

So, that was the recommendation by the federal government to make—to actually get the extension. And so, the extension does end—at—on that date, which was 2024, February of 2024.

Mr. Bushie: So, if it was just—so, I'm hearing it's almost potentially just a formality to kind of update the current, well, the environmental assessment act from an outdated or archaic act, whatever it may be, to the current one, then does the minister, then, not see an additional extension being applied for then?

Mr. Piwniuk: Is it—asking if we were to do another extension?

Mr. Bushie: Yes.

I guess, to kind of clarify the question a little bit then: there's been, so far, an extension, I guess, to the

environmental assessment. And so, with—if that was just kind of a formality to kind of update whatever on the federal level from the act of 2012 to the act of 2021, then, is—will there be no more further extensions applied for from the Province to the environmental assessment?

Mr. Piwniuk: When it comes to the Canadian environment assessment act of 2012, it was the agency that has indicated to us that we've come a long ways with the old act, the old legislation; that it was—they were very confident that—it was told to our department, that we should, by the time 2024 came along, we should be in that stage when it would be at the approval basis.

And so, that's what—that was recommendation from the agency themselves because we've done a lot of work. They're happy of all the work we have done, and they feel that that was our best option; was to continue with the old act. And—but again, I was reassured here that there will be no extension. They are very confident that we would be approved by that time.

So, we'll—it's—and again, it's really up to the federal government. They understand the urgency of this project and right now, they—again, they just approved the port extension and I'm just hoping that they're on a roll; that they will move this project because that one is economic development which, you know, if our supply chain, what we send out, economically, it's a big impact for the country. But this is people's lives here. So, I'm hoping that this is a priority on the federal side.

* (15:20)

And the thing is, again, his—have to realize that when it comes to DFA programs—and what was nice about the 2022—the—out of that crisis, the opportunity was that we were able to—we really didn't have any damage of floods in the snowmelt of last year. Considering that we had a lot of snow, Mr. Chair, last year, and—we were spared. I think there was minor flooding around the Red River Valley. Very—just around St. Jean Baptiste, they had a little bit of flooding where there was a little bit low lying areas. I see it—sit—saw it for myself. But it was when those Colowad [*phonetic*] rows—lows were coming in that created a lot of moisture—impacted us. And a lot of our snowmelt didn't happen in the escarpments in—west of Morden-Winkler.

And the thing was, with the DFA program, they actually took the events from April 1st all the way to an event that happened in July—the end of July in

Teulon. They were put—they—we were so fortunate that they looked at it as one claim.

So, we didn't—each time there was a weather—Colorado low that came, they didn't consider that as one claim, it—as different claims, because then we'd have \$4.6 million each time there's a claim as a deductible, but what it was allowed all these—that almost \$400 million worth of damage to be part of one claim with one deductible. And that means that that \$400 million, 90 per cent of that \$400 million is part of the DFA program, which is covered by the federal government.

So, it's only in the best interests of the federal government to approve this project so that they don't have these major losses. And now, since we had—even the two thousand and—this year—flood here, we might be close to the 2020, and if—keep—the weather keeps going the way it is, we may be below the two—2020 flood. And that means that with all the investments of projects that we've done—flood mitigation projects, we probably have a minimal amount of damage.

So, this is why it is so important for the federal government to approve this project so that they don't have to come up with a whole bunch of money for the next flood the cat—can happen. You know what happened in the Red River Valley? Thank God that we never had all that water that was coming from the Souris and Assiniboine River last year because that would have went to lake—raising the Lake Manitoba, and we'd await—be in the same boat that we were—would have been in in 2011, and then matching the 2011 flood situation there. We were just lucky. We were spared that Lake Manitoba wasn't impacted by last year's flood.

And so, this is why the federal government's best interest is to approve this project. And I would say to the member, your influence now with the coalition government—with Singh and Trudeau—is making sure that the pressure's put on for this province.

Mr. Bushie: Well, I thought we were going to go the whole term without using the coalition word there, but apparently, we couldn't do that.

So, just to put some timelines and some requests in to the department, then, the minister had mentioned that the extension to the environmental assessment was done as a—almost a formality just to update from a 2012 act to the 2021 act.

And understanding that that wasn't then due to any kind of information that was further required from

the province. That was just the formality that was requested just to kind of update that system.

So, the minister had mentioned that we're now in step 4 of 6. But the—he also referred to the extension, the one-year extension, basically, in 365 days, and now we're 206 days into that extension. So, with the 150-plus days, what happens, then—if the decision and the license is not approved, what happens on day 365?

Mr. Piwniuk: I just want to clarify with the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) that the extension was actually 18 months—18 months of the C-E-A 2012 extension. And the fact is that 365 days is the clock that starts ticking when we do the submission and—the first submission.

And so, the thing is, once he asked for more questions, the clock stops and then there's require for more—and that is basically their guidelines so that they have time to review the information that they can—that they get from us. And they can determine if they need these full 365 days. It has no control of what—and it's not a—basically, they have to go through the whole 365 days. It's—just allows them to review all the information that we've sent, because we've sent 1,100 pages; that's a lot of reviewing to do. So it gives them a chance to review all the submissions that we have given.

And the difference between the—when it comes to the assessment and the act of 2012 versus the new act of 2021 is—the primary difference is that there's a social economic impact study that is required now, in the 2021 act. And the thing was, which is nice, is that when I said yesterday that we do—we were asking also with our—what we're waiting for from our First Nation communities is their social economic impact study.

So that is something over and above that we feel that—it was required so that when they get all this information, even with the change in the act and in—even now that we're on the old act, we gave them beyond the amount of information that is required so that they can't use that to say that, you know what, you never did this and this and that.

So, we're just covering our bases. We're—is—this is an insurance policy, basically, what we're doing here. So, we're going beyond the call of duty here to make sure that this project gets approved by your coalition government.

Mr. Bushie: So, the minister referenced kind of the social aspect of the project, then. And then I appreciate the answers and the clarifications on the assessment acts and why we went from 2012 act to 2021 act and that we're only in stage 4 of the

submissions and there is basically no timeline, then. I'm not hearing a committed timeline to actually get that done rather than trying to call on others to hurry up and get that done.

But we know, also, that the budget for the Lake St. Martin-Lake Manitoba channels project has increased, thanks to delays caused by the failure to properly consult with Indigenous communities.

So can the minister explain, then, is that consultation now completed?

* (15:30)

Mr. Piwniuk: Well, I'm not quite sure—the member for Keewatinook—I'm not quite sure how much more I have to explain it in plain English here, but when it comes to the process—of the approval process, it is the federal. It's on a federal timetable.

Wince we submit these proposals in round 2 at the end of May, it is all up to the federal government. And I've been saying this all along. That's the federal process. They're the ones that will come and determine if they need more questions. They're the ones that will determine if they have to provide another round, which we saw here, when I explained as an example for Calgary. They went as far as round 3.

The thing was, when it came to the port in Vancouver, when they got the approval on it last week—again, it took 10 years.

So, it's out of the control of the—like, if it's a city or if it's a province like ours or if it's a port authority, it's going to—it's—it really—it's the determinations up to as much as the proponent puts on all the information, sends the—all the information as requested by the federal government. It is on the timetable of the federal government. It is the approval of the federal government.

We have no control of their timetable. We took their recommendations to go to act—to do—to stay on the old act of 2012 and—because that was a recommendation of the federal government. They're confident enough that, with all our submissions, we will get it through.

So, again, I don't know if I have to—I'm going to say this one more time: It is the federal process. But, when it came to the process of First Nation consultation, when we submitted the first timetable of the 2019 that we—step 3, the agency issued a final environmental impact statement guidelines to MTI issued on May of 2019. So, this is when we were informed that

more consultations had to be done with First Nation communities.

And because of the pandemic was right at that time of 2020 and in 2021, we have—because of the restrictions of having to be—to be anybody to go to First Nations communities, they were impacted by COVID-19 and there was a lot of lockdowns in a lot of these communities.

So, we had to do a lot of our consultation by Zoom, by virtual. And that's—it was kind of hard to actually continue this process, but we did it. And then once—since May of 2022, we've now, where we—am able to move after the pandemic into in-person meetings. And since May 2022 and with my—our staff, who've been going regularly, and especially the ones that were most affected by the flood or by these channels, there's been now a biweekly meetings with these First Nation communities.

And, like I said, I've been to most of them and we've actually went into—you know, we've met with a number of them and to talk about these issues. And you know, they had concerns. There were concerns about how they were treated at that time during the flood of twenty—2011, the emergency channel, the impact on the environment. That was, I believe in—well, it definitely was during the NDP government.

And so, the thing is, we're to—having them at the table. Now they're appreciative that they're at the table and for everything that we do from now on, this is part of reconciliation. This is about action. It's about getting them at the table, getting them to have a say. And we've actually built a very good relationship with—and they still have concerns.

When we had these community meetings with our staff, a lot of them had detailed written responses—requests—of questions. And we've actually responded by 6,400 different answers to a lot of their questions. So, our staff continuously provide them with answers when it comes to their concerns and we want to make sure that we have everything on the table here to see what it is that's going to be the impact of this project.

And, but at the same time, what is the trade-off when it comes to saving these communities at the same time? We don't want to use that emergency channel again. That was an environmental disaster. We want to build this project that we know that it's not going to have sediment; it's going to be designed properly to accommodate a future flood.

Mr. Bushie: To use the minister's comments in plain English, the Indigenous communities are not at the

minister's table, and they've made that abundantly clear. And their voices are not being heard by this government and by this minister's department time and time again. So, when the minister is referring to consultations and extensive engagements and discussions, there's an entirely different story coming out of the Indigenous communities on that regard.

But the question was to the minister specifically about that issue was, the budget for the Lake St. Martin-Lake Manitoba channels project has increased again. Delays caused by this failure of this government to actually consult with Indigenous communities. And that's on the record as that being the reason why there is extension, because those consultations needed to happen. And here the minister is talking about, in 2019, you know, they've done consultations and the pandemic came, and again, using the pandemic as a shield for not being forthcoming and proactive in terms of engagement.

But now, referring to May 2022, a year ago now having, in the minister's words, biweekly meetings. So I will ask the minister, then, when he's referring to those biweekly meetings that are happening in Indigenous communities, can he then, for the committee, provide the names of those communities that are part of those biweekly meetings?

* (15:40)

Mr. Piwniuk: Like I said, when it came to before I was minister—again, we had a pandemic. Pandemics are very serious.

And the thing is, I know there was a lot of First Nation people, you know, lost loved ones when it came to the pandemic. And I'm not going to use that as an excuse, but I am going to use it as a reason that we wanted to give the respect to communities when it came to consultation. We gave them the option if they wanted to go either virtual or in person. And a lot of them required that we'd like to see in person. It was a respect that we had for the First Nation communities. I know Zoom is not always the best. But the fact is, that's—was the respect that we had for the communities.

And some of the communities that we—like, the communities that we have on a regular basis, on a biweekly meetings that we have, and it's their discretion if they want to come onto those meetings on a biweekly basis so that information gets flowing.

I think it's all about communication. It's all about respect. It's all about—you know, you have to realize that we're all Manitobans, and we're all in this together

when it comes to floods. It's—we're all in this together when it comes to the economy.

And this is why we feel that the respect that we have for First Nations, we want to make sure that they're aware of what's all happening, how much this is going to benefit their community. And, like I said, we don't want another emergency channel like the NDP did back in the—2011. Talk about disrespect. And there was a lot of opposition on First Nation communities when that happened. So, we're respectful here.

And I'll just tell you the communities that we have a—biweekly meetings with is Dauphin River First Nation, Lake St. Martin First Nation, Little Saskatchewan First Nation, Pinaymootang First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation, Peguis First Nation, Lake Manitoba First Nation, Manitoba Métis Federation and Dauphin River community. And it—hold on—I'm not even quite sure how I can—Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation.

And so, we've been on—communicating with these communities, and I've say that my staff have been very—like, making sure that they went out to every First Nation, and they've had multiple face-to-face meetings with all these First Nation communities.

Myself, I have gone out to talk to any of them that wanted to talk about this project. I've been to Fisher River for—and meet with the chief. I was at Peguis First Nation. Met with Chief Hudson at the time. And the thing is, Chief Hudson also wants to see—at that time also wanted to see his community be protected by flood mitigation projects in the future.

And, like I said in the House, that, you know what, we've actually—when I had meeting—when I had my FPT with Emergency Measures Organization, I met with Patty Hajdu—Minister Patty Hajdu, Indigenous Services Canada Minister. And I had grand chief—Regional Grand Chief Cindy Woodhouse there. And we are talking about how important these projects are to move forward for these First Nation communities. We're advocating for them to make sure that they are part of the solution. We are making sure that—we know, we want to work.

And this is part of reconciliation. It's respectful. It's collaborative. And this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) wants to see collaboration. And this is the first Premier in a long time that I can remember that have—has such—built such a great relationship with our First Nation communities.

And I—like I said, talk about the First Nation communities during 2011 about Selinger, when he basically

did the emergency channels. We'll see what kind of response they have for you.

Mr. Bushie: Well, the response they're going to have is they're embarrassed by the lack of support by the provincial government.

So the minister refers to—again, the question was about the biweekly meetings and the engagement, and he read the list, right? And that's just the list of the affected communities.

So, the question was whether or not these bi-weekly meetings actually include the leadership of these communities and the First Nation Indigenous communities. Or is the meeting just simply held and, you know, maybe they're there; maybe they're not. But are the meetings still continuing on without them, or are they included in those meetings?

And it's clear that—and the message that we've received on a—on such a regular basis—is they're, in fact, not included in these meetings, even though these meetings may be happening. And these meetings are then—so then, by that regard, these meetings are happening and decisions are being made without proper consultation from these communities. It's simply a matter of the fact that they're, you know, here's an invite to the meeting and, sorry, it's going to continue on whether you're there or not.

And, as the minister said, Zoom's not always the best, but if that's the case, then let's resolve that broadband issue that we've been raising about every day.

So, the minister seems to be using excuses as to why he's not engaged properly with Indigenous communities, and, again, using COVID as a shield for not doing that proper work.

So, when it comes to the engagement, the question is still the same. It's now turning into a two-part question: Are the Indigenous communities part of these biweekly meetings, or are they just invited so then all of a sudden it's like, well, we gave out the invitation; sorry you couldn't make it, but we're going to count that as consultation. Or are they, in fact—is it contingent—this meeting is contingent on First Nation and Indigenous communities being part of that?

So, again, on page 18 of the Estimates book, it refers to communications to Indigenous rights holders on active projects under federal environmental assessment. And the target for the department is nineteen fifty, and can the minister then explain to us one of your first communications to Indigenous right holders, in particular with this project, can the minister tell us

what—what is the definition of communication in this context? Is that emails? Is that phone calls? Is that invitations to meetings, or is that actual meetings and actual discussions and that included Indigenous communities at the table?

* (15:50)

Mr. Piwniuk: I just want to, you know, let the member know that, you know, the respectful and the consultations, you know, I have to honestly say that, you know, since 2020—May of 2022, our staff have been working out—working at—going to different First Nation communities that have been affected by—extremely affected by the floods of the past and what this project is going to benefit. And so they have been out there from May.

And the—then, when we built up the information that was first initially—by Cynthia and her team to go out there and talk about the channels, the projects, the design and everything, there was consultation there. And it was serious consultation now that the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, and we were able to say face-to-face.

But one thing I have to say—and the member may not like—want to hear this, but I'm sure he's going to going to have a rebuttal after—but, you know, it was—I had a very good opportunity to meet seven chiefs at—in July, or, I think it was July or August—it was late July, early August—and we were at Pinaymootang First Nation and—seven chiefs.

And I have to respect them, because all seven chiefs—basically, how they were treated in the past, especially during the flood of 2011. I wish you were there to hear what they had to say, how they were treated by the NDP government at the time. And, at the same time, the respect and the emergency channel that was there—has been drawn out there.

Like, these were serious—and, of course, it was our department staff. But, you know, they were—had directions from the NDP government. At the same time, there was a lot of 'impacting' that happened there. But what they were really happy about, you know—they basically had the chance to air their grievances at those meetings, and every one of them had talked about how they were treated in the past.

But our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) wants to change that, wants to have the respect of First Nation communities. And by the time each one of them talked, they were thankful of that they had the opportunity to express their—themselves, and they felt that there was a new direction that was happening. That is the

response that we got for, I'm sure, almost all seven of them, that there was—there's a change in the air right now, that the—that finally they've been listened to. They've been respected.

And now, this is why we want them at the table for everything we do now. We are looking at some serious opportunities up in the—I signed an MOU with Alberta and Saskatchewan. And where I'm working with, some grant—like, with some projects up there right now, with some opportunities to actually have some northern corridors. And the opportunities to—economic opportunities for First Nations when it comes to natural resources.

Our government's listening to First Nations. And it's exciting right now because there is opportunities for First Nations up there. We're all Manitobans, and this is part of reconciliation. It's respecting each other. And we can do this all together and grow this province as an opportunity to work together.

And this project here is that—with the feedback that we got from this project from the seven chiefs is that they're finally being listened to. And the thing is, this is why we're doing our due diligence. This is why we've actually went beyond what the federal government is required, because even though that the act of 2021 requires us to have a—socio-economic impact studies, we are getting the social-economic impact studies from every First Nation community that's going to be affected by this channel.

And we're going to make sure that we've done our due diligence. And I have to thank my staff for all the hard work they have done to get that information together so that we can move this project forward, we can build—move our relationship with our First Nations forward into the future and we can have economic development in the future for Manitoba and the northern communities.

Mr. Bushie: Well, I appreciate that stroll down memory lane from the minister about how great this government is supposedly doing when the only difference in government is Brian Pallister's not there anymore.

The minister had stood with the premier as he continuously neglected, ignored Indigenous communities; stood there and applauded while the—while Brian Pallister did all these negative things and—to Indigenous communities, including the communities that are affected by the channels project.

So, we've also had conversations with the affected communities, in particular the Interlake Reserves

Tribal Council and all the member nations there. We've been up in Pinaymootang as well.

So, the minister talks about, you know, the great work that this department is wanting to do and, you know, the fact—he doesn't refer to the fact of the neglect of six-plus years of Indigenous communities. So this channels project, it's not just happening today, it didn't just start today. This is a lot of—part of their term, the entirety of the term for this department and this government.

But again, here we are, potentially an election year, saying oh, this is what we're going to do, we're going to change the channel, you know, they don't even say the word Brian Pallister when they go out to these communities because they're trying very hard to turn the page from that legacy. But the fact of the matter is there's only one person that's different in there. Brian Pallister was not the entirety of vote in this government—or maybe he was, I don't know. But this minister was part of that government as well.

So, we're sitting here talking about the communication and the consultation with Indigenous communities, and nowhere in that answer did the minister reflect the actual answer to the question—was about communication and what communication meant in that context in terms of consultation with Indigenous communities.

But instead talked about, you know, we've had a meeting or two—and when I say a meeting or two I mean the minister not having those face-to-face meetings with Indigenous communities and not owing that respect and giving that respect to those communities as well, because they've asked for it on a regular basis, and it doesn't happen. And, all due respect to everybody in the department, Indigenous leaders also want to talk to leaders in government, not just when it suits government. So those are things that need to happen on an ongoing basis as well.

So, I was hoping that we would've had some great questions, great answers, but it's more of an adversarial approach that the minister seems to have taken on questions that are just basically simple questions about consultation, about the process, about numbers. And it's unfortunate that he just wants to kind of go, say, you know what, the former NDP government this, former governments that, but we're talking about the entirety of this government as well. And this project has been on the books the entirety of this government.

* (16:00)

So the question, then, was specifically about the communication and the 1,950 target that they're going to have and what that—what is that? Is that engagement? Is that, you know, an email that the department sends out? Is that a phone call that goes to voicemail or is it an actual discussion that goes with Indigenous communities and actually they're at the table and there's a meaningful consultation, not just a going-through-the-motions consultation which just seems to be what the government is doing and then trying to highlight those kind of minimal consultations that are taking place. And referring to the fact, you know, they're happy this and, you know, this was the past.

Well, they're looking towards the future and in a couple different answers, now, the minister has also mentioned about Peguis wanting protection in the future. Well, Peguis also wanted protection last year, right, which didn't exist from this minister. And it was this minister that didn't exist in the—in protecting Peguis. So, going forward, obviously, they are looking for that too.

But again, back to the question specifically, what does communication to Indigenous rights-holders mean, by definition, in the Estimates book from this department?

Mr. Piwniuk: Well, Mr. Chair, when it comes to the page 18 of the target of—and communication of Indigenous rights-holders on active projects for federal environmental assessment, there's 1,950, but the explanation of 2.C, the communication of an—Indigenous rights-holders on active projects under the federal assessment—environmental assessment. These are the—so, he could read it right there that these are the amount of communications that are required.

But I just want make the member know that I'm not quite sure—like, maybe he is now going out there First Nations—communicating with the First Nations. But one thing that I—our minister that now is back with Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations has indicated since—she took the file back when we formed government. And one of the things that she says over and over, that the NDP government had never, ever even gone to visit with them.

Even if—I think it was Eric—what was his name? He was the member for—maybe your predecessor. And he—basically, what—my—our colleague was—been said, is that this is the first time they've been actually listened to. That was back in 2016.

But what I'm finding right now is that I'm—that, you know, I was actually in Nelson House First

Nation and they've been asking for a highway for 20 years plus. And they hadn't had—to pave about 10 kilometres. Actually, we're going to get it done this year. And they were so pleased that, you know what, I was there twice in 10 months.

And so, the thing is, they've never seen that before. And we are working more with First Nation communities than there were ever—I've—we believe that we're getting a lot of things done right now and there's opportunities.

And I just have to say that, when it came to the engagement, we had minister meetings. We—I've met with number of them on a group basis, but also on an individual basis, going directly to their communities like Fisher River, Peguis, Lake Manitoba First Nation. We've been to those communities and they say the same thing, that we feel that there's a change.

And right now we are—you know, we had ministers meetings, we had leadership meetings, we have community meetings—leadership meetings with our staff. Community meetings to, you know, get the information of—that concerns that lot of community members had. I know one of the things that they talked about was their medicine plants and how important was for them to be—to make sure that that was considered.

So, we do—we had regular meetings with all the communities that were going to be effective. We have a website; we have newsletters that we've been sending out on a regular basis for communications; translation of project materials in Indigenous languages; meetings with specific topics, as requested by the communities. So we're always there to make sure that if there is any request for meetings we're out there with our team, out there making sure that every question's answered.

We've—actually have 6,500 questions that were asked, and we have answers—6,500 answers. We are going to be sending them with the submissions to the federal government to show that we were at proactively communicating with First Nation communities and consulting with them.

We talked about fish and fish habitats, fish ladders. We talked about heritage resources, flooding, peatlands, you, know. We talked about aquifers. We addressed every concern that anybody had, if it was First Nations or if it was municipalities.

We were—we had meetings regularly, so that we want to make sure that we—has never let any rock unturned. We want to make sure that every question is answered, and this is our communication. I'm not

quite sure what more the member wants to—what more—how more we can communicate, but this is a very intensive application, very, very intensive work that, again, our staff have been out there and making sure that every question and concern has been addressed.

And, like I said, I can't understand that the member, and even his leader, have said how important this channel is, and the fact is—I'm hoping that you're going out there and saying how important this channel is and how this—and then you guys are requesting it—that I'm not quite sure where you're getting that here. You want to almost stop it, but then you want to make sure that we push it through.

So, what is—what is your opinion on that?

Mr. Chairperson: Before we continue, I would just remind the minister and everyone around the table that's making comments that questions and answers and comments be directed through the Chair.

Mr. Bushie: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for your guidance on that.

So, I don't know; I was—as a former chief of my community, I met with the NDP government all the time, including Eric Robinson. So that was a regular occurrence, regular communication. So the minister constantly refers to the fact that those discussions didn't happen with various communities, and they happened all the time.

And I understand that's just, to coin a word that's been used often, that's fear mongering in various communities to the fact that things are past and understanding the minister was not part of forming governments in the past, so he really shouldn't be able to comment accurately on any kind of discussion that may or may not have happened back then.

So, the minister had referred to the number nineteen fifty, and doing over and above, leaving no stone unturned, no rock unturned, or whatever it might have been. But, measuring consultation in a sheer number's not really the only context. It's also about the quality of the consultation and the actual meaningfulness behind it.

It's not a matter of checking the boxes, which is—seems to be what the—this department is wanting to do, is just kind of check the box and say, you know, we've done our due diligence. But it's not really meaningful consultation. Rather, it's just kind of announcements of saying they do that.

So, I do want to ask the minister about the fund that was announced, that \$15-million fund to support Indigenous economic development opportunities related to the channel projects. It was announced in October of last year, and here we are, some seven-eight months later, and I'm just wondering if the minister can explain or tell the committee how much has been spent to this day on this—on that file, out of that development fund?

* (16:10)

Mr. Piwniuk: I just want to—for the record, when it comes to the—this \$15 million, it was a unique proposal that we put in to work—it was more for—it was an innovated proposal that is—it—we announced the development of a \$15-million fund dedicated for Indigenous-led economic opportunities and long-term economic development in the communities affected by the proposed project.

The fund is in the development stages, so we're consulting with First Nations of how we roll this opportunity out. It will be proposal-based and is open to 'applicants' from 39 groups, First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs communities and Indigenous organizations.

So, this is kind of a unique situation that we're in. We feel that gives opportunities for—once the proposal is looked at, the good consultation with First Nation communities and getting their feedback, this is good opportunity to help with First-Nation-led companies, organizations with First Nations, to get advantage of maybe being able to use some of this—these resources. Be able to have an opportunity to be competitive when it comes to the bidding process when it comes to—in the future when the actual licence is approved and the actual project can actually get started. This gives them an opportunity to enhance their organizations, their companies within First Nations communities and be able to participate in the competitive bidding process when it comes to the channels, which is a big project—especially in that region—of close to \$600 million.

And so, this is what this portion of this \$15 million was for, was to give First Nations opportunities—communities opportunities, businesses, to apply for. And, again, we still need to do consultations with First Nations to find out how we can really utilize this fund.

Mr. Bushie: So, then, it's still in a process of being developed and there still has been nothing spent or expended out of this, or forwarded? Is that correct?

Mr. Piwniuk: Well, yes, it's—what it is is a co-developing funding with First Nation communities, and when the approval of the project gets approved, that's when we

do start looking at releasing the funds to First Nations communities.

So, we'll be able to have the consultation, be able to even, maybe, to almost be able to allow applications to be even drawn up, and then be able to be ready for when the licensing is approved, that we move these applications forward and be able to allocate some of these funds to First-Nation-led economic opportunities for other companies or organizations within First Nation communities.

Mr. Bushie: So, then—thank you, Mr. Chair—so, then, to be clear, then, there's been no applications at all received by the fund because they're—still have not been developed?

Mr. Piwniuk: You know, it's my—when I was—this, you know, this afternoon, when I've been talking, it's partnering up and co-developing and working with First Nation communities. It's about collaboration. It's about respect. It's about working together.

And right now—what we're doing right now is we're co-developing a program working with First Nation communities to make sure that we'd be able to allocate this money the best possible opportunities that would benefit First Nations. So, we're in the talks right now of creating a co-developing program, but also, at the same time, how it's going to be allocated to First Nation communities.

We want to make sure that this is a success. We just don't roll it out for the sake of rolling it out. We want to make sure that it's—everybody's set up to succeed here. And this is what this project and the innovative project's all about. And it's co-developing, and it's working together and collaborating, and we want to get the feedback from First Nations. We—this is taxpayers' money. We want to make sure that it's rolled out and we're getting the—Manitobans are going to get the best value for their dollars, and to making sure that they see that there's actually benefit for a First Nation community, and especially business—First Nation community. That this could give them a hand up when it comes to building their business, being successful and continuing.

* (16:20)

And then with this success of this seed money, to help them grow capacity in their—within their own communities, and with their own companies, allows them that—and then with the opportunity to get some experience in this project that we're doing, if they get—like, when get a—when and if they get awarded, the fact is the—it's the experience that they're going to have

that they can continue going on to new projects. Lot of this seed money, I bet you could talk to a lot of our contractors in the past; a lot of them started off from small organizations and small companies, and are now thriving into becoming, like, almost a big contractor out there.

And this is the opportunity to provide that seed money for First Nation communities, and especially contractors within these First Nation communities, because at the same time, we really believe that there's going to be a lot of development up in northern Manitoba, a lot of opportunities for economic development, especially for First Nation. And this—how we look at it is seed money, to get that next stage. You know, sometimes when you're in a small company, you just need that little bit of seed money to buy maybe a few pieces of equipment, or to hire that—these—a certain number of people that you may need to be able to bid on a part of the contract of the project.

And this is our opportunity to have participation in First Nation peoples of Manitoba. And this is innovated opportunity that we, as a Province, believe that can really—can change lives.

Mr. Bushie: So just to be clear, \$15-million fund announced in October of 2022. Here we are, seven to eight months later, still not a dollar of that has been expensed. But you're working on a plan to help develop proposals; but again, no dollars are going to move until the project is approved.

So with that way of thinking, then—so when the project is approved, how long before then—those applications that are there—how long before they get approved or not approved from the department, then?

For me, it just seems that this work and this disbursement of this fund in the anticipation of the project being approved at some point in time, and not waiting until it, in fact, is done. Because if we—if we're sitting there and the—some sort of engagement is happening now, but nothing has been disbursed, and then all of a sudden the project gets approved for whatever day that may be, and then Indigenous communities and companies will be trying to play catch-up because other companies—other bigger companies—will already be at the ready to bid, to compete for the work that's there.

So I'm just wondering if the minister can then tell us, is that still going to be the case with the fund sitting there now, nothing expensed out of it, and nothing is going to be expensed out of it until the project approval takes place; is that not, then, a little too late?

Mr. Piwniuk: Again, just to give the clarification to the member from Keewatinook is that when it comes to this program, it's basically we are consulting with our First Nations and feedback of how this program is going to be rolled out and what the feedback is. We've—actually have gotten some requests back from the feedback from First Nation communities, but there's a number of them that asked for extensions. So we want to be respectful. We want to make sure that all input has been given to us so that we have input from every community that's involved, all 39 communities. So, a number of them actually asked for extensions, so we're respecting that.

We believe that, hopefully we—and we hope to get a lot of those feedback by the—by summertime so that when the licensing does happen, and if it happens in the fall—but, again, if it—that's beyond the fall into—it's too late to start. Again, we—the ideal time to start the project is going into fall because there is requirements when it comes to when we can actually start digging, environmental reasons. We—like, when we do bridges, we have to make sure the respect—is that we do most of the work in the fall, in the wintertime, so that we—not disrupting environmental waterways.

And so, the thing was, we believe that we are going to get enough feedback in so that we can actually start the process, so that applications can be applied well before even the actual project gets approved for licensing, so that when we—if it happens to be that we get really quickly, approval this fall, we can start construction.

So—but we—we're hoping that we'll have all the feedback and we'll have the applications submitting by summertime when we get the feedback and that we can actually—if the project does—our best-case scenario, the project starts this fall, they will have time to apply, to invest, to bid on projects. But if it goes beyond the fall, they're going to have a whole year to get ready for what's to come. Once the approval—if the approval happens the maximum time of February of 2024, they're definitely going to have a lot of time to get ready for bidding on some of the contract work.

Mr. Bushie: The minister just made reference to an extension. So, is that—in reference to an extension, then, does that mean there, then—there is a deadline for applications? And if so, when is that date?

Mr. Piwniuk: It's the feedback from—thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's the feedback. We asked for their feedback, and we were wanting to get their feedback by May 1st.

And so, some of them—we got responses back from a number of communities but some of them wanted extensions. So, this is what the extension's about, is extending for the respect of, again, making sure that everybody has opportunity to share their input and to, you know, talk to their communities to make sure that—what do we—what do they need so that they can get back. Because, again, it's going to be those community members who are probably going to be the ones that are going to be the ones that—who apply for the—for this opportunity. Or maybe the community itself.

So this is why we've—we were respectful to extend the feedback, so that we—that everybody has a say of how we can roll this program out.

Mr. Bushie: So this is—so the deadline, barring extension, of May the 1st for feedback, then the feedback is meant to define the parameters of the fund?

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes.

Mr. Bushie: So there was the May 1st deadline, or soft deadline, if you want to refer to it that way. So the extension, then, when is the extension extended to?

* (16:30)

Mr. Piwniuk: Just to let the member know that we really had a deadline for March 31st; we extended it to May 1st.

And if we get more requests, we'll be respectful. We'll make sure that everybody has an opportunity. Again, this is a new innovated project. We want to make sure that we get feedback from all communities. And then, that shows that, you know what, our communication's happening. We're—we—the willingness to make everybody opportunities to have a say just shows us how respectful we want to make this process happen.

And that's why we want everybody's feedback, and if we have to extend it, that's great, but at one point we need to make sure that we get ready so that we can start sending out applications so that when we get the approval, or we get closer to the approval period, then we can look at the applications and then we can award that money to help with bidding on when we actually put tenders out for the channels themselves.

Mr. Bushie: So then, to be clear, the original deadline was in March, and the extension was then to May the 1st?

Mr. Piwniuk: That's correct.

Mr. Bushie: So the engagement on feedback, then, was specifically only to the 39 groups that were allowed to—are going to be allowed to apply?

Mr. Piwniuk: That's correct.

Mr. Bushie: So the minister also referred to the fact that the original date was March, the extension was May the 1st, but if there was feedback that came after the—May the 1st, they would be respectful.

But is there a—then, a date after May the 1st where it's, you know, we have to kind of end any kind of potential feedback because we got to define the parameter?

Mr. Piwniuk: I want just to give the information on the record here. May 1st was kind of a soft deadline.

The thing is, there's a lot of information that the First Nations, that we've experienced—the ones that actually submitted—there's a lot of information that they're providing, and the thing was, a lot of them still have to get a lot of information from their communities.

And we would really want to have, like, since we extended from March 31st to May 1st, we will give the respect of if there's a lot of information still to come, you know, that we would not go too far beyond May 1st, but at the same time, we'd like to have something developed, and this is, again, the respect, because we're co-developing with these communities, and we want to make sure that no one feels that, oh, you know, we never had opportunity to put everything in that we wanted to put in.

But majority of the companies—and, like I said, this is about consultations and this is about communications, and we want to respect that communications. And the thing is, we want to make sure that everybody feels that, you know what—then they can't say, at the end of the day, we never had a chance to give our input.

This is why we want to make sure that we do it right, we do it correctly and that no one can say after we did not give enough time. But, at the same time, we started March 31st. We got a few come in, we got—and then we extended to March 1st; a lot more responses. And now, we want to make sure that, like, the last few communities be able to still submit their proposals in.

Because that's 39 communities, you know. Some are very gung ho; they'll send that information in. We see that with municipalities—I'm sure I could talk to municipalities in rural Manitoba that some of them are right on things, and some of them are a little bit

behind, you know. Just depends on who's doing the work.

And so we—it's—but the thing is, we want to make sure that no one can say that we did not get everybody's input.

Mr. Bushie: Can—out of the 39 groups or communities, could they also apply as a group?

Mr. Piwniuk: Absolutely. We want everybody to have the opportunity.

So if, all of a sudden, 39 of them wanted to create a company that could be a force to contend with, especially when it comes to our tendering process—a tendering process, we want to make sure that, hey, if that is going to benefit 39 communities, definitely. We want to make sure that the more—the stronger numbers, right? So, if they all want to come together and create an opportunity to apply for an application for opportunity to start a company, we definitely will take that as an application.

But, at the same time, I think that's almost more favourable, because now they have a better opportunity to get more tendering and get a bigger piece of the pie of the channels.

Mr. Bushie: So, that being said, and the work that would—will be undertaken at some point in time, because it is a huge project to undertake, is there, then, a set-aside percentage of work for Indigenous-specific companies on the project?

* (16:40)

Mr. Piwniuk: When it comes to, you know, this—the tendering process, you know, we're—you've actually with—when we did the consultation with First Nation communities, and also doing this application when it comes to being able to provide—getting opportunities to, you know, with the co-developing of the \$15 million, this gives opportunities so the discussions that our department has already had with First Nation communities is that we are prepared and presented tender staging to all of the different communities.

Saying that, you know, when it comes to—when the licence does get approved and we can move forward on the construction side of the project, of the channels, we are having discussions with our First Nation communities and saying that, you know, we're sort of packaging up different tenders so that everybody can have a opportunity to bid on, you know, not just doing, like, one big contract or doing the whole project. We're piecing it out to many, many different opportunities for different contractors to—because again,

at the end of the day, the No. 1—because we are working with taxpayers' dollars, we want to make sure that we have value for money when it comes to the project of this—of these channels.

And one of the nice opportunities that we have here with that grant that they could apply for, be able to have some opportunities to invest in the equipment, to do the tendering; one advantage, I always have to say, is that because this project is so close to so many First Nation communities, is that they already have the advantage of being able to have employment, employees right at site that don't have to commute very far. They don't have to deploy them, they don't have to house them. This is an advantage of actually being able to put a tender in, to have this opportunity to, you know, have a company that can apply for the grant money, and then be able to put a tender in.

Because a lot of contractors who are from Winnipeg or from different parts of the province do have to mobilize their equipment, do have to pay time for their staff to live far from their—possibly from their homes. They have to possibly create housing, and so this is an opportunity for a lot of these—lot of the First Nation communities, if they have businesses in these communities, that they already have the advantage of being so close to the project.

And so that could be an advantage. And also, at the same time, you know, when they put the tenders in, we want to make sure that they understand that the—how we stage these tenders, so that they can apply for numerous type of tenders that are out there. And at—and again, at the end of the day, we want to make sure that we get the value for our taxpayers' dollars, and we want to make sure that everybody has a fair advantage. And—especially when it comes to First Nation communities.

This is why we had this innovation of this \$15 million, so that they can build their resources, they can buy equipment, they can do some training with staff, or pay staff at the first part, until they start doing some of these projects and getting money for what—the work that they have completed on the channels project.

Mr. Bushie: So that was a long way to say, no, then, there is no specific set-aside percentage for Indigenous contracts or work out of the channels project, other than to say, you have the advantage because you live close to where the project is going to be.

So I'm sure, in discussions that the minister has had with those Indigenous communities, they asked

about specific Indigenous set-aside work that would come with part of this project. And I did ask the question whether or not that would be in terms of a percentage, or whether it be—perhaps maybe it'll end up being in terms of a dollar amount. But the minister had referenced the \$15-million fund that you can apply to, kind of, get a head start on this matter.

* (16:50)

But the fact that there is no percentage set aside for Indigenous-specific work in Indigenous traditional territory is disheartening that that's not there, that that doesn't exist.

And I'm sure, in the conversations that the minister has had and the department has had in various communities, that they, in fact, asked for that and requested that and asked for the economic reconciliation to be able to take on that work.

So, we did ask the question very specifically, whether or not there was going to be a percentage of set-aside work in the project—a megaproject, mind you, in the hundreds of millions of dollars—and there was no commitment to say that a certain percentage was going to be there and—but simply that they already have the advantage because they're in the area.

But time and time again, we know that that's not actually the case, that there is, in fact, outside contractors that come and do the work and then they leave. And, for the most part, Indigenous communities are left to be at more lower end jobs, whether it be, in this case, maybe, perhaps flag people and whatnot, but not an actual player in the main part of contracting here.

So, I was very disheartened to hear that response from the minister in regards to there is no set aside for Indigenous work on this project.

And I know there's a lot of Indigenous communities that are affected by this project that are going to watch this in Hansard, read this in Hansard—I know I'm going to share this with them as well—that the fact that there is no commitment from this minister to actually set aside work for those Indigenous communities rather than just refer them to a fund where they may or may not have the opportunity to actually bid on the project.

And the fact that this—potentially, when this could end up being is this—hundreds of millions of dollars worth of work may just come down to potentially accessing \$15 million to be able to perhaps bid on this, but there is no commitment to a set-aside percentage or a set-aside work in the area.

So, again, I'll ask the minister if we can lock down or commit to a percentage of work on this project that would be specific to Indigenous and Indigenous-owned community-companies.

Mr. Piwniuk: When it comes to any projects that we do close to First Nation communities, we do have a minimum 10 per cent Indigenous involvement.

And Indigenous involvement can include undertaking of work from contractors, to subcontractors, to joint ventures or provisions of services, materials, fuel, labour, equipment and from communities in and around the project.

And, Mr. Chair, too, that—I just wanted to elaborate, too, that when we met—meant with the tendering packages to Lake Manitoba outlet channel, we have 19 contracts with clearing, structures, servicing and grading.

That's just on the Manitoba–Lake Manitoba outlet channel, so then we look at the Lake St. Martin outlet channel, we have 10 contracts: upgrading, clearing, aggregate and structures.

So Mr. Chair, when it comes to these—and then like I said, the advantage of being close to the area here—it's 10 per cent minimum involvement, but I'm saying here that the opportunity of understanding this \$15-million co-developing opportunity, I believe that the 10 per cent minimum, this gives First Nations in these areas even beyond the opportunity to—we see that 10 minimum Indigenous involvement, but going beyond that because of the opportunities that they do have by having this \$15 million opportunities plus—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

CHAMBER

JUSTICE

* (15:00)

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 Justice.

At this time we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber, and the minister and the critic are both welcome to introduce their staff in attendance.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): To my left is the remarkably talented Maria Campos, and immediately in front me is the superbly skilled Mardi McNicholl, and to my right is the fantastically intelligent Deputy Minister Jeremy Akerman [*phonetic*]-Akerstream.

Mr. Chairperson: As previously noted, questioning for the department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Of course, the minister'd be very well aware of issues that have taken place at Health Sciences Centre recently and concerns from nurses—well, really, at a number of health-care facilities, but in particular, Health Sciences Centre—with regards to the—their safety coming to and from work.

One of the commitments—2019, I believe, the bill was passed in this Legislature—was to establish the ISOs, institutional safety officers.

What is the minister's plan on following through on that four-year-old promise to establish those institutional safety officers at health-care facilities?

Mr. Goertzen: Thank the member for the question.

Yes, the Department of Justice committed to developing an institutional safety officer program and to train individuals, and that has occurred.

Mr. Wiebe: How many institutional safety officers are currently working at Health Sciences Centre?

Mr. Goertzen: That would be a question I think the member would have to ask the—either Shared Health or the Department of Health, but the Department of Justice doesn't employ Health employees.

Mr. Wiebe: I would hope that the minister would have more interest in supporting a program that his department created and promoted and talked about and lauded as being such an important part of their overall safety strategy.

We just had committee last night. Of course, community safety officers is the next level in terms of this sort of support for communities. And yet, we're hearing from them they haven't had—seen any additional dollars, any additional supports. Once again, it sounds more like just words rather than actual action.

So, how can anyone have any kind of confidence that the minister will follow through on those community safety officers when he hasn't—his department—he doesn't seem to care one bit that nurses in our province are feeling unsafe going to and from work, and the

program that he created is not functioning right now at Health Sciences Centre and other institutional safety facilities?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, the member, of course, is incorrect. We have a great concern any time anybody, including nurses, doesn't feel safe in Manitoba. That's a significant concern for those who work in Justice, as is it for the government as a whole.

The member opposite asked about the commitment to develop an ISO program and whether or not—and labelled it as an unfulfilled promise. Of course, he was wrong because it was a commitment to develop an ISO program. The program was developed. There have been dozens of individuals who've been trained, who are working in institutions.

The member wants to ask about employees that are outside the Department of Justice—that would include at the universities where there are ISOs, that would include at hospitals where there has been training of—regarding ISOs. He would have to ask those departments.

So, it's not anything other than he needs to ask the questions in the right place. If he wants to ask the question about how many folks who are employed in the Department of Highways, he would have to ask the Department of Highways. If he wants to know how many people are employed in the education system, he would normally go either to the school divisions, who are the actual employers, or, if they're employed through the Department of Education, that's where he would go. But he's asking how many Health employees are employed in the Department of Justice, which is just not the place to ask.

But in terms—he did properly ask about the training program, because Justice does provide training, and the ISO training program is operating and graduating individuals.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the level of indifference that this minister has for the safety of nurses is quite astounding, and I'm quite surprised that he would be unwilling to undertake this in a more serious way, considering that the minister, as I said, lauded this as being, you know, a solution to keeping our health-care workers safe.

* (15:10)

The minister may know, or he may not know, that there was an incident recently at HSC that was in the news just this past week, I believe, or this week, I should say, regarding a patient that turned violent while waiting in the ER.

These are serious concerns for our health-care workers, for other patients who are using our health-care facilities. Has the minister himself been involved in any discussions about hiring institutional safety officers at our health-care facilities?

Mr. Goertzen: Obviously, we do have a concern about safety of those who are in institutions, both working or seeking care at the institutions. The member will know, for example, that the health authorities do things such as have contracts with security companies across the province. I know in my own community of Steinbach, if I'm visiting or attending the hospital—excuse me—in Steinbach, there are security officers that are stationed at the front, but they're not employees of the Department of Justice; they're employees, I guess in that case, of Southern Health. Excuse me again.

However, he's asking questions regarding, you know, whether the Department of Justice is, I guess, hiring security in schools or hiring school—security in hospitals or hiring security in Walmart. I'm not sure how far he wants to extend this in terms of where the Department of Justice is hiring security officers.

Just for his clarity, the Department of Justice is responsible for enabling the program for training. That would be true for CSOs as well. As I mentioned yesterday at committee, the CSOs will be trained through the Department of Justice, and there'll be training standards. Good work, of course, in terms of uniform standards with Devon Clunis.

But if he's suggesting, then, that the bus safety unit that is envisioned by Mayor Gillingham, that those would be employees of the Department of Justice—I'm just not sure how far he wants to extend that. If he's looking for security guards, maybe—he didn't say it, but maybe he's suggesting that there be security guards in schools, and he wants those to be, then, employees of the Department of Justice because it's then related to a safety issue.

Is he looking to have—Justice have—employ people in malls or different sorts of things to have that security? He seems to be interested in having the Department of Justice hire and have all of these as employees in all of these different places.

So that's actually not the function. The function of the Department of Justice is to do the training and to establish programs where there can be training, and that has happened when it comes to the ISO program. So he mischaracterizes—likely, purposely—the—as an unfulfilled promise.

Well, the promise from the Department of Justice and previous ministers of Justice was to develop a program for ISOs. That's happened. There's been training. There have been institutions that have chosen to use that training, both health facilities and post-secondary educational institutions.

So he's aware those that took the training and that are now at the University of Manitoba, they're not employees of the Department of Justice, either, although I suppose maybe he wants them to be employees of the Department of Justice. He hasn't asked any questions about the safety of students, so maybe that's not a concern to him.

I don't know. It just seems to be—like, the member seems focused on trying to get, I guess, the department to have security officers in all sorts of different institutions. So maybe he can provide a list of where he wants the Department of Justice to have employees in different places.

Again—and maybe he can explain why he hasn't asked any questions about the ISOs at the University of Manitoba and why those aren't employees of the Department of Justice. So if he can just give us some clarity because I'm not quite sure what the member's expectations.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, I think that this minister's flippant answers speak volumes to the nurses in our health-care system, to the health-care workers, talking about Walmart and going completely off the rails.

You know, the minister's quite eager every time he stands up in question period and the media to talk about specifics at the University of Manitoba or other universities. And yet, when asked a simple question, maybe the minister didn't hear it, maybe he missed it. He can go back in Hansard and read it, but I'll ask it again.

I'm asking if the minister has met with the health authority, with Shared Health? Has he met with anybody about the lack of implementation or hiring under this ISO program, and does he care?

We're just trying to get some reassurance from the minister that this is a priority of this government and it's not just more cheap talk.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, it's absolutely a priority, which is why the Department of Justice developed the ISO program and the training for it through training providers.

I'll remind the member that that never happened under the former government and there were concerns

about safety at hospitals and other facilities at that time, too. Not only did they not make them employees of the Department of Justice, but they didn't even institute a training program.

So, yes, the commitment was to develop a training program for institutional safety officers. The program was developed. There have been individuals trained both in the health-care sector and in the post-secondary sector for institutional safety officers.

So the member just doesn't want to accept, I suppose, that, you know, the Department of Justice has fulfilled that commitment, and there'll be more ISOs trained.

If he has questions though, about employees in Health, he seems to have missed his opportunity and maybe that is frustrating to him, that he couldn't get a question or wasn't aware that Health was in Estimates previously.

This seems to be a pattern maybe with the member. He was upset that he couldn't get questions on MPI, even though there was just a Crown Corporation committee a few months ago where his leader asked questions—a number of questions, I think, regarding Project Nova and I don't recall if the member opposite was able to ask questions or maybe he just chose not to.

But now, he has some sort of regret that he didn't ask questions at Crown corporations and he has regret that he didn't ask questions in the Department of Health, but I would encourage him if he's interested in the great work being done at Health and the employees at Health, then he might want to, you know, to look at that.

I know, as an example, there have been security contracts that had been issued by the Department of Health, not—last year, I think. They were relative to a number of different health institutions. He might now come back and ask me for the details of those. I only know them because I saw it in the paper, but they're not employees of the Department of Justice.

Health employees are generally the employees of a regional health authority or, in smaller situations, the Department of Health.

Mr. Wiebe: Once again, that answer would be very disappointing to health-care workers who are feeling unsafe.

I'd like to ask the minister about bail reform. This has certainly been an item, again, that the minister's been very eager to talk about when—with regard to changes at the federal level.

What I'd like to ask the minister, get a little bit more detail about what actions he's taken with regard to his own authorities, to enhance bail enforcement under the current federal rules.

In terms of enforcement, what steps has the minister actually taken to enhance or strengthen bail enforcement in this province?

Mr. Goertzen: That's a very good question. I thank the member for bringing that topic up.

It was probably summer of last year where officials and I identified the concern around bail, and this was before a lot of—really, most provinces were speaking about it.

I know, I think British Columbia, at that time, were raising issues around bail and concerned about it.

We raise it in the context of individuals who are violent offenders, sometimes using bear spray, sometimes used—using edged or bladed weapons, then receiving bail and then committing another crime.

* (15:20)

And some of that, by the way is—came about because Winnipeg Police Service raised issues around bear spray and then subsequently around bail. So, we started talking about it at that time last summer and then we had the opportunity to meet as ministers of justice together with the federal Minister of Justice and Minister of Public Safety in Halifax for the FPT, for the federal-provincial-territorial meeting.

And there was a lot of different things on the agenda, but the member might remember from his time in government—I know he wasn't in Cabinet, but he would—probably heard this from some of his colleagues—you know, there's an opportunity then—I mean, there's an agenda at these FPTs, but there's an opportunity to raise other issues, as well. So, we had asked for bail to be on the agenda—Manitoba did—and we brought it up.

And, you know, the dynamic of these FPTs is usually you'll get—if you're lucky, you get a consensus of provinces who agree on something. But generally, you almost never get unanimity from provinces.

So, when we raised the issue about bail, very quickly, British Columbia came alongside and supported that call. They had some of their own specific concerns about bail.

And then we ran around the table and every province, every minister of justice or Attorney General or public safety minister if the provinces had

them—they all expressed their concern about bail. So much so that the then-federal minister of—or, the current federal Minister of Justice and Minister of Public Safety said, you know, we're going to call a special meeting on bail coming out of that meeting in Halifax because there was unanimity around the table.

Now, I know there's not even unanimity in the NDP caucus on this issue. The member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw), as an example, has spoken out very strongly about bail reform, doesn't think there should be bail reform. He tweeted about it—I know the tweet was deleted, but, you know, people were able to capture it, so we still have it recorded. And, you know, so there's not unanimity in—even in the NDP caucus, but there was unanimity around Canada about the importance of bail reform.

And so, then, fast forward to March 10th in Ottawa, and there's a special meeting on bail reform. Provinces, you know, weren't quite sure what the federal government would be proposing. They called us to Ottawa for that. Minister Lametti and Minister Mendicino both appeared at that particular meeting and recommended that there be Criminal Code reform before the end of this parliamentary session and that—and so, hopefully, within four or five weeks—and that bail be changed and be tighter, more restrictive, a reverse onus, essentially, for repeat violent offenders, which would, I think importantly, capture those who are using bear spray or using edged weapons in the Manitoba context. So, that would provide a reverse onus for repeat violent offenders.

Now, that was good—and by the way, that was echoed by the premiers and the chiefs of police just last week. So, I just want to—not to be too political about this, but it's important to recap now that you've got the chiefs of police, all the premiers, the federal Minister of Justice, the federal Minister of Public Safety, all calling for the same thing, except for the provincial NDP. And that's a really interesting contrast.

So, I appreciate the member's question, but I might ask him one back, and what is he doing to try to convince his own caucus—particularly his member for Fort Garry, but others—because the member for Fort Garry often says out loud what the NDP caucus just thinks privately.

But, like, what is it is he doing to convince his caucus that this is actually an important issue and there needs to be stronger and tighter bail, and not, as the member for Fort Garry says, even less restrictive bail provisions.

Mr. Wiebe: Wow, that was a master class in spending five minutes not answering a question; you know, a very specific question. He seems to be so concerned about this issue, and yet, can't even answer the question, can't tell us one thing that Manitoba is doing here about bail enforcement.

It's quite concerning. I think it's no wonder our province is seeing such an uptick in violent crime and in pressures on our justice system. This minister's all talk; all talk no action, once again. And he wants to make a political point, but, you know, people are actually asking for action, so it's very disappointing.

I will move on, Mr. Chair, to ask questions about Project Nova at MPI. I did indicate to the minister that we would spend—well, I told him yesterday, but of course, there was a bit of a delay in our timing.

So we're going to move right into it today, and hopefully he's had some chance—a chance to consult his officials and look into this program a little bit more. We would be very much interested in getting some details with regards to money already spent and money now committed to the project.

Minister, as I mentioned yesterday, would know that there is, on page 39 of this year's supplements to the Estimates of expenditure in Manitoba Justice, an—a line item with regards to Project Nova.

Can the minister explain why there's a change from last year to this year in terms of MPI self-financing these capital investments now, which we presume includes that information technology upgrade?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, I'm sorry, I—you know, I didn't actually want to point this out, because I feel bad for the member; I though maybe it was a mistake.

So the Province actually announced last year some new programs and stronger programs for those who were out on bail or release. In fact, it was at the human right—or, just outside the human rights museum at The Forks. There was police officers from the WPS, the RCMP, the Brandon Police Service. In fact, there was a front-page article in the Winnipeg Free Press, there was news releases, there was editorials that came after that as a result. The Winnipeg Police Service spoke in favour, the Brandon Police Service has spoken in favour, the RCMP spoke in favour.

And, you know, I didn't want to mention that, because it was—I thought the member probably would've seen that, and I wasn't trying to point out that maybe he hadn't. So, I—but I guess now I have no choice but

to acknowledge that the member must have missed that really, really big and significant announcement.

Now, in fairness to the member—because I like the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), he wasn't the Justice critic at the time, I don't believe. I think he was still the critic for Finance, Health, for—not for Justice, anyway. So he may not have been paying attention. So I acknowledge that. I don't—I'm not trying to suggest he's not doing his work. I find him to be a diligent MLA with thoughtful questions. But because he wasn't the minister—or, the critic for Justice at the time, he may not have seen that announcement.

So—but it's easy; he could simply google it, and he'll see that there was a—lots of different news releases, there was lots of different commentary by the police showing the different programs that we have that are enhancing bail supervision both for, I think, for the female population, for others who are out on bail.

There'll be more announcements, by the way. I can't tell him about those yet, but I want him to actually be alert to this now, because, you know, he missed the last one. So he should, you know, be finely tuned into the next few weeks, where he'll hear more announcements.

But yes, if he goes back to look at the announcement, the really, really large and well-publicized announcement last year, he'll be able to get all of that information, and he might want to share that, then, with his colleagues who might also not have seen that at the time.

Mr. Wiebe: Once again, can the minister explain why there's a change from last year to this year in terms of MPI self-financing in—of these capital investments now, which presume—we presume includes information technology?

Mr. Goertzen: In terms of MPI and capital, there hasn't been, I'm told by officials, any change in how capital is funded from MPI to the government. The numbers might change because the nature of the capital changes.

He'll remember, under his government, under his watch, MPI purchased Cityplace, I believe, and so there might have been some capital repairs to Cityplace. And so maybe that's why there's different numbers. But there's no actual change in terms of that.

* (15:30)

He asked about Project Nova, though, in a previous question, and I just want to remind him—this came up at Crown corporations in December, I think his leader was asking some questions about this—but we've

reiterated, I think that the CEO reiterated at the time that there is no more funds, additional funds that will be provided by government for Project Nova. There's no more funds anticipated to be needed by MPI. And we understand that the timelines for the program rollout are on time. And, in fact, there was a first phase that was rolled out a few months ago with Project Nova. So there's already some rollouts happening. I suspect there might be more happening in the summer. But no additional money is being provided through government, and no additional requests are being anticipated by MPI, and the project, we understand, is on time.

So I hope that gives the member some assurance. I know he's asking these questions from the right place and because he also, I'm sure, would have concerns—as I did—with cost overruns. And so, in that way, we have agreement and we have accord.

Mr. Wiebe: So is that line item all the funding that was provided in '22-23 for Project Nova?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question. I'm learning a bit, too, just in terms of the presentations of the books.

And so, MPI is entirely self-funded, so it's not being funded through government. But for the purpose of transparency, they now prefer to present it on the books as the money essentially coming in and then going out. But the money is self-funded by MPI through their operations, but is presented so that there's transparency. But it's not money coming from the core of government to fund capital.

So—nor would it all be for Project Nova. It would be for whatever capital needs that MPI has. And I included as one example the—Cityplace, but there could be others, too.

Mr. Wiebe: So, let's break that number out, then. How much of that—I guess it was \$87 million this year—sorry, \$76 million this year, \$87 million last year. Out of those two years, how much was for, as the minister said, Cityplace; how much was—flowed through for Project Nova?

Mr. Goertzen: I don't want to overpromise for the member because we don't have full access to MPI's books here because this isn't the Crown Corporations committee, and the member will have had opportunity to ask these questions in December—or the critic at the time—I can't remember if it was him or not.

But I'm told we did have that number, and there was \$57 million provided for Project Nova—not from

government but from MPI in '22-23, an additional \$57 million in '23-24.

Mr. Wiebe: And I think we were referencing—no, that may be—okay, that may be the question that I asked; I'm just trying to get my dates correct here. So, \$57 million is the baseline for Nova for each year, I think I heard the minister say.

So, the question I have, then, is: are those—is that the total number, then, of the cost overruns so far that have been tallied up to date currently, or is there additional money that's been flowed through this department, as per the Estimates book, that is also—would also be tagged for Nova?

Mr. Goertzen: There's no other additional money being supplemented through the department.

Mr. Wiebe: And the latest undertaking of this government was to, I guess, issue an untendered contract for an outside consultant to come in to try to get a handle on the mess over at MPI under this minister's direction.

Is that number captured in this—under this line item, or is this—would this be somewhere else in the Estimates book here?

Mr. Goertzen: The government hasn't issued an untendered contract.

Mr. Wiebe: What about the undertaking that the minister has publicly stated will be a—I think he's calling it a ministerial inquiry? Where is the line item in the Estimates that would capture the costs related to that?

Mr. Goertzen: So it's not an untendered contract. It'll be a tendered contract. It's an organizational review, not a ministerial inquiry, but it was—but it came from a ministerial directive that is allowed for under the Crown corporations act.

And so the ministerial directive was that the Manitoba Public Insurance undertake an organizational review, so it'll be a tendered contract that'll be through MPI.

Mr. Wiebe: So if I can understand this correctly then, this is a ministerial directive. However, the minister's department or office wouldn't be directly then responsible for the funds to pay for that inquiry. That comes directly out of MPI.

Mr. Goertzen: That's correct.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, and then, so what are the cost estimates for this ministerial inquiry and is that, you

know, we're now told that the latest number is \$290 million for the project, so about \$200 million over budget.

Is that included in that number, that 290, or would that bump it up north of \$300 million?

Mr. Goertzen: The number of—that's been projected for Project Nova since last year, has not changed.

I don't know the cost of the organizational review because it hasn't come back from tender. When the tenders come back and the contract's issued after that competition, I'll be able to provide that to the member.

But I think he's making the mistake that I think has happened in some of the media as well, so this isn't particular to the member, that the review—the organizational review—isn't specific to Project Nova.

You know, there's been reviews done on Project Nova. It's been re-scoped. There's an assurance by the corporation that the budget for Project Nova is not going to change.

We will hold the corporation to that assurance. They've indicated that it's on time. The organization review was not sparked by Project Nova.

It's not in the absence of concerns around Project Nova, but less perhaps about costs, and more about, you know, accountability.

There were concerns that were raised by the PUB about financial reporting. The member will know that, that, you know, the rate applications that went in from MPI into the PUB, they were quite different between what was being asked for by the corporation and what PUB ultimately offered—or directed, I should say—because the PUB has responsibility for that.

* (15:40)

There were concerns about the financial reporting. The PUB itself asked for some particular directives on that. I've been very public about saying my concerns about the desire of the corporation to hire I believe 400 employees, you know, at a time when there were, you know, these other concerns.

I've been very public about my concerns about untendered contracts which, by the way, happened significantly under the NDP, and the NDP did nothing about it. But I did take action on that because I was concerned.

So, I know what the member's trying to do, and I don't think out of any sort of malice, but he's maybe

looking at news reports and trying to link the organizational review as directly a review of Project Nova, and it's not. And so, the cost wouldn't be appropriated to Project Nova because it's an organizational review that has about—a lot of concerns about financial reporting, the reliability of certain financial numbers, the management structure, the employee makeup, concerns about—I know we talked about it, about untendered contracts.

So, it's not—it is not a review about Project Nova specifically.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, so that is clear, I appreciate that. So, the additional money that will be required for this organizational review will be above and beyond the \$290 million already budgeted for Project Nova.

I understand that the RFP closes May 18th. The House doesn't rise until June.

Can the minister commit to reporting back to the House the cost for this organizational review?

Mr. Goertzen: The cost of the organizational review will be remade public, as they always are, but they are not attributable to Project Nova. I can see where the member is going. He's going to try to suggest that this is a cost overrun to Project Nova.

I will repeat, this is not specifically related to Project Nova. And, by the way, so he doesn't think I'm sort of into some sort of revisionist history here, I've made my concerns, probably more than ministers of—been responsible for MPI have in the past, public about the concerns that I have about certain things with MPI.

And so, member might be, you know, criticizing me at some point and then, you know, in the next five or 10 minutes about interfering with MPI. But I had concerns, and so we raised—issued two directives that were related to that and made other public comments that I thought were concerning regarding—and that were echoing what the PUB had said as well.

So, these are not costs that are attributable to Project Nova. Even if Project Nova had never occurred, my same concerns would have arisen about other issues that would have still sparked an organizational review.

Mr. Wiebe: No, we got it. This is in addition to the \$290 million that Project Nova is costing. I understand the minister is saying it's separate.

I guess the point that I'm getting to or making sure I understand is, is that ratepayers at MPI are on the

hook for this organizational review, for the mess that's happening over at MPI.

Question with regards to that \$290-million figure once again. Trying to understand the untendered contract that was awarded to McKinsey. Would that have been captured in that \$290-million budget that's been laid out to this point, or is that over and above the 290 that's been publicly disclosed?

Mr. Goertzen: That's a question he'd have to bring to Crown corporations, to MPI directly.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I think this is—again speaks to the fact that, you know, there's a lot of questions over the—what's going on at MPI and, you know, we don't have much faith in the minister bringing this information forward in another venue. So, this is the opportunity for him to clear the air. Put it all out there, you know, so to speak. Lay his cards on the table. If he's serious about making things right at MPI, this would be his opportunity.

And we know, of course, that that \$290 million was amortized over a number of years. It's, you know, a major upgrade to the systems at MPI, but of course these untendered contracts that have been issued, this additional money that's been flowed through, does—this isn't amortized money. This is money in this year's budget; this is money that is being spent by ratepayers of MPI on this government's mismanagement.

So I think he needs to be clear and, I mean, I gave him fair warning this would be an opportunity for him to clear the air, so here's his opportunity. Simply get it out on the table, because I think that, you know, he might feel better. His conscience might be, you know, cleared. If he comes clean about where things are at now, we can start talking about what the implications are for ratepayers going forward.

But I think he should be clear about how much this is costing Manitobans right now.

Mr. Goertzen: My conscience is quite clear. I sleep quite well. The member opposite—now, it's the second day he's worried about my health; I talked to him about heartburn yesterday, and the potential to use Nexium if he's suffering from that. Melatonin is a good natural aid for sleep, if—deprivation, if the member needs some help, if he's having difficulty with his conscience and not sleeping well at night. So that's two bits of health advice that I've been able to give him in two days.

But I do really want to welcome him to the Estimates for the Department of Justice. And the

Estimates for the Department of Justice are before him. He knows that there's the line item of self-funded money from MPI coming in or coming out, but to remind him again, the structure by which this Assembly works—and he's not a new member, he's been both in government and in opposition, and I think before that he was a senior adviser to the former NDP premier, Gary Doer, who by the way, I think, tried to take \$21 million out of MPI and give it to universities when the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) was an adviser to Gary Doer. But we can explore that at another time.

But I want to remind him that the structure by which this Assembly works is that the core of government, and the expenditures from the core of government, are appearing in the Estimates books, and that he's free on a global basis to ask questions as they relate to the expenditures of the core of government. And then there are outside reporting entities, OREs, which consist of things like Hydro and MPI and centennial corporation and Liquor & Lotteries. And the financials of those corporations are brought in on a summary basis—this was changed by the NDP a few different times, depending on how well Hydro was doing, and they were trying to falsify the books of the government—but in this government, the expenditures get summarized into the government.

But, the operations of those outside reporting entities are separate, not—I don't run MPI on a day-to-day basis. So that's why you have Crown Corporation committees for Hydro, for MPI, for MLCC and for the centennial corporation. And then members can, for hours, ask questions of the officials. The most recent one for MPI was in December, I believe, not that long ago—it might feel a long time ago—but it wasn't that long ago, where the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) asked a number of different questions as it related to MPI.

And that is the opportunity for those type of questions. This is the Department of Justice. Now, this would be similar in the Department of Health, and I lived that life for a while, is the minister of Health—I know the member opposite, I think, was the critic for Health at that time, for a while, and he might've come and asked questions in the Department of Health about expenditures at the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

Now sometimes, you know, we were able—because Health often was in Estimates for days, if not weeks—and so sometimes we, maybe, were able to circle back and get some of those answers, but you

have to ask the questions to the right authorities. So, you know, we might be able to go and get some of these, or there's other avenues the member can ask, but I just wanted to give him that really brief overview of how the Legislative Assembly and its finances work.

I've never been the Finance minister; I've been on Treasury Board, I've been around now in large departments so I have an idea of how this all pieces together, and if I've said it wrong some official somewhere will send me a text and correct me. But I think that that generally is how it works.

* (15:50)

So, if he wants to bring these forward to the Crown Corporations committee of MPI, he certainly will have that opportunity and the statutory—and it is statutory, there's—because former government never used to call it Crown corporations. So, we—if it's statutory, it has to be called so and so many times in a certain period of time and he'll have that opportunity again and I hope he avails himself of that.

Mr. Wiebe: You're damn right, I want to ask these questions at a Crown corporations meeting, but it's at the minister's discretion to call that, and, of course, he's not willing to do—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —that.

He also knows—the minister also knows—

Mr. Chairperson: Order. I'm just going to interrupt the member.

Just want to issue a gentle reminder about parliamentary language in the Chamber here. The member may—the honourable member for Concordia may continue.

Mr. Wiebe: My apologies, Mr. Chair. I'm usually better at that, having young children. I usually throw in a good darn every now and again, but that's about usually as far as it goes.

But I guess this does get me a little fired up because the people of Manitoba are on the hook here for this minister's mismanagement of MPI, and, you know, the minister knows, of course, that the questions we're asking are perfectly within scope. We're talking about page 39 of his department's Estimates books. He's already put on the record that we're talking about \$57 million last year and \$57 million this year that's already been flowed with regards to Project Nova.

Our concern, of course, is that the costs are already over \$200 million over budget. However, we also know that that's only the project costs so far. That's not even the full amount that are estimated, and the numbers that we're hearing at this point are closer to half a billion dollars that Manitobans may be on the hook for.

We've heard concerns about how the project, even at this point, is collapsing under its own weight, and the decisions made early on by this government have handicapped that project. And, you know, we'll force it again to near that \$500 million mark.

Is—are those the numbers that the minister is also hearing? And so, can we expect that \$57 million that's been allocated in these—this year's Estimates books to go up next year and the year after and the year after that and the year after that?

Mr. Goertzen: And I appreciate both your caution, Mr. Chairperson, and the member, my friend from Concordia, withdrawing his unparliamentary language. I'm sure that his kids are part of the 20 who are watching the committee today and they would have been mortified for the moment, but now proud of their dad that he took back the comments that he put on the record. He did the right thing by doing that.

Just to correct a couple of things, however. He referenced the \$57 million and, if I heard him correctly, he indicated that the money had flowed. It's budgeted money but it would not necessarily have flowed or been spent. And that's true for, you know, previous fiscal year and the current fiscal year because the books haven't closed on the previous fiscal year. So, just, you know, a small correction that the money wasn't necessarily spent, but it was budgeted for.

I think I did advise him at the beginning of this sort of line of questioning, in addition to a couple days ago when he indicated he was going to be starting down it, that there's—that we just have limited access to some of the information from MPI, which is why we have a Crown Corporations committee.

I think, maybe, what's happening is he's probably—because his leader, I believe, did ask a lot of questions at Crown corporations on Project Nova, and at that time, in December, I believe, it was already known that the budget had gone up. So, he probably is expressing disappointment in the questions that were asked, maybe, by the Leader of the Opposition, doesn't feel they were good questions or maybe not as specific as he would have liked.

I sometimes feel that way about the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) too. I sometimes think, boy, those aren't—those weren't the best questions, and so, in that way I, you know, feel for the member opposite if that's his concern and that's his frustration.

But, I mean, not to delay things too much. I understand from officials who were able to discern through the technology that exists that the McKinsey contract of which he refers is included in the budgeted amount of Project Nova.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the minister continues to be cavalier about the fact that, you know, \$57 million has flowed through, total of \$290 million is the public figure so far.

But, again, the question was more about the final cost to ratepayers at MPI. As I said, we were hearing that this is with regards to the current project. I think the minister would be aware of that. And that, in order to complete the project, which is quite a ways off yet—this is already years over—past its due date—that those costs are only going up to even complete the project. Again, what we're hearing is potentially \$500 million that will be expended on this project to get it complete.

And maybe the minister wants to refute that today. I encourage him to do so if that's—if I've got the wrong information, let us know if this will not be a project that will end up costing Manitobans even more than \$290 million, as is public so far.

Mr. Goertzen: I've already indicated to the member that government has indicated that there would not be any approval for additional expenditures on Project Nova other than what was budgeted and already discussed at Crown Corporations committee last year.

Course, some of the Project Nova initiatives have already started to roll out. I understand that there will be more that'll be rolling out in the summer.

You know, I—but I—the member, I guess, can throw numbers around and—without—and he didn't table anything, he didn't, sort of, indicate where he was hearing anything from, so I suppose that maybe that's what opposition does. You know, he used to actually accuse us of that when we were in opposition, because I remember—I'm old enough to remember there was a time when the NDP—we used to say that the building of the third bipole line on the west side of the province as opposed to the east side of the province wouldn't cost taxpayers one cent. That's actually a quote. He literally said—well, not him in particular—but the

NDP government literally said it wouldn't cost one additional penny for taxpayers.

And when we would suggest in the House as opposition at that time that that just wasn't true, because it made no sense, right. I mean, you were moving a hydro line, you know, from northern Manitoba, you know, towards the Saskatchewan border, then almost paralleling the Saskatchewan border and then pulling it back into southern Manitoba. It now runs through the RM of Hanover, and then back up towards Winnipeg to get to the converter station, as opposed to that almost direct line down the east side of—it made no sense that it wouldn't cost any additional penny. And it turns out, you know, this is—now we can look back and we know it to be true—it turns out that not only was it an additional penny, it was an additional \$4 billion—\$4 billion.

And when you talk about the PUB and the cost to certain things, I mean, we know what the PUB indicated that the hydro rate increase should be this year was only because of the good work of this government by reducing water rental rates and other fees that are paid by Manitoba Hydro that cut that projected rate increase in half.

So the member opposite can throw about a number without any evidence, without any indication of where he's heard it from, but he does so without credibility based on his own track record in the former government, when he clapped and shouted with great glee from the government benches when government members said that the hydro line wouldn't cost one additional penny.

I've made it clear as the Minister responsible for MPI that government will not provide or approve additional funds for Project Nova. I've been given an assurance by MPI officials that they won't be seeking additional funds for Project Nova, and that the cost of the—or, that the timeline for the project is on time.

* (16:00)

Now, if the member opposite has evidence to the contrary, as opposed to allegations, I absolutely would welcome him providing that evidence.

Mr. Wiebe: I look forward to doing so.

Is the minister indicating, then, that if the costs for Project Nova exceed \$290 million, that he is willing to walk away from this project?

Mr. Goertzen: Government has indicated that we will not be approving it—and this is through Treasury Board officials—would not be approving additional

funding for Project Nova, and Manitoba Public Insurance has indicated that they will not be seeking additional funds.

Mr. Wiebe: Aha. So, we've figured that one out. That took a little while to understand what the minister was saying.

So, essentially, what I'm hearing the minister say is is that there's no additional money coming from his government, which—earlier on he said there was no money that came from government with regards to MPI; MPI is self-funded. So what he's saying is there will be no money from government.

But, of course, the taxpayer—there's only one taxpayer, I'll remind the minister, and that taxpayer, that ratepayer for MPI, potentially could be on the hook for whatever it costs to complete the project.

Unless the minister is willing—because he's, you know, so eager to get involved in the day-to-day at MPI—is he willing to direct MPI that they should walk away from the project if the costs exceed \$290 million, which is already over budget?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, it's just after 4 o'clock, and the member has now accused me of interfering too much at a Crown corporation, after spending about, you know, two months accusing me of not interfering enough. I thought it might take us 'til 4:30 before we got to the flip-flop, but I appreciate him getting there a bit earlier.

No, he once again is not understanding the process by which government finances work. Maybe that's why they got into the problem of a \$4-billion overexpenditure with the bipole line at Manitoba Hydro.

What I've indicated to the member before, because Crown corporations now appear before Treasury Board, and they have to have their expenditures approved, and it's been indicated that there would not be additional expenditures approved by the government, which would not allow it to happen.

Mr. Wiebe: How many times has the minister met with the CEO of MPI in the last six months?

Mr. Goertzen: Many times.

Mr. Wiebe: It sounds like it. Can the minister give me a number?

Mr. Goertzen: The number is many.

Mr. Wiebe: I—sorry, I didn't hear the minister.

Mr. Goertzen: Many.

Mr. Wiebe: Pretty sure many is not a number. Can the minister tell me how many times he has met with the CEO of MPI in the last six months?

Mr. Goertzen: So many that I don't have the number on me.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, as we're getting used to, the minister's come unprepared to committee. So I'd—maybe he could undertake that, to get that number, bring it back to us.

Mr. Goertzen: How many times has the member opposite met with his Leader of the Opposition in the last four months? Does he have that number on him?

Mr. Wiebe: So, I think this is a pretty straightforward question for the minister. I'm not sure why he's refusing to answer. Can he just, maybe, look at his schedule, talk to his scheduling secretary might be a good option? I'm not going to tell him how to do his job, but maybe he should, I don't know, ask somebody that knows a little bit more than him. That might be a good way to do it.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, see, but that's a different sort of thing, because when I asked the member opposite how many times he'd met with the Leader of the Opposition, I actually thought he might know because it's probably close to zero. But I—my hope is that he meets with him so often that he wouldn't know the number off the top of his head, in the same way that I don't know the number off the top of my head.

So, if he's asking to, you know, to try to discern a number of how many times, you know, we've been meeting, perhaps he wants to give a time frame. But, he might also have to be more clear because, you know, I've run into the CEO sometimes at events and we've talked about things; I've seen him at announcements; there was a Christmas gathering, I think, that I saw him at last year.

In fact, now that the member opposite mentions it, I was at the ATA—the association of—*[interjection]*—the automobile trades association—thanks, Mardi—at their president's dinner on Saturday of this last week. Great dinner. I want to commend all those who were involved. In fact, it's the first—the member will be upset if I don't mention this—it's the first time they've had a president's dinner since 2008, and so Johnny Vernaus and others were instrumental in organizing it, and I want to commend them for that. Really a full room; a full room of folks in the industry were there.

I recognized a number of people who were introduced into the hall of fame of the ATA, including

Jim Gauthier, the big guy. You'll remember from the commercials—there are some who are too young, at this table, to remember Jim Gauthier in the commercials, including Jeremy, who just wouldn't recall that—but big guy was there; he received an award. A number of others received a recognition for their awards in the ATA.

But the reason I say that is because the CEO of MPI was there and spoke at the event. So I don't know if he would include that as a meeting of the CEO. Maybe he could just give a little bit more clarity in terms of what he's looking for.

Mr. Wiebe: So the question was, in the last six months, how many times has the minister met with the CEO of MPI?

Mr. Goertzen: Sure, so when—just in terms of meetings, does he mean, like, when we were at a Christmas function together, or when we were at the ATA—does he want that included as well?

Mr. Wiebe: Sure. That's at the minister's discretion, if he thinks those were meetings that should be included in the public record.

Mr. Goertzen: So I'll do my best, then, to remember every hockey game I may have run into the CEO at, or anytime—it'll be—yes. It'll definitely be many, but we'll endeavour to get that to the member in the prescribed period required.

Mr. Wiebe: So, and—in these number of discussions that the minister—it sounds like it's very often that he's meeting with the CEO of MPI—has he given him any kind of direction or raised any concerns prior to him calling a ministerial inquiry into the organizational structure of MPI?

Mr. Goertzen: Well I mean, you know, the specific nature of those meetings would not be appropriate for me to, you know, to speak about, but I can assure the member that I wouldn't call for an organizational review without having raised concerns previously about a number of different issues.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I mean, it—but it's clear that the minister is certainly well-briefed on the situation at MPI, obviously would be well briefed on the situation with regards to Project Nova—the cost overruns, the delays that have occurred so far.

Did the minister also get information at that time with regards to the turnover in the executive suite in MPI's management?

* (16:10)

Mr. Goertzen: I'm not sure the exact definition that the member's using when it comes to executive management. You know, I don't have specific information about turnover rates of whatever the definition he's using because we're not operating the Crown corporation.

But do I sometimes hear when individuals leave a corporation? Sure, but I also hear sometimes when people leave, you know, the staff of the NDP caucus, but I'm not controlling that, either.

Mr. Wiebe: Can he advise the committee how many executives have left in the past two years?

Mr. Goertzen: No, and that would be a question more appropriate for Crown Corporations committee.

Mr. Wiebe: As I've said, I'm happy to ask those questions there as well and I look forward to the minister bringing that forward.

I'm looking for a list of executives that have left their titles and the date that they left, and whether they have been replaced.

Again, you know, if we want to stay out of the realm of the, you know, the Crown corporations process, because of course the minister, I think, has been pretty clear he's not willing to call a Crown corporations meeting.

Maybe the minister can just talk about the times that he's been briefed by the CEO at MPI over the presumably dozens and dozens of meetings that he's had with the CEO over the last six months. What sort of information has he received from him about executives that have left in the last two years?

Mr. Goertzen: I think I indicated to the member that I would try to discern how many times I've met with the CEO of MPI, how many times we, you know, happened to meet at a Starbucks down the street by accident, how many times our paths crossed at various events.

In terms of, you know, looking for specifics, in terms of details of turnover of executive management, I think I've already indicated to the member opposite that would be best asked at a Crown Corporations committee. I'm glad the member is eager to be at a Crown Corporations committee and I can assure him that, if I'm still in the current role as House leader, that I will ensure that it is called in the statutorily required time frame.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the minister is the House leader right now, so he can get that going now. I think Manitobans want to get that information.

But again, I mean, the minister has now—we're hearing maybe even more than dozens and dozens of meetings because he's saying they run into each other all over the place. So he must have heard very clearly about the concerns with regards to executives that may have left.

So, maybe the minister can shed a little bit more light on the nature of those departures and indicate if he's aware of the use of non-disclosure agreements in the departure of those executive members.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, the member should know that if I run into people, you know, casually, whether it's the CEO of MPI or Deputy Minister of Justice or the special assistant to the Minister of Justice, you know, at a football game—for tickets that I pay for personally, by the way—or a Jets game—for tickets that I pay for personally, by the way—or a concert, I don't usually, you know, pull them aside and start grilling them about turnover in their organization. So, if that's the sort of thing that he's thinking that I'm doing, then he doesn't know me well.

But I've already indicated to him that, you know, he's asking now, you know, pretty operational questions. About 45 minutes ago, he was saying that I shouldn't be interfering in a corporation. About 15 minutes ago, he was saying I'm not interfering enough. And now he's wondering why I'm not running the corporation on a day-to-day basis.

So, there will be a Crown Corporations committee called within the required time frame. He'll be able to ask questions at it in the way—same way that his leader asked questions in December, although apparently he's not satisfied with the questions that his leader asked. I'm daily not satisfied with the questions that his leader asks. But he'll have that opportunity.

He also has other opportunities, I suppose. He could avail himself of FIPPA to the corporation because the Crown corporation is subject to FIPPA legislation, if he doesn't want to wait for a Crown Corporations committee.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, you know, outside of the biweekly meetings that the minister has with the CEO of MPI, it sounds like he runs into him all over the place. So, really does sound like he is running the corporation already.

Maybe the minister can shed some light on how many times he's met with the chair of the board of MPI in the last six months.

Mr. Goertzen: I mean I think, you know, defining running into an individual at an event is—and then trying to link that to operating the corporation, well that's ridiculous. I mean I ran into, as I mentioned, Jim Gauthier at an event on Saturday. I'm not running his car dealership because I ran into him at that particular event. I ran into Johnny Vernaus at the same event, and I'm not running his autobody shop because I ran into him at that particular event.

I sometimes get accused of going to too many events, and I like going to events because I meet lots of people there and I hear about lots of different issues. But the member seems to be equating my association with people at events is then being responsible for operating the things that are within their world, which is, of course, ridiculous.

So I'm not sure why he's trying to make that assertion, but I reject it.

Mr. Wiebe: Of course, it's very transparent and easily identified by most who are paying attention to the proceedings here that the minister didn't dispute that he eats biweekly with the CEO of Hydro—or, of MPI and that he remains in lockstep with all the actions that have been undertaken there.

Of course, we know that the CEO of MPI was hand-picked by this government and remains, you know, again, very closely linked, not just in terms of the work that's being done, but also, apparently, socially, as well, that the minister spends a lot of time with the CEO at MPI.

I'd also like to just note that we asked about the meetings with the board Chair, and we didn't get a response to that, so I'll ask the minister again: How many times in the last six months has he met with the Chair of the board of MPI?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, no; I wouldn't say that I'm social buddies with the minister of—or, sorry, the CEO of MPI, any more than I'm social buddies with, you know, Mark Chipman, who I might run into at a particular event or any other well-known individuals in Manitoba.

The fact that people, you know, show up in the same place is actually a very Winnipeg thing, you know. If I—we get together and then we meet each other, but we don't necessarily have to suggest that because we meet each other or that we talk to each other, that somehow we're running each other's affairs or running each other's business—is a really odd assertion the member has made. I'm not quite sure

why he's going down this really odd and circuitous line of questioning.

But he did say at the beginning of that question, before he delved into this weird sort of fantasy about people who meet each other at events are somehow running each other's businesses. Before he got into that particular line of questioning, he said that it's clear that I'm in lockstep with the decisions of MPI.

Now, again, this is where we've been winding on this sort of road, right, because he said that I was a minister who is more than willing to interfere with the operations of MPI.

He said that like—you know, being critic is fine; I've been a critic before. And sometimes being a critic means you're not always consistent. It's usually good if you're consistent within the same day. It's even better if you're consistent within the same hour.

But, within the last hour, the member opposite indicated that he thought I was, you know, terribly willing to interfere with the operations of MPI by issuing directives, because I have issued two. I issued two on the issue of untendered contracts, which the member opposite and his government never did, despite the fact there being many untendered contracts of high value under MPI. And yes, I've issued an organization or a view that requires there not to be an application for a rate increase and to let the PUB make the decision.

And, by the way, I should correct some of the record that the member has left in the public record for the 20 people who are watching, because the member opposite has said that, you know, somehow there's going to be a delayed decision on the rates at MPI. Well, that's not true at all. PUB is ultimately going to make a rate decision, as the PUB has always made a rate decision.

Now, in the course of these two days, he's questioned the impartiality of staff of the Legislative Assembly, who he's questioning whether or not they're taking down all of their things that have been taken advisement. Which, he did that, you know, just before this committee started, and he was wondering where all the different things were that was going to be coming back. And as I indicated to him there were none and there were none recorded. And he once again questioned the—those who do that good work.

* (16:20)

And now he seems to be questioning impartiality of the PUB, an—which is an—you know, this really

strange position, because the NDP in some times in this House in the last couple of years have said that we need to protect the PUB.

And now, he seems to have been taking the position in the last few months, since the directive came out that, the PUB can't be trusted and that, somehow, you know, that they're going to be hiding some kind of a rate increase this year because this is an election year.

So, you know, he's all over the map on these particular issues, Mr. Chairperson. But I'll try to bring him back to some level of consistency, and that is to say that the PUB will again, you know, look at the finances of Manitoba—or Manitoba—well, Hydro, too—but Manitoba Public Insurance. The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation will provide financial information to the PUB, and, in whatever normal course they make their decision on rates for MPI, the PUB will do that. That's the same as every year.

So, this is the conspiracy that the member has drawn up. In a normal year, MPI goes to the PUB, the PUB assesses the financial information and the PUB makes a decision.

This year, the 'conspiratists' year that the member's drawn up, MPI will go to the PUB with information, the PUB will analyze that information and the PUB will establish the rate. It's the exact same process.

So, I hope that the member opposite will be more careful in the kind of the communications that he's putting out to the public.

Mr. Wiebe: How many times has the minister met with the chair of the board of MPI in the last six months?

Mr. Goertzen: *[inaudible]*

Mr. Wiebe: The minister has committed to the—to this committee that he will bring back—he will undertake to bring back a number for the number of times that he's met with with the CEO of MPI in the last six months.

I'd ask if he would make a similar commitment to bring back a number of how many times he has met with the chair of the board of MPI in the last six months.

Mr. Goertzen: By meeting, would he be also asking about, you know, incidental times when I would run into the chair of the board? Is he talking about emails

of this sort of contact—like, what—can he be more clear in terms of what he defines as meeting?

Mr. Wiebe: How many times has the minister met with the chair of the board of MPI in the last six months?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I'm just—want to make sure that there's consistency. So, when he asked the question about the CEO of MPI, he wanted me to 'include'—include sort of social gatherings. Is he looking for the same criteria? I don't want to provide the wrong information to the member.

Mr. Wiebe: Again, leave that to the minister's discretion.

How many times has he met with the chair of the board of MPI in the last six months?

Mr. Goertzen: And apply my discretion to answering that question as an undertaking, but I hope not to get criticized by the member, then, if he doesn't like the discretion he's asked me to apply.

Mr. Wiebe: So, the—can the minister just confirm that he has no knowledge of how many executives have left MPI's—MPI in the last two years?

Mr. Goertzen: The member hasn't given a description of what his classification of executives is, but again, I've indicated to him that I—one sometimes hears about individuals who are leaving the corporation, but I don't have a specific number, no.

Mr. Wiebe: What did the minister hear?

Mr. Goertzen: I've heard of people sometimes leaving the corporation who I might personally classify as an executive.

Mr. Wiebe: Sorry, I didn't catch the end of that statement.

Mr. Goertzen: I do sometimes hear of individuals who leave a corporation like MPI who I might classify as an executive.

Mr. Wiebe: The—executive is the classification. I think a minister would know that. I assume he would know that. The people of Manitoba pay quite a hefty salary to the minister to be the Minister responsible for MPI, so I do hope that he understands what an executive is at his own corporation, the corporation that he's responsible for administering on behalf of the people of Manitoba.

You know, I think it's quite remarkable what we've heard today here, that the minister has confirmed that he meets at least biweekly with the CEO of MPI, that he apparently meets multiple times as

well with the chair, although we're waiting to hear back on how many times the minister has met in the last six months.

It's clear, of course, that the minister has been well briefed on the issues at MPI. He is well aware of the concerns surrounding Project Nova, concerning the overall organizational structure of MPI.

He understands that those—that that organizational mismanagement is impacting rates that Manitobans are paying with regards to their MPI and their Autopac rates every year, including this most recent year. Of course, people are paying more as of April 1st because of concerns about mismanagement by the PUB at MPI.

And yet, the minister has been working side by side with the CEO at every step—of course, their own hand-picked CEO and their own hand-picked board. They have been working together in lockstep every step of the way with regards to Project Nova and other mismanagement that the minister clearly—or openly admits is the case over at MPI.

And yet, considering all of that information and, you know, knowing that and, of course, it's very obvious that the people of Manitoba are concerned about this, he refuses to call a Crown corporations meeting which would allow the people of Manitoba to get some information about this, would allow them to get some answers about where that \$200-million-and-counting cost overrun is actually being spent; understand the nature of this boondoggle, understand that this is just the beginning, of course, that, you know, despite this minister's doublespeak, we know that that \$290 million is potentially just the beginning in terms of actually fulfilling the goals of this project upgrade.

And, you know, the minister, I think, quite freely admitting that it's going to go higher, although he won't give us a number of what he estimates it will be. Of course, he doesn't want to do that.

We know this is very political now. That's why he's been brought in as the minister responsible for this particular file. He's been very successful in the past as, you know, the minister who cuts emergency rooms—*[interjection]*

Well, you know, I appreciate that the critic for Education is focusing on the cuts that were undertaken by this minister when he was minister of Education.

However, I'll take him back a little bit further yet because we know this was the minister who cut our health-care system first and went around and closed

emergency rooms, set in place the plan to close rural emergency rooms and rural health-care facilities as well.

So he's got a track record, and when brought in to clean up the mess over at MPI, I think he's realized that this is completely a boondoggle of this government's own making and now, in desperate times, is saying, well, we won't call a Crown corporations meeting and won't answer the questions in detail at the—during the Estimates process.

Of course, he's not going to answer during question period. I mean, that's an obvious starting point, but would, you know, be given an opportunity to give the people of Manitoba the information that they're so desperately seeking right now about why their rates are going up and only will go up further in the future.

But, of course, when will this ministerial inquiry conclude? Wow. It's—just so happens it'll be after the next election. Isn't that an interesting coincidence? And it's very frustrating that the minister thinks very so little of the people of Manitoba that they don't see through this very transparent attempt—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —to try to not, you know, bring that information forward.

So, you know, we're left with these—forum to bring forward these questions. The minister refuses to answer in depth any of the questions. And it's frustrating. But we'll continue to ask him here, in question period, in the media, in every—in the hallway any chance we get. I'm looking forward to getting some answers from this minister.

Mr. Chairperson: The member's time is expired.

* (16:30)

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I like to think that I'm sort of an available person when it comes to media and questions. I don't—I think I almost never miss question period because I really like question period. I enjoy question period. I look forward to the questions that I get from the members; I don't get 'asnough'—I don't get as many questions as I actually would like. I'd be happy to take more questions from the member opposite, but he rarely asks questions.

And then when questions are asked, like, the questions from the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew), at a Crown Corporations committee just a few months ago, when the cost increase of Project Nova was known and when the Leader of the Opposition and others could ask questions—and did ask

questions—apparently, he's unsatisfied with those questions that are asked.

Now, I know that he's now taking advice from the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare), as he indicates. The member of Transcona's providing him advice; the very member for Transcona that, just earlier this week, decided to declare for Manitobans that he was poor and that he couldn't afford the basic things. Walked around with a sign that says, help me, I'm poor. You know, brother, can you spare a dime?

And I say to the member opposite, if he doesn't think that his MLA's salary of just north of \$100,000 is a living wage, then he's out of touch with Manitobans.

So, he can make comments, if he'd like, about my time as the Education Minister. That's fair game; I'm a public official; I—my record is there. He can do as he likes.

But so is his, and walking around telling the public that he's poor, with his MLA's salary in addition to whatever pension he might be receiving from his illustrious and well-thought-of career in the education system, I think, perhaps, speaks to his own judgment. And so, he can question my judgment if he likes, but I will spend some time questioning his.

Now, of course, we've heard from the Leader of the Opposition what his plan is when it comes to health care. He already declared, I think on a podcast, that he wouldn't reopen emergency rooms that were converted to urgent-care centres, so he's endorsing that right there. But then he went even further, saying that he wouldn't make those changes, but that he would start cutting Shared Health.

Things like, I guess, the Children's Hospital, which is at—in Shared Health. Or the Selkirk Mental Health Centre, which is in Shared Health. Or the Health Sciences Centre itself—going to cut the Health Sciences Centre—that's Manitoba's hospital. You know, and the great work that they're doing over there with building new surgical centres.

So, we know the NDP's record. You know, they've got MLAs who think that their \$100,000 salary is too little, and it leaves them impoverished and too poor. They're now looking to, you know, cut the Children's Hospital, looking to cut the Health Sciences Centre, the CancerCare unit. They're—you know, and this is just the beginning. You know, the NDP really haven't started to talk about what their election plans are yet.

But, the very little that we've seen—the very little we've seen about their election plan so far, involves—I guess—asking for salary increases for their MLAs because, you know, you can't make ends meet on \$100,000 and plus whatever pension is being received. And they're going to start shutting down things like the Health Sciences Centre and the Children's Hospital. I mean, this is like a snippet.

They haven't even gotten to the, you know, taxation, and we all know what they would do with taxation, because members opposite and—now, of course, the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) has his head down, and he should. I would keep my head down because, I mean, he'll remember when he, during the 2011 election campaign, went around to the good folks of Concordia and told them, he said, read my lips. No new taxes.

His constituents told me that. They said, Matt, you know, we thought he was a—oh, sorry. The member for Concordia, we thought he was a good guy, he knocked on my door and he said I'm not going to raise your taxes.

And then the ballots went into the box, he came out with his victory, he wiped his hands, he walked to—into the Legislature, his premier said we're going to raise taxes and he cheered and said, yes, let's raise taxes, completely forgetting the promise that he made to his own constituents.

So, I look forward to seeing this election platform of the NDP, which has started off with closing down, I guess, the Health Sciences Centre, moved over to trying to find more money for the member for Transcona, who isn't able to make ends meet with his \$100,000-a-year salary and his pension, and seeing what other taxes that are going to increase on the poor people of Manitoba to increase those MLA salaries.

So, I'm happy to sit here for the next few weeks and talk about the bad record of the NDP if the member opposite wants to continue on with this line of questioning.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. I'm going to say to the critic and to the minister, I will remind all involved—I will say to the member for Concordia and to the minister that we are here to discuss the Estimates for the Department of Justice. And I'm—I got lost somewhere in all of that.

And so, I would just remind those members—the minister and the member—to please stay on track, to please keep it relevant and to please remember why we're here and why people are watching, so.

Mr. Wiebe: I do appreciate your guidance and, of course, that is the purpose of us being here today and that's why we're so eager to point out the significant failures that this government has undertaken, in this case on MPI, and the cost overruns that are costing Manitobans more. It—costing ratepayers, in this case of Autopac, more money every single month.

And, of course, in a cost-of-living crisis, this is important. This is what Manitobans are telling us are very concerned about.

So, you know, the minister might be, you know, very flippant in his answers, he might be cavalier as to the amount of \$200 million. You know, he said the other day in question period, it's no big deal. He thought it wasn't a boondoggle. I think the people of Manitoba certainly would think it's a boondoggle.

The other, you know, aspect I would just point out, of course, with regards to Justice, we did spend quite a bit of time—although not as much as I would have liked—asking questions about specifics within the Department of Justice, hoped that the minister would give us some detail with regards to, you know, even simple questions about staffing and about vacancy or issues around vacancy within the department.

Course, 'waround' Crown attorneys, this is an issue that's live right now, you know, it just so happened we were in Estimates and I was asking those questions. Not, you know, not the day after did Crown attorneys come out and say this is a serious, serious issue and we need some answers from this government.

So, we gave the minister the opportunity to answer directly to those Crown attorneys; he didn't do so. You know, that's very—that's incredibly disrespectful to those Crown attorneys who are working so hard right now to try to keep our justice system moving forward.

And, you know, they're doing so at a time when they've seen a government walk away from their responsibilities around public safety and, you know, talk a good game, use divisive language, try to rile up their base, you know, their MAGA base, get them all fired up.

But at the end of the day, what's really on the—on people's minds is why is the justice system so under strain and why are—is my personal safety and my community's safety getting worse under this PC government? Why is it that things are actually worse now than they were seven years ago?

And I think most Manitobans are smart enough. The conversation has gone—has gotten to the level where people understand that their root causes of crime do have an impact on their own personal safety and their community's safety.

And so, when we go knock on a door in—well, in my own constituency of Concordia, and somebody says you know, my garage was broken into. I say yes, this is terrible, this is exactly the kind of thing we need to address.

And I say, and do you know that the addictions crisis is out of control in this province, and they nod their head. And I say, you know that this PC government has completely abdicated any responsibility for making things better for people who are suffering from addictions, and they nod their head.

And I say, you know that the homelessness problem has become even more pronounced since this government started cutting funding for poverty initiatives, started freezing the minimum wage, started, you know, cutting housing supports, cut the number—actually cut the number of subsidized housing in this province.

I mean, it's just unfathomable, in a time when there's so much need, that this government has continued this complete focus on austerity and cuts, you know, until this election year. And then they say, well no, don't worry, don't worry, we've changed. We've come to a new position, now, under the same Cabinet, and the same Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and the same old people behind the scenes who are calling the shots. There's nothing changed. It's the same old PC party, but of course now they say trust us; we're different.

* (16:40)

Manitobans understand cuts have consequences. Every one of those cuts that I listed earlier with regards to this—that has this minister's fingerprints all over it—every one of those cuts has pressured the justice system because of actions of this government.

And so, now—now—the minister wants to be—wants to say that they are going to change, that they're going to be completely different than they've been for seven years. That, you know, every question that I asked here that he refused to answer, once again talking in circles, being dismissive, being flippant, you know, just pretending, oh, I don't even know; what are you talking about?

I don't even get—you know, I mean this is the kind of stuff that Manitobans see right through, and the effects in their communities are real.

So, I hope that the minister will take some time to reflect on his performance here today and, maybe, you know, maybe change his ways. Maybe just come clean with Manitobans. He's proud of his record of \$290 million wasted at MPI. He should come out and be proud of that and say that.

I look forward to ceding the rest of my time to the member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux), and I appreciate the opportunity—thank the staff for coming in—the opportunity to ask questions here today.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I think it's important to correct the record in many ways, of course.

The member opposite sat in the government—when he talks about MPI—that tried to transfer—*[interjection]*—well, I know he's defensive; he doesn't want me to put this on the record.

But I'm going to put it on the record anyway. He tried to transfer \$20 million from MPI surplus to universities. Now, that's not speaking ill about universities. Like, I—I've—I was—spent eight years in University of Manitoba, but that is not what the expectation of that money is, to move \$20 million of a surplus from MPI into universities.

Now, of course, Gary Doer had to back off of that—the member opposite was the executive assistant to Gary Doer, I think, at the time—he had to back off that decision. But that's how they treated MPI.

And I won't get into all the untendered contracts and the \$50,000 contract to Marilyn McLaren to do nothing. I've talked about that before; I could talk about it again.

But I do want to talk a bit about this issue of justice that he raised and to compare the two records. And let's think about these two records. We had a former government when they had warrants—outstanding warrants.

So, this government, together with—under the leadership of our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has decided to create an integrated warrant unit—high risk; it's called different things, but certainly, part of the role is going to be to ensure that those who have high-risk warrants are sought after.

Do you remember what the former NDP government did when it came to warrants? They deleted them. They actually deleted the warrants. And

I remember asking, together, I think, with the member for Springfield at the time, what happened to the warrants? Well, the minister of Justice sat in his office, and he deleted them—delete, delete, delete, delete—and—because there was a story that came out about the thousands of outstanding warrants that they had, and then suddenly all the warrants had gone down and we wondered, well, I guess, you know, they got police to go out and take action on these warrants. No; they just deleted them from the system. And that is how the NDP treated justice.

You know, we had questions at the time about high-risk car thieves. It was a big issue in the 1990s before immobilizers came in through auto manufacturers. But high-risk car thieves, and I would ask questions right where the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare) is sitting, I sat in that seat, and I would ask questions about high-risk car thieves and how they were dealing with those individuals.

And you know what we found that they were doing? They were buying them Slurpees. They had a fund where they would take high-risk car thieves to 7-Eleven—and listen, I like a good Slurpee, okay. I'm not going to deny that—but, like, go to 7-Eleven and buy them Slurpees.

That was—that's how they treated high-risk car thieves who, by the way, weren't just stealing cars, but were causing crashes on the streets of Winnipeg and many, many people were being injured.

That was how they dealt with things.

You know, I would go through—I remember touring a jail at one time and seeing that prisoners were watching inappropriate material and raising that with then Andrew Swan—*[interjection]*—well, it was pornography—and raising that with then-minister Andrew Swan, and he said, well, you know, I don't think I'm really in charge of that. Well, about a month later they found out that he was in charge of the jails. He discovered that.

But there had been several months—several months—where prisoners were ordering UFC fights and different sorts of things, because their cable package had changed and nobody had put any restriction on it. So they were watching pay-per-view and watching all sorts of other things.

I mean, there—the list could go on and on and on in terms of how the NDP treated justice in—compared to our government. A very, very different approach.

Now, I think the member for Transcona—who's trying to figure out his budget for next week and how he's going to make ends meet—might sit there and go, oh, like, you know, but things do change; we're now—we're different now; we're not the same as we were under Gary Doer or Greg Selinger.

And yet, he could go to the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv)—his own member—his own member—and say, why is it that you don't think bail should be strengthened? Why don't you think bail should be tougher? Because the member for Fort Garry indicated he doesn't believe that bail should be tougher—the only party in Canada who doesn't believe there should be stronger bail provisions is the NDP opposition.

So, I look forward to the election campaign, whenever it's called, to contrast our record on justice with this current NDP opposition on justice and the former NDP government on justice.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, before recognizing the member for Tyndall Park, I do want to say that not all of those comments were within the boundaries of relevance, and I please would ask that we keep that on track.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the minister for his time this afternoon. And I do not get a lot of time, unfortunately, and so I'm hoping that the minister will work with me to the best of his ability to answer a few of my questions.

This one comes actually from a conversation I had with a constituent earlier this week. I suspect that the department has heard about Keira's Law.

Are there currently any plans for this government to follow suit and bring forward a motion to protect victims, including children of domestic violence?

Mr. Goertzen: In the interest of time, if the member wants to contact my office, we can personally meet and she can provide some details and we can pursue that from there.

Ms. Lamoureux: The minister knows I'm a big fan of youth justice committees, and I've been advocating for them since I first got elected back in 2016.

I recognize it was actually the former NDP government who got rid of all the youth justice committees here in the province of Manitoba.

And I'm just wondering if the minister has any plans to recreate or bring something forth that would be similar in nature that allows for opportunities for

restoration, especially with those who are younger, who may want the opportunity to show that they are remorseful, rather than have to go into our criminal justice system.

Mr. Goertzen: I do actually appreciate the member's heart for this issue, and I know that she's raised it, along with Kevin Lamoureux, when he was an MLA in this Chamber before he went to Ottawa.

So, the—those youth criminal justice committees are statutorily created under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, so we don't have tremendous interaction with them.

There are 54 community justice committees that still do exist, though, across the province. If the member feels that, you know, in some ways those can be enhanced, I'm open to her ideas on that. Because, like her, I do think that, often, there are ways for certain kinds of offenders, if they're appropriate offenders, to find restoration and, sometimes, restitution in different ways.

Ms. Lamoureux: In Manitoba, the Women's Correctional Centre, for those serving sentences under two years, is overcrowded and lacks substantive programming for inmates to set goals and work towards them. Understaffing also leaves women without support.

What are the current plans in motion to address this?

* (16:50)

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, thank the member for the question.

So, there are certainly programs such as therapeutic drug treatments at—both at Headingley and the Women's Correctional Centre, something that I championed when I was in opposition, and I was glad to see our government bring that forward. There were committees that are always—that meet, and that are always looking for additional ways.

But, you know, I'd actually offer this to the member opposite, I'd—I think she's invited me to her McDonald's coffee shop at different times but I'd be happy if she wants to do a tour together of the 'womenal'—Women's Correctional Centre, we could do that together. And, coming out of that, she might have some ideas.

Ms. Lamoureux: I will definitely take the minister up on that.

In follow-up, there's only one halfway house for women in Winnipeg.

Can the minister share what plans the department has to provide mental health, addictions and trauma services for those when released from being incarcerated?

Mr. Goertzen: I'm advised by officials that halfway houses are federally run.

Ms. Lamoureux: Can the minister explain the reasons why there are no provincially run, Indigenous-led halfway houses as alternatives to incarceration in Manitoba?

And I recognize his last answer was suggesting that it is a federal role, but I think that the Province also has a role to play, whether it's through finances or other means.

Mr. Goertzen: So, I appreciate the member's question. Certainly, we share some of those same concerns.

You know, as an example, we have, within the facilities we're looking at healing and lodges so, you know, I understand the nature of culturally appropriate programs for restoration.

But when it comes to halfway houses, I did mention that those are federal programs because they're—we have a different parole system. Manitoba it's release on two-thirds of serving of the sentence, federally there are other opportunities for release earlier, like day paroles and different sorts of release systems.

So, we have things like the Walking Bear program that the—but the halfway houses are because of the ability to obtain parole in earlier fashions federally.

Ms. Lamoureux: Can the department confirm for us if judicial justices and other family-court professionals currently receive training in domestic violence and trauma?

And just watching the clock here, this will be my last question, and so I just also want to take this opportunity to thank the minister for answering my questions so directly this afternoon, as well as the critic for the NDP for allowing me a bit of time.

Mr. Goertzen: Because of the limited time, we'll undertake that—to get that back to the member in a relatively short period of time.

I also want to thank her for her questions. Her questions are always thoughtful and direct, and so that makes answering them much more easier. She's done an excellent job as a critic. I've indicated her—happy to tour with her at the Winnipeg [*phonetic*]-Winnipeg Correctional Centre, and maybe I'll have the opportunity to join her at McDonald's again sometime. And I want to wish her well as she plans her wedding this summer.

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any further questions?

Seeing none, we will now proceed with the resolutions.

For the information of the committee, regarding 4.8, there are no monies allocated for resolution 4.8 this year, so it doesn't need to be a vote. The information was included in the books to reflect the changes from last year.

Resolution 4.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$61,203,000 for Justice, Crown Law, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,841,000 for Justice, Legislative Counsel, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$241,187,000 for Justice, Correctional Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$86,498,000 for Justice, Courts, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$307,188,000 for Justice, Public Safety, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,037,000 for Justice, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 4.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 4.1. At this point, we request that all ministerial and opposition staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

Are there no—are there any questions? Seeing none, if a motion—*[interjection]*

Resolution 4.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$68,075,000 for Justice, Corporate and Strategic Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Justice.

And given that it is almost 5 o'clock, we will recess for one minute.

The committee recessed at 4:58 p.m.

The committee resumed at 5:00 p.m.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, May 8th.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 27, 2023

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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