

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

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALTOMARE, Nello, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COMPTON, Carla	Tuxedo	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JACKSON, Grant	Spruce Woods	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon.	Notre Dame	NDP
MOROZ, Mike	River Heights	NDP
MOSES, Jamie, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
MOYES, Mike	Riel	NDP
NARTH, Konrad	La Vérendrye	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon.	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
OXENHAM, Logan	Kirkfield Park	NDP
PANKRATZ, David	Waverley	NDP
PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
SALA, Adrien, Hon.	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHMIDT, Tracy, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
SCHOTT, Rachelle	Kildonan-River East	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SIMARD, Glen, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
SMITH, Bernadette, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	Ind.
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 15, 2024

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

House Business

The Speaker: The honourable member for Roblin, on House business.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Honourable Speaker, I seek leave to allow the Opposition House Leader to call Bill 221, The Earlier Screening for Breast Cancer Act, to a committee of this House before the end of the First Session of the 43rd Legislature, no later than October 30.

The Speaker: Is there leave to allow the Opposition House Leader to call Bill 221, The Earlier Screening for Breast Cancer Act, to committee of this House before the end of the First Session of the 43rd Legislature, no later than October 30? Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

The Speaker: Leave has been denied.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: Introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Standing Committee on Social
and Economic Development
Eighth Report**

MLA Mike Moyes (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the eighth report of Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

The Speaker: Honourable member for—no.

Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on October 10, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 254 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 7)** – *The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act/Loi abrogeant la Loi sur les projets de construction dans le secteur public (appels d'offres)*
- **Bill (No. 9)** – *The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act/Loi modifiant le Code des normes d'emploi*
- **Bill (No. 21)** – *The Public Schools Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques*

Committee Membership

- Ms. BYRAM
- Mr. JACKSON
- MLA KENNEDY
- Hon. Min. MARCELINO
- MLA MOYES
- Mr. OXENHAM

Your Committee elected MLA MOYES as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected MLA KENNEDY as the Vice-Chairperson.

Substitutions received during Committee proceedings:

- Hon. Min. SCHMIDT for Hon. Min. MARCELINO

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following 16 presentations on Bill (No. 7) – The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act/Loi abrogeant la Loi sur les projets de construction dans le secteur public (appels d'offres):

Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour

Kyley Parker, Private citizen

Tanya Palson, Manitoba Building Trades

Marc Lafond, IUOE Local 987

Victor Da Silva, LIUNA Local 1258

Sean Ramsay, Private citizen

Nicholas Adams, Private citizen

Kyle Kalcsics, UA Local 254

David Grant, Private citizen

Paul Moist, Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees

Yvette Milner, Merit Contractors Association of Manitoba

Tyler Slobogian, Canadian Federation of Independent Business

Peter Wightman, Construction Labour Relations Association of Manitoba

Ron Castel, Private citizen

Daemien Bernhard, Private citizen
Joshua Fisher, Private citizen

Your Committee heard the following three presentations on **Bill (No. 9)** – *The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act/Loi modifiant le Code des normes d'emploi*:

Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour
Susan Russell-Csanyi, Canadian Cancer Society
Patrick Tohill, Crohn's and Colitis Canada

Your Committee heard the following presentation on **Bill (No. 21)** – *The Public Schools Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques*:

David Grant, Private citizen

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following five written submissions on **Bill (No. 7)** – *The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act/Loi abrogeant la Loi sur les projets de construction dans le secteur public (appels d'offres)*:

Ben McGillivray, Private citizen
George Emery, OPCMIA Local 222
Ryan Sellar, International Brotherhood of Boiler-makers Local 555
Robert Duarte, Ironworkers Local 728
Joshua Lapointe, Private citizen

Your Committee received the following written submission on **Bill (No. 9)** – *The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act/Loi modifiant le Code des normes d'emploi*:

Alanah Duffy, MS Canada

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 7)** – *The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act/Loi abrogeant la Loi sur les projets de construction dans le secteur public (appels d'offres)*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 9)** – *The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act/Loi modifiant le Code des normes d'emploi*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 21)** – *The Public Schools Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques*

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

THAT Clause 5(1) of the Bill be amended by striking out "July 1, 2024" and substituting "the day it receives royal assent".

MLA Moyes: Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Justice Second Report

Mr. Tyler Blashko (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the second report of the Standing Committee on Justice.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Tim Abbott): Your Standing Committee on Justice presents the following as a second report—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on October 10, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 16)** – *The Regulatory Accountability Reporting Act and Amendments to the Statutes and Regulations Act/Loi sur la remise de rapports relativement à la responsabilisation en matière de réglementation et modification de la Loi sur les textes législatifs et réglementaires*
- **Bill (No. 209)** – *The Provincial Court Amendment Act (Expanded Training for Judges and Judicial Justices of the Peace)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Cour provinciale (formation accrue des juges et des juges de paix judiciaires)*

Committee Membership

- Mr. BALCAEN
- Mr. BLASHKO
- MLA COMPTON
- Mrs. HIEBERT
- MLA PANKRATZ
- Hon. Mr. WIEBE

Your Committee elected Mr. BLASHKO as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected MLA COMPTON as the Vice-Chairperson.

Substitutions received during Committee proceedings:

- Hon. Min. CABLE for MLA PANKRATZ

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- Mr. GOERTZEN
- MLA LAMOUREUX

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 16)** – *The Regulatory Accountability Reporting Act and Amendments to the Statutes and Regulations Act/Loi sur la remise de rapports relativement à la responsabilisation en matière de réglementation et modification de la Loi sur les textes législatifs et réglementaires* :

David Grant, Private Citizen

Keyli Loepky, Canadian Federation of Independent Business

Your Committee heard the following 12 presentations on **Bill (No. 209)** – *The Provincial Court Amendment Act (Expanded Training for Judges and Judicial Justices of the Peace)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Cour provinciale (formation accrue des juges et des juges de paix judiciaires)*:

Susan Dawes, Provincial Judges Association of Manitoba

David Grant, Private Citizen

Kayla Harder, Private Citizen

Amy Danielson, Private Citizen

Sarah Mitchell, Private Citizen

Jennifer Kagan, Private Citizen

Stéphanie Plante, Private Citizen

Esther Mordechai, Private Citizen

Stacey Soldier, Manitoba Bar Association

Kimlee Morrisseau, Family court hurts

Mikayla Hunter, Private Citizen

Fernanda Vallejo, Latinas Manitoba Inc

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following three written submissions on **Bill (No. 209)** – *The Provincial Court Amendment Act (Expanded Training for Judges and Judicial Justices of the Peace)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Cour provinciale (formation accrue des juges et des juges de paix judiciaires)*

Kate Rowswell, Private Citizen

Jennifer Chan, Private Citizen

Ann Loewen, Private Citizen

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 16)** – *The Regulatory Accountability Reporting Act and Amendments to the Statutes and Regulations Act/Loi sur la remise de rapports relativement à la responsabilisation en matière de réglementation et modification de la Loi sur les textes législatifs et réglementaires*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment, on a recorded vote of ayes three, nays two.

- **Bill (No. 209)** – *The Provincial Court Amendment Act (Expanded Training for Judges and Judicial Justices of the Peace)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Cour provinciale (formation accrue des juges et des juges de paix judiciaires)*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Blashko: Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I am pleased to table the Annual Report of the Department of Advanced Education and Training for the fiscal year of 2023-24, as well as the annual reports for the year ending March 31, 2024, for Brandon University, Red River College Polytechnic, Research Manitoba, University College of the North, Université de Saint-Boniface, University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg.

The Speaker: Further tabling of reports?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): I am pleased to follow-to table the following annual reports for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024. First, the Department of Environment and Climate Change; second, the Manitoba Hazardous Waste Management Corporation; and third, the report of Efficiency Manitoba.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Punjabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Economic Development, Investment, Trade and Natural Resources): It is my pleasure to share the vision and goals of the newly formed Punjabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry with the province of Manitoba.

The Punjabi community has been part of our province since the 1960s, contributing significantly to both its economic and cultural landscapes. Over the years, Punjabi-owned businesses have achieved remarkable success in a variety of new and diverse industries.

Now, the community will have a dedicated platform to celebrate these accomplishments in an organization that collaborates collectively with the government in addition to representing the community with a broader business landscape.

This is how the Punjabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry was formed. A few members of the Punjabi business community came together to bring this vision to life, resulting in the establishment of this organization. Their vision and goals were clear: to provide a platform for internal networking, engage in collective advocacy, collaborate with government, support truth and reconciliation.

With these set out and clear mandate from its membership, I've no doubt that the Punjabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry will have an illustrious future advocating for its members in the years to come.

I am happy to acknowledge some of the folks who are in the gallery joining us today from this organization: Amrit [*phonetic*] Singh Dhillon, Varinder Singh, Dalbir Singh Bala, Randy Brar, Gurjant Singh Dhillon, Jay-Jaskaran-Sodhi, who are here with us today.

I'm delighted to mention that the Punjabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry will be hosting an MLA appreciation dinner this evening in the Golden Boy Room starting at 4:30 p.m.

We, as members of the Legislative Assembly, celebrate your accomplishment and wish you well and know that you—what you have achieved so far is only the beginning.

I invite all the members to join me in welcoming the members from the Punjabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry to the Legislative Building today.

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): Honourable Speaker, I'm honoured to rise today to recognize the invaluable contributions of the Punjabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Manitoba, highlighting their unwavering commitment to fostering sustainable growth and prosperity in Punjabi business and communities across this great province.

This organization plays a vital role as advocates for entrepreneurs, promoting diverse economic development that not only serves the Punjabi community

but also benefits all Manitobans. Their efforts are significant assets, provide tangible resources that contribute to the continued success and reliance of the Punjabi communities throughout Manitoba.

Moreover, the chamber's focus on creating opportunities for professional development and facilitating network collaboration within the Punjabi community uplifts and broadens our understanding of what it means to thrive together.

The perspective—this perspective is crucial for shaping the future of our great province, ensuring that every voice is heard and valued. Their extensive network encompasses a wide range of businesses, industry associations and non-profit organizations, all united in their mission to cultivate a vibrant and thriving business environment.

This collaboration seeks to foster inclusivity and innovation, making Manitoba a more welcoming and dynamic place for all. As an organization dedicated to growth, professional development and networking, the Punjabi Chamber of Commerce evaluates—elevates, pardon me—the meaningful contributions of an active community.

Their work is integral to the overarching goal of positioning Manitoba as an appealing destination for living, working and conducting businesses, enriching our province for current and future generations.

And I, too, on behalf of the official opposition, would like to ask everybody to join us tonight between 4:30 and 6 o'clock and celebrate the Punjabi Chamber of Commerce.

Thank you.

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

The Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave? [*Agreed*]

MLA Lamoureux: Chambers of commerce bring together coalitions of businesses across all sectors, associations and industry organizations who all share a commitment to address challenges in our communities and overcome barriers to growth.

Punjabi Canadians account for nearly 3 per cent of Canada's population, and Punjabi businesses thrive here in Manitoba. And having a chamber of commerce here in our province will help unite the community and beyond by offering events, programs,

opportunities and creating an environment to strengthen businesses and careers.

* (13:40)

Honourable Speaker, this is all while providing programs, advocacy, networking, events, business services and encouraging collaboration to fortify and pave the way forward for Punjabi businesses within Manitoba's business community.

The establishment of the Punjabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry is a local chamber, and I'd like to welcome them here to the Legislature today.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Before moving on to members' statements, I would like to draw the members' attention to the public gallery where we have seated from École Julie Riel 22 grade 6 students under the direction of Stephanie Gagnon. The group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Riel (MLA Moyes).

Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Winnipeg Blues Women's Basketball Champions

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity): I rise today to recognize the extraordinary Winnipeg Blues women's basketball team.

The team achieved something truly remarkable this summer, winning the championship title and solidifying their place in the history of our province's sports.

Their journey to the championship was filled with unforgettable moments, none more impressive than their gold medal game where they faced a 14-point deficit with only five minutes remaining. In what can only be described as a display of heart, resilience and teamwork, they rallied together and managed to outscore their opponents, ultimately winning by just two points.

Their perseverance was inspiring. The road to victory wasn't without its challenges. Throughout the season, players faced injuries including bad ankles and some mental health, like panic attacks. Yet despite these obstacles, the team never wavered. They demonstrated the true meaning of unity, trust and resilience, pushing themselves to the limit, not just for personal glory but for one another.

Watching them fight every point, overcoming every obstacle with grit and grace was a testament to their unbreakable spirit. Their courage, tenacity and sheer willpower of these young women have shown nothing is short of extraordinary what they accomplished this season.

I also want to extend a special congratulations to Head Coach Russ Patterson, assistant coach—and also Assistant Coach Alexandra Patterson, Coach Patterson's daughter, whose leadership has been instrumental to the team's success. Their support, strategy and commitment played a crucial role in shaping this incredible team into champions.

I ask my colleagues to help me honour and celebrate the Winnipeg Blues for their monumental achievement. Their victory is not only a triumph for their team, but an inspiration for all of us.

Congratulations to these amazing athletes on their championship win. You have made us all immensely proud, and I ask for leave to have my members' names in Hansard.

Miigwech.

Emma Coghill, Kate Coghill, Ciara Deloli, Khady Diabate, Lily Hoffman, Nmesomachukwu Isinguzo, Uloma Isinguzo, Alyza Masesar, Otitodilichwuku Okwumabua, Ebunoluwa Otegbade, Alexandra Patterson, Russ Patterson, Rodger Salm, Sarni-Jo Saunders, Addison Sweet, Mingyue Wang, Sophie Zielinski

International Day of Rural Women

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): Today, October 15 is international rural women's day. As—and as a rural woman myself, I am honoured to celebrate the many achievements and contributions that rural women make in our province, our communities and our homes.

Women in rural communities are the backbone to many businesses, organizations and non-profits, as well as often being the primary caregivers for their families. Despite their—excuse me—despite their crucial roles in agribusiness and food industry, many rural women encounter challenges that hinder their full participation with less access to land, credit and other resources.

Recently I was appointed to the women's commonwealth parliamentarians regional steering committee which I'm honoured to be part of and represent women in politics.

As a woman, I believe it's important that we encourage female representation, foster relationships and discuss action on gender-related issues. International Women's Day recognizes women—women's contributions to agriculture, food security and sustainable development. Today, I would like to highlight three rural women from my constituency of Morden-Winkler.

Helping lead the way with—in Manitoba Beef Producers is Mary Praziuk [*phonetic*], a director and producer. Mary is dedicated to representing the interests of beef producers through advocacy, research and education, with a mission to strengthen and enhance beef industry in Manitoba. In a male-heavy world, Mary is one of—only one of—one of the female directors out of 14 districts.

Trisha Thiessen and her husband run a third generation family farm corporation. Her dedication to hard work ensures that their operations run smoothly. A former nurse turned farmer, Trisha actively volunteers in our community: on school council, she sits on various committees and is youth—is a youth leader in her local church. Her favourite part of living in rural Manitoba is the tight-knit sense of community. She loves having her family involved in the farm, including her four teenage children.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

The Speaker: Is there leave for the member to finish her statement? [*Agreed*]

Mrs. Hiebert: Sorry, thank you.

Leah [*phonetic*] Kuhl is part of the southern Manitoba potato family farm. She has a supportive role in the farm, bringing meals to the field, helping move trucks and equipment and helping with staff events, as well as being a listening ear regarding all business. She is also a nurse by trade and loves being involved in the community.

I would like to thank all women in rural Manitoba for your endless contributions. Today we celebrate your resilience and dedication. Happy international day of the rural woman.

I would like to ask my colleagues to please join me in thanking these three women that are here online with us.

Thank you.

Springfield Seniors Living—President's Gala

Mrs. Rachelle Schott (Kildonan-River East): Seniors are the backbone of Manitoba communities. They are volunteers, leaders and actively engaged community members. Nowhere is this more on display than at Springfield Seniors living.

On Saturday, October 5, 2024, just a short drive north of my own constituency of Kildonan-River East, I had the honour of attending their president's gala. It was held at the Elmwood golf and country club in the great constituency of Springfield-Ritchot, where I attended on behalf of the most popular premier in Canada.

I'm not the MLA for the area, but I'm happy to work with and advocate for more Manitobans in my neighboring community. The outstanding volunteer award was presented to Jane and Alan Burpee, the parents of the one-and-only David Burpee, otherwise known as Ace Burpee from hot 103.1 FM.

Throughout the evening, it was obvious that the Springfield Seniors living's commitment to community is deep-rooted. With programs like the congregate meal program, they provide seniors with living spaces that address daily living needs and positively influence their quality of life.

It was so nice to make new connections with these open and welcoming folks who have already started to reach out to our Kildonan-River East team for follow-up and are happy to work with our new NDP government because of our commitment to health care, seniors, all across our great province.

I may not be your MLA, Springfield-Ritchot, but I am the MLA for Kildonan-River East right next door, and my door is always open to you. Speak soon neighbours, and I'll see you at the Chickendaze in June.

Dr. Allan Preston

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Dr. Allan Preston has spent his career advancing agriculture, imparting his infectious love for the industry and doing his utmost to make rural Manitoba and Canada a stronger and more vibrant place.

That's why it was only fitting that the lifelong Hamiota resident was inducted into the Manitoba Agricultural Hall of Fame in July.

After graduating high school, Dr. Preston attended university and then was accepted into the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatoon. Following graduation in 1974, he worked in Winnipeg

for a year before returning to Hamiota to practice veterinary medicine and work with his dad on the farm.

Dr. Preston didn't just help animals. He immersed himself in the community and took a leadership role in most community initiatives, including guiding the Hamiota Agricultural Society, chairing the Hamiota Community Foundation, being an active 4-H leader and managing a AAA hockey club.

Dr. Preston was also active in industry organizations. He was the president of the Canadian Simmental Association and was involved in many livestock organizations, including the Beef Science Cluster advisory body and the Westman Opportunities Leadership Group.

* (13:50)

After 20 years, chronic arm and shoulder problems caught up to him and Dr. Preston moved on to work with Manitoba Agriculture, first as manager of veterinary field services, then chief provincial veterinarian and eventually assistant deputy minister of Agriculture.

He also tackled some very major and difficult assignments important to the health of the agriculture industry and the province. He was a bovine 'tuberculosis' co-ordinator and the chair of the Assiniboine River Basin Initiative.

Dr. Preston was awarded the Lieutenant Governor's Medal for Excellence in Public Administration in Manitoba in 2008 and the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal in 2022.

Please join me in congratulating Dr. Allan Preston, who is watching online today, on his distinguished career in the agricultural industry and on his induction into the Manitoba Agricultural Hall of Fame.

Frank Soja and Fish Market

MLA JD Devgan (McPhillips): Today I rise to recognize McPhillips constituent and outstanding member of our community, Frank Soja.

Frank is a co-ordinator for Fish Winnipeg, an organization that has, for 25 years, brought inner-city youth out onto the Red and Assiniboine Rivers to fish, an experience that most would not otherwise have. The program is free of charge and provides free transportation for youth.

Fish Winnipeg has been recognized for their excellence and meaningful contributions to the inner-city communities here in Winnipeg by various levels of government. They are a part of Fish Futures

Incorporated, which is—in the year 2000, received a Canadian Recreational Fisheries Award in Ottawa. In 2013, they also received the Mayor's Volunteer Service Award for their work with youth. Recently, they were grateful to receive a grant through Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries to replace their van. With this support, Frank and Fish Winnipeg continue to provide transportation to young anglers, free of charge.

As an arm of Fish Futures Incorporated, an organization that aims to improve water conservation and maintain freshwater fisheries and habitats here in Manitoba, Fish Winnipeg is also passionate about conserving our waterways.

Over the years, interest in this program has only grown. Frank and Fish Winnipeg have become an important part of the community here in Winnipeg, and I hope we continue to see Frank's work with Fish Winnipeg grow over the next few years as they continue to foster inner-city youth interest in fishing.

So I ask that the House join me in thanking Frank and his colleagues for their work with Fish Winnipeg, and to congratulate them on 25 years of excellence in our province.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Business Closures Due to Crime Impact on Manitobans

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): It is interesting that when members stand up and talk about Chickendaze that are held in the riding, or the constituency of Springfield-Ritchot, it's unfortunate that the member stands up today talking about some form of golf course that doesn't even exist in Manitoba, Honourable Speaker.

It's harder these days, Honourable Speaker, to do business under this NDP government. The number of incidents in the first quarter of this year was worse than previous annual totals. We've seen 7-Elevens and other businesses boarded up. Matter of fact, 7-Eleven is closing almost a quarter of their stores right here in Manitoba.

Under this Premier, Honourable Speaker, there's more people that are hungry, there's more people desperate and they're stealing and community businesses are closing down for good. Businesses are still operating in Manitoba with increased security expenses.

I ask the Premier: Who should bear those costs for those expenses, Honourable Speaker?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I'll get to the meandering question in a second, but I want to begin by acknowledging Kam Blight.

Kam, you're a good man and it's been an absolute pleasure to serve alongside you these past few years. I learned a lot from both your perspective as a municipal leader, but also from your leadership role at the AMM. I truly, and on behalf of our entire government and the people of Manitoba, wish you all the best in what's next and hopefully this next stage is very meaningful for you.

Of course, we know that business is great in Manitoba. Inflation is down because we cut the provincial gas tax. We're a business-friendly government and we're on the side of workers, too.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Speaker, last November, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the restaurant industry and other groups called for the new NDP government to provide financial relief from theft and vandalism. Manitoba businesses would like to see them stop theft and vandalism, too, and to support businesses through these difficult times.

A single break-in can cost tens of thousands of dollars. Security upgrades, we know, costs tens of thousands of dollars. And the NDP government has not adequately addressed the affordability crisis that's driving crime and theft.

Businesses are still calling for help, and some are simply closing their doors for good as the NDP's failure to act.

Will the Premier apologize to the communities that are losing their businesses in their inaction, Honourable Speaker?

Mr. Kinew: Well, our team is very happy to be working for you, the people of Manitoba. And with all due humility, I would say that one year in, our approach is proving results, certainly more than the PCs ever did during their failed two terms.

We can look at the macro-level indicators. Today, Statistics Canada said that inflation is 0.8 per cent in Manitoba. That is below the Bank of Canada target rate. So what we're saying to the Bank of Canada: red flashing light from Manitoba; please cut interest rates.

And when you talk to small-business owners themselves, what do they say? Well, they say that our

Attorney General (Mr. Wiebe) has been doing very good work with his retail theft initiative.

So whether you're talking to the small-business owner or whether you're talking to the economists who see the system-wide trends, progress is coming.

Things are back on track here in Manitoba, and more good days lie ahead.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Speaker, the fact is the closure of 7-Eleven stores and other businesses only are making things worse for those who rely on these types of businesses close to their homes. This is a big deal to many families. Easily accessible to milk, bread, fruit and other basics have been ripped away from tens of thousands of Winnipeggers.

The government should be looking into urgently supporting businesses to stop this crisis and its unintended consequences.

The NDP seem to find money for vanity trips for their ministers and staff. They find money for the Premier's daily \$17 salad. But they make businesses compete with homeowners for doorbell cameras that doesn't actually meet their needs, Honourable Speaker.

Supporting businesses is supporting Manitobans, a fact that this NDP government is failing to understand.

Honourable Speaker, will the Premier apologize for misleading Manitobans on the growing food prices, insecurity and the decline to community safety?

Mr. Kinew: And I quote, on behalf of 7-Eleven Canada, I would like to applaud you and the Manitoba government for the policy commitment to support safer communities through 'strategic' investments in the Retail Crime Task Force. The return on investment will be measured in terms of safe and secure communities, employees and customers. End quote.

From the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses, and I quote: We appreciate that this year's budget includes payroll cost relief measures for small businesses.

Now I appreciate that all of the validators that would not stand beside the members opposite are, in fact, thanking our government—our ministers, in particular—for taking important steps to make your life more affordable, make your community safer.

I will remind the members opposite that job one for our government is fixing health care and repairing the damage they caused by years and years of cuts.

The Speaker: I would ask the First Minister if he was quoting from a private document, if he'd table it, please.

Mr. Kinew: Happy to table the documents that dunk on the member opposite.

Brandon Police Service New Chief Acknowledgement

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): I would like to begin my question by first recognizing that today is the first day for the new chief of police at the Brandon Police Service, and I would like to give him a warm welcome, to Chief Tyler Bates, on behalf of myself and our entire PC caucus.

Chief Bates brings with him a wealth of experience: over three decades of dedicated law enforcement service, and I know he will complement the Brandon Police Service.

* (14:00)

So, Honourable Speaker, will this Premier commit to working with Chief Bates to make our streets and communities safer, or will he simply revert to his old ways and target the new chief of Brandon Police by blaming him on the rising crime—

The Speaker: Time has expired.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): We know that the issue of public safety is one of the most sacred responsibilities that we have in government and that why—that is why our team, under the leadership of our Attorney General (Mr. Wiebe), has been bringing in forward numerous measures to hold people accountable. But at the same time, under the leadership of our acting Education Minister, we also have a universal school food program, which is going to make our community safer and healthier for generations to come. It's a comprehensive approach.

When it comes to the Brandon Police Service, I was very proud as the Minister responsible for Indigenous Reconciliation to provide a very small grant to provide orange patches leading up to Orange Shirt Day for the BPS. Again, it's almost a grant too small to mention but it's my hope that that'll be a conversation starter to build linkages between Indigenous peoples, the Brandon Police Service and the broader community.

It truly takes all of us to build the Manitoba that we want together.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Brandon West, on a supplementary question.

Crime and Public Safety Request for Plan to Address

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Honourable Speaker, this Premier promised to Manitobans that he would make streets and communities safer, but not only have stores been forced to board up the windows and close down, but employees are starting to take vigilantism action. Manitobans are fearful of making trips to their local community stores.

When will this Premier deliver on his promise to all Manitobans to make our streets and communities safer?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I welcome the accountability questions; they're always rightly directed towards me. The credit, though, for the progress we're seeing on public safety belongs to the ministers of the Crown.

That includes the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), who's doing generational change to break the generational curse that too many young people in our community have been handed. The credit goes to our acting Education Minister—in that direction, rather—who is making important strides to ensure that every child in Manitoba can stay on a path to post-secondary instead of a pipeline to prison.

And then, of course, we have the Attorney General, who was there after the summer, able to point to numerous successes, such as the retail theft initiative, towards the increased foot patrol presence through our partners like SABE Peace Walkers and DCSP.

Again, this is a team-Manitoba approach. We're working together to address root causes, to address immediate needs in the community, and we're showing results for you, the people of Manitoba.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Brandon West, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Balcaen: Honourable Speaker, this Premier and his Justice Minister have used bud words and band-aid solutions that have made for our communities to be less safe. We've been waiting for a long-term plan to make Manitoba safer.

In March, the Winnipeg chief of police raised concerns about violence using long-edged weapons, and it took this minister seven months to bring forward legislation that will still require lengthy consultations before it even comes into force.

Can the Premier share today when Manitobans will have a concrete plan with long-term solutions to reduce crime and protect all Manitobans?

Mr. Kinew: Manitobans got a plan when I shared it with them at Canadian Mennonite University in the lead-up to last year's election. It was the first time there was an adult, comprehensive approach to public safety tabled, because, certainly, none was forthcoming from Heather Stefanson and the PCs.

So, when we talk about tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime, that means that we are investing in school food programs and recreation facilities to keep young people on a positive path. But we're also investing in law enforcement.

For instance, this year, Brandon Police Service's urban policing grant went from \$5.4 million to \$7.4 million. I realize the reason why he's so upset in the Chamber every day is because he's mad at himself for not sticking around for another year so that he'd finally have the resources in Brandon to do the right thing by the people of that great Manitoba city.

Surgical and Diagnostic Services Public Disclosure of Wait Time Data

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): We know that one of the first things the NDP government did is cut surgeries and diagnostic tests for Manitobans. They fired the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force, they slashed surgical options for Manitobans who were willing to travel, they reduced surgeries and diagnostic tests here in Manitoba by refusing to work with private providers and cancelling existing contracts.

Now, they're even turning down funding from communities like Portage la Prairie that are willing to expand diagnostic capacity. As a result, Manitobans are left facing longer wait times for both surgeries and diagnostic tests.

Why has the Minister of Health failed to address the growing backlog of surgeries and diagnostics that has worsened under their watch?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Our government has been listening to Manitobans who—making it very clear that they want more access to surgeries and diagnostics in their own province, close to home, where they can recover close to their families and in their own communities. Under the previous government, they spent more money sending people to the United States of America—out of country—than they ever spent building

capacity right here in our own province, and that's shameful.

Now, I understand that the member is now standing up to ask a question. They continue to share misinformation like her colleague has been doing for weeks. But on this side of the House, we're going to stand in truth, work with experts, work with the front lines, continue to build more capacity, not less, here in our province.

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

Mrs. Cook: Hip and knee wait times have skyrocketed under the NDP government. The median wait time for hip replacement has climbed to 48 weeks, the highest it's been in at least five years, including during the pandemic. Knee replacement is up to 40 weeks and has climbed steadily since the NDP took office. I'll table all of that data for the House. These wait times are only current to June.

It's now October, and we have no updated data. This marks the fourth time I've had to stand publicly and prod the NDP to do their job and update the data that's posted online.

Will the Minister of Health commit to updating the wait time data today?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, you know, on this side of the House, we believe that Manitobans should be able to access health care here in their own province. The previous government didn't believe in that. So they sent hundreds of folks outside of the province, millions upon millions of dollars, paying people who don't pay taxes in the province; in California, everywhere else but in Manitoba.

And what they also did—which is particularly shameful—they ignored people who had been waiting for surgeries for years. They basically created an invisible wait list, Manitobans who never had the opportunity to even get close to getting a surgery in our province. Our government is making sure that those Manitobans who were ignored by the PCs are finally getting care here in Manitoba. Those wait times reflect that finally Manitobans are getting care—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Roblin, on a final supplementary question.

Mrs. Cook: Honourable Speaker, MRI wait times are as high as 46 weeks in Winnipeg. Cataract waits are climbing, as recently reported by media—another report

that I'll table—cataract waits average 11 months. Ultrasound wait times are increasing. CT scan wait times are increasing. The list goes on and on. And these numbers don't even account for the wait time people face waiting to see a specialist.

Despite promising an updated wait time tracker earlier this year, we're still waiting for one to materialize.

Why do surgical and diagnostic wait times continue to increase under the NDP government?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, here in Manitoba, we are delivering more surgeries and more diagnostics than we ever have in the history of our province, right here in our own province; over 11,500 surgeries. That's far more than previously done. We're delivering more diagnostics than we ever have in the history of this province.

We have stood up historic spine surgery programs. We are working with our partners to stand up historic investments that are changing the trajectory of health care for the better.

Now, I know it's taking us longer than Manitobans would like because we are dealing with cuts that were done over seven and a half years; historic damage to our health-care system due to a failed approach. It's going to take us years to fix the damage done by the PCs, but we're committed to doing that—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

New Child-Care Spaces Request for Number Created

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): In 2021, Progressive Conservatives were very pleased to sign on to the national child care strategy, committing \$1.2 billion over five years to build 23,000 new child-care spaces in Manitoba. We got over 12,000 completed before the October 3, 2023, general election.

* (14:10)

In the one year that this government has been in office, can the minister update the House on how many new daycare spaces and centres have been announced under their tenure?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Acting Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I thank the member opposite for this important question, and I know that child care is top of mind for many Manitobans.

As a parent of young children, I, too, have experienced the challenges in finding accessible, affordable

child care in this province after years of a failed PC government strategy.

I am very proud to update the House that we have already built more than 6,900 spaces, and we are committed to many, many more.

There is a lot of work to do. We are committed to doing that work. Manitobans can count on us.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Spruce Woods, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Jackson: I hate to correct the minister, but the RTM spaces that we built and she just got to cut the ribbon for don't count.

So the question is how many new spaces has this government announced in their first year in office? And the question is answered, because the only space they've announced is a new daycare in Fort Rouge constituency.

So why is the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) constituency getting new child-care spaces while the rest of Manitobans are stuck waiting in line?

MLA Schmidt: Again, I'm pleased to update the House that over 120 projects have been approved and will be out throughout every region of Manitoba. Over a quarter of those have opened already.

But again, on this side of the House, we know that spaces aren't the only thing that's important. There's also the issue of child—early childhood educator wages, which were stagnant under the previous government. We also know that operational funding to daycare facilities in this province was frozen for seven years under the previous government.

The damage is great. There is much work to do, and like I said, Manitobans can count on the folks on this side of the House to get the work actually done.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Spruce Woods, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Jackson: The minister just committed that she has approved, or, her government has approved, 120 child-care projects in the province.

Will she table that list of 120 projects for this House and for all Manitobans to see where they are?

MLA Schmidt: Honourable Speaker, again, thank you for the member—thank you for the question from the member opposite. This is a very important issue. Manitobans have been suffering for seven and a half years under the failed leadership of the previous government.

From on this side of the House, you're going to get responsible, transparent planning. It would—we all know that it would have taken 30, 40, 50 years under the PCs' imaginary child-care plan that they had. On this side of the House we have real plans. We work as a team. We are here for Manitobans' families and children.

Post-Secondary Education Future Funding Inquiry

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): Honourable Speaker, the University of Manitoba expects to lose up to \$8 million this year. Enrolments have declined 30 per cent and more students are not returning to continue their studies. Students are asking if they'll be paying more to make up the difference in upcoming tuition.

The Minister of Advanced Education has ensured this House that she will keep Manitoba universities and colleges whole.

Will she confirm that contingency funds are being allocated from this year's budget to keep the U of M whole and (2) that funding is being put in place in Budget 2025 to avoid tuition hike next school year?

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): It is a pleasure to stand up in this House, to finally get a question about one of the most important institutions in the province. Post-secondary education is so critically important to our economy, to the future of our province and to the success of all of us as Manitobans.

I appreciate the member—the question from the member, which highlighted the fact that earlier this year, the federal government unilaterally cut allocations for international students. That was something that was really unfortunate. We fought very hard to get our fair share of students into universities.

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

Mr. Perchotte: Honourable Speaker, this minister is responsible for keeping those institutions whole. Students are looking to her for answers and asking me to hold her accountable.

The University of Winnipeg looks to lose up to \$4 million in revenue this year.

Can she tell the House today that contingency funds are being allocated in this year's budget to keep the U of W whole and that funding is in place for Budget 2025 to do the same?

MLA Cable: Honourable Speaker, I find it really rich that the members opposite are asking questions about sustainable funding for post-secondary institutions after they cut and froze funding for seven and a half years.

Seven and a half years of institutions not having enough money to cover basic operating costs, of—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Cable: —students coming forward to say they didn't have the classes they needed, of students coming forward to say they didn't have the supports they needed. So I—while I appreciate the question, best to sit down.

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

Mr. Perchotte: While this minister is definitely stuck in the past, students are looking forward to their future. Colleges and universities are down hundreds of students and millions of dollars. I'm here to advocate on behalf of them and hold this minister accountable.

Brandon University—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Perchotte: —is down 20 per cent and the international students are further down. Many smaller independent schools are facing significant declines.

Can the minister please confirm contingency funds are being allocated for our schools?

MLA Cable: Honourable Speaker, I thank the member for the question but I have to question where he was advocating during those seven and a half years, where students were out front of this building hollering, where institutions were on strike, where the University of Manitoba Faculty Association took that government to court for the fact that they interfered in bargaining. Where was that member then?

On this side of the House, we value our relationships with our institutions, with our professors, with our unions and with our students, and we're working doing all that we can to ensure that institutions do not bear the brunt of a terrible policy by the federal government.

Child-Care Spaces Dawson Trail Constituency

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): I've received numerous concerns from parents regarding the cancellation of the Kids at Play program and, as a direct result, the increased risks associated with children walking along Highway 207, where traffic speeds can reach 70 kilometers an hour.

Due to the NDP negligence and cuts, after-school programs and additional daycare spaces are off the table in Dawson Trail.

Will the minister commit today to put more daycare spaces and after-school programs in, yes or no?

The Speaker: The honourable minister for Advanced Education and Training. Sorry. The honourable minister for Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Acting Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I thank the member opposite for that important question. I would welcome the member to reach out to our office and I'd be glad to have a discussion with him. I'd be glad to meet with people in the community to hear about what the needs are in that community and what we can do to better support the concern.

I will repeat myself, that after seven and a half years of inaction by the previous government, Manitobans have finally elected a listening government, a government that's ready to meet folks where they're at and do the work that's necessary.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Dawson Trail, on a supplementary question.

MLA Lagassé: The NDP cuts to nine schools is very—is dramatically impacting the community of Ste. Anne. The new vocational high school planned and budgeted by our PC government hit the NDP chopping block, despite clear identified need in the community. This new school included over 100 new, desperately needed daycare spaces.

Can the Minister of Education please explain why the funding for this school was cut and do the right thing today and commit to the residents of Ste. Anne that their new high school will be built.

MLA Schmidt: Again, we know that for seven and a half years, Manitoba students and families suffered under the previous government.

* (14:20)

Honourable Speaker, on the way out their door—on the way out the door in the last election, in the Department of Education, just like departments across government, they made a bunch of fake and phony promises to Manitobans to try to earn themselves re-election. It failed.

Manitobans see through the PCs' failed strategies, and they've elected a government that's going to do real work.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Dawson Trail, on a final supplementary question.

MLA Lagassé: The Legacy Children's Centre in Landmark, which opened in 2021 with provincial support from our PC government, is now struggling to stay afloat due to severe staffing shortages. Despite having the physical capacity to serve more children, the centre is being forced to limit its operations because it simply does not have the support it needs to attract and retain early childhood educators.

Will the NDP stop cutting and immediately step up for daycares like the Legacy child-care centre?

MLA Schmidt: It is disappointing that members opposite, like the member for Dawson Trail, pretend now as if they care about education and as they care about child care.

On this side of the House, we recognize the challenges that families and caregivers face in meeting their child-care needs. That's why Manitobans elected an NDP government.

We are a government that believes in supporting children and their families. It is the most important investment that we can make in society, Honourable Speaker. Parents know that the previous government's plan failed them, and we look forward to working with Manitobans to make sure that we can meet their educational and child-care needs.

Protection for Persons in Care Office Abuse Investigation Backlogs—Timeline to Clear

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Back in July of 2023, the Auditor General's report investigating the Protection for Persons in Care Office reported a lengthy backlog of cases involving severe abuse of seniors and vulnerable Manitobans.

I brought this issue forward almost a year ago on November 23, 2023, and asked this government to provide a timeline when these backlogged investigations will be completed. We never received the timeline.

Nearly a year has gone by. Will the government confirm for the House if these backlogged investigations have been completed?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I thank the member for that really important question, and I do recall that she raised it previously and I appreciate that she did.

You know, under the previous PC government, there were very serious concerns, allegations of investigations not being done as far back as 2019. The previous PC government not only ignored those concerns; they went even further to not invest any resources whatsoever, knowing the concerns existed, to address those waits.

It's a really reprehensible approach. It's a failed approach. It's why they're sitting on that side of the House, something that they should remember, something we should all remember, which is why our government has worked very, very hard to clear that backlog on behalf of Manitobans, seniors and their families.

And as I just stated, I'm happy to report that backlog has been cleared.

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

Implementation of AG Recommendations

MLA Lamoureux: I am very happy to hear that.

The Auditor General's report provided recommendations for change at the policy and front-line level to prevent further abuse. I'm tabling a CBC article from April 29, 2024, where the Health Minister said the NDP government is moving forward on certain recommendations.

Can the minister share with us how many of the 12 recommendations from the Auditor General report have been implemented by this government?

MLA Asagwara: Again, I thank the member for that really important question.

You know, as I stated, we were handed a health-care system that was cut year over year by the previous government. Serious issues were ignored, neglected or made worse by their terrible decision making.

And I appreciate the member is asking really important questions about how we protect seniors as a government. We've taken very, very significant steps to move health care and the protection of seniors in the right direction, including ensuring that we're

implementing all 12 recommendations brought forward by the Auditor General.

There's a lot more we need to learn. We're going to continue to listen to seniors and their families and experts in the system to move health care in healthier direction and to remember the mistakes of the PC government past and Heather Stefanson so we do not repeat them.

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

Seniors in Manitoba Government Plan

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, it is wrong for this government to have campaigned on protecting seniors when an entire year has passed and they still have not—they haven't addressed the abuse that occurred within our care homes or allowed for Manitobans to voice their opinion with respect to the independent office for the seniors' advocate.

Can this government tell us specifically what their plan is for seniors in Manitoba?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I want to be really clear: the investigations are up to date. We did clear the backlog—was an extensive backlog left to us by the previous PC government who, again, spent years cutting health-care services and failing to protect seniors, which is a shameful record.

Our government made sure that we had the tools in place to equip the PPCO with not only clearing that backlog but establishing policies that will further protect seniors. It is doubly shameful that the PCs opposite to us not only made those mistakes in the past, but they actually blocked the introduction of the independent seniors' advocate office from being introduced in this House while seniors were in the gallery for it that day.

But our government is moving forward, we're making sure that we are establishing an independent seniors' advocate office. I look forward to working with that member to make sure it meets the needs of seniors across this province.

Health-Care System Capacity Transitional Care Bed Announcement

MLA JD Devgan (McPhillips): Honourable Speaker, our government has been hard at work addressing the ER wait times that grew exponentially under the PC

government. Cleaning up their emergency department disaster has been a top priority and we've made progress.

One significant step our government took this summer was the much-needed addition of transitional care unit beds to the system. These beds are key to improving care-times and reducing wait-times.

Can the minister please tell us more about how these beds will help our health-care system and what they will do for our communities in Manitoba?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I thank my colleague from McPhillips for that really great question. We have 68 new transitional care beds that are already making an impact on patient flow, wait-times and overcrowding. We've added 15 beds in Selkirk; 8 beds in Misericordia; 25 beds to Holy Family Personal Care Home; 20 beds to the safe space program in St. Boniface and there's more on the way.

All of this is going to help seniors who are waiting for placements at long-term-care facilities. It's going to help patients who are ready to be discharged but have barriers to being discharged in the community and it's going to support those who need additional care.

Honourable Speaker, our government is committed to fixing the emergency room wait times that were caused by the previous government's cuts and this is a great step in the right direction.

Drivers Education Enrolment Need for Classes in Rural Manitoba

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): Honourable Speaker, I'm hearing from constituents across Turtle Mountain and from Manitoba across our province that under this minister it used to be the rite of passage and now like winning a lottery.

The current options are woefully inefficient. Enrolling into driver's ed should not require a combination of luck and patience.

Why is this minister failing to schedule sufficient classes, especially in our rural communities, Honourable Speaker?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation): Well, it feels like there's a bit of a theme going on here today, Honourable Speaker, because it's all about cleaning up the mess created by the previous government.

Of course, not only in this case was the minister a member of the government, the member remember—

member of the previous government, he was the minister responsible and he, of course, allowed the training and the situation with driver's ed in rural Manitoba to 'deterior.'

We're working with our partners in rural Manitoba, we're ensuring that there is continuity and that there's enhanced services. Really, it's about cleaning up the mess. We're getting to work; where this minister failed, we're going to get it right.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Turtle Mountain, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Piwniuk: I used the course finder feature on MPI's website and I'm not sure if the minister understands Manitoba geography, honourable minister—Honourable Speaker.

The students at—a student from Cartwright who was told the only option that he had was to either go one hour to Morden, Manitoba, or to Brandon, Manitoba. Spending more time on the road than he did in the classroom, except it isn't the option because there are no seats despite registrations are just opening for that class.

Why is this minister not making additional classes available in rural Manitoba?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, Honourable Speaker, it's a big mess and there's a lot to clean up, but we're working hard to make it happen. We're working with MPI to increase recruitment and retention of driver examiners, particularly in rural areas. We've got a new full-time driver examiner position which we filled this month in Brandon, to help better serve the needs of the growing community there.

Of course, the improved program reach, update to the instructor contracts, increase pay for driver's ed instruction, adding fleet vehicles to attract new instructors; the list goes on and on, Honourable Speaker.

* (14:30)

There's a lot to clean up, but the member opposite needs to be accountable for the steps that he didn't take when he was minister responsible.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Turtle Mountain, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Piwniuk: Honourable Speaker, looking at courses in this man—minister's 'constituently,' you have 25 different courses offered, except these students suffer the same problem as rural students: even with a wealth of choices, seats are snapped up as soon as they become available.

This minister is depriving youth throughout Manitoba of vital driver's safety education and the opportunity to getting supervised practice on the road.

Will this minister make it a priority for his office?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, Honourable Speaker, the member's taking all this time to detail in specific examples all the failures that he created.

We understand the issue. We understand the problem. The one thing he's not mentioning, of course, is the strike that the members opposite created at MPI and tried to politicize rather than getting to work at the business of improving MPI. That's the work that our government is doing. We're working with partners, not just with MPI, but of course with ACC and others who are providing some of this training.

We're willing to work with all as one Manitoba to solve the problems created by the members opposite.

School Construction Request for Location

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): Last week, in response to a question, the minister-acting Minister of Education committed to building five new schools in this year under her new administration in that department.

Can she outline for us where those five new schools are being constructed?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Acting Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I thank the member opposite for the question. I'd be happy to detail the five new schools.

So the one that's already opened is École Discovery Trails in Morden. We've also got one school in Seven Oaks, we've got two schools in the great-or the great neighbourhood of Sage Creek, a DCFM and also an LRSD school. And then we've also got the Parkhill School in Steinbach that's slated to open in the fall.

We are very excited of our capital school plan. I can't wait to share more with the House and with Manitobans.

Mr. Jackson: So just so everyone's clear, three out of those five schools are already built, and we know that this government didn't build them in 12 months. So those are PC schools. You're welcome for building them in your constituencies.

And when are you going to start building schools for the rest of Manitobans?

MLA Schmidt: Honourable Speaker, I apologize to Manitobans for the anger and the divisiveness coming from the opposite side of the House and for their inaccurate statements about the state of public education in Manitoba.

Let's talk a little bit about their record, Honourable Speaker. They cut education for seven and a half years, and only in the election year pretended to have an increase. They tried to get rid of all school boards with their failed bill 64 they couldn't even pass with their own majority government-

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Schmidt: They misled Manitobans by claiming they were building nine new schools when reality they didn't even budget for them. They froze operating grants for child-care centres for seven years. They gutted the bureau of education française and cut the assistant deputy minister position.

I could go on and on and on and on, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The time for question period has also expired.

Petitions? There are no petitions?

Grievances? No grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Honourable Speaker, can you please call to resume Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: The House will now dissolve into Committee of Supply-resolve.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

HEALTH, SENIORS AND LONG-TERM CARE

* (15:10)

The Chairperson (Rachelle Schott): Will the Committee of Supply come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I will just jump right back into it.

I wanted to start by asking a couple of questions related to the Brandon minor injury clinic that was announced last month. I have two questions. I'll phrase them together.

One is: Can the minister confirm that new funding has been made available for the operation of this clinic, and where in the budget would we find that funding? And, secondly: Can the minister confirm exactly what services and equipment will be available at the Brandon minor injury clinic?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): While we get some more information on that, I want to use this opportunity, since it's been a little while since we've been at this committee, to talk about primary care. Because what the member is asking about, really, is about primary care and the importance of primary care in Manitoba.

You know, access to primary care and enhancing access to primary care has been a big priority for us as a government. It's something that is a huge priority for Manitobans. Making sure that they have more access to those who provide primary care and not less has been key.

And so I just want to share a little bit of information in terms of what have we done since the last time we were here at this committee to improve Manitobans' access to primary care.

And one of the big things that we've done and we were really, really proud to share this several weeks ago now, is we've added more health-care workers to the front lines of the health-care system, including those who directly provide primary-care services to Manitobans; 873 net-new health-care workers added to our health-care system is 87 per cent of our target to add 1,000 net new.

Those are really important numbers. There's a breakdown of that that I can provide, but at a high level, I want to talk about what that means. It means that more Manitobans have access to doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, those folks they count on to provide improved access to primary-care services, be it in minor injury and illness clinics, be it in the clinics of different kinds in community, be it in hospitals, you know, sites across the province.

And the first and most important step to achieving anything that our government has laid out in our budget for '24-25 and budgets moving forward is making sure that we have the people on the front lines to deliver that care. Which is why that really ambitious target of 1,000 net new health-care workers—and again, that's a very ambitious target. It was one that I think Manitobans saw that target and they raised some eyebrows and questioned whether or not, based on seven and a half years of cuts to health care and mistreating health-care workers and driving people out of the health-care system in droves, whether or not we could actually achieve that.

But, you know, what we said at the time when we announced that target was that Manitobans deserve an ambitious government. They deserve ambitious goals. Manitobans have really achieved some pretty ambitious—overcome obstacles and achieved ambitious targets themselves, and they deserve to finally have a government that matches their level of commitment to improving health care.

And so we've made progress. Not enough. You know, there's a lot of work to do in making sure that we have more health-care workers and primary care and across the system, not less. Not—continue to add net-new folks to the front lines. But we're committed to doing that work and we're committed to making sure that we stand up investments that meet the needs of Manitobans across the province, be it in rural Manitoba, in Brandon, in Winnipeg, in the North.

We're really working with our partners across the province to make sure that when we make these announcements—not just announcements, and they're not just commitments; they're things that we can action on behalf of Manitobans to move health care in the right direction.

And so when our government talks about clinics, when we talk about improved access to primary care, what are we saying? Well, what we're saying is more people on the front lines, more folks to provide the care that Manitobans count on. It's also important that when we look at primary care, that we're talking about more than just physicians.

Physicians are awesome. Doctors are great. We love doctors. Our government makes that very, very clear. We're thrilled to work with them to improve health care for Manitobans, but we're also talking about experts in the system that, again, were mistreated for seven and a half years by the previous government, kind of ignored.

Like nurse practitioners as a good example. When I met with those folks in my office, I was shocked to learn they've never been to the Leg. They've never been invited to the Leg. by a Health minister to meet and talk about their expertise and how we can work together to make health care better.

And I have to say, the nurse practitioners we have in Manitoba are absolute rock stars. These are phenomenal people, incredible scope of practice, incredible commitment to making health care and primary care better for Manitobans and really have been wonderful partners in terms of how we work together to really enhance the conversation around what it means to provide primary care.

And I would go even further than that to say, you know, having really meaningful conversations with nurse practitioners and other folks about how do we improve access to care beyond primary care while using expertise like NPs, like midwives, like allied health-care professionals and other folks.

It's a really exciting time in Manitoba for health care because there's a lot of openness to creativity and innovation, and quite frankly it's an openness that was there previously but the previous government just had no interest in engaging these folks, which is really shameful.

So, thrilled to be in a position where we can do this work alongside our partners and really improve access to primary care by making investments as a government.

Mrs. Cook: So just to restate my original question and add a little bit more request for information, in addition to information about where the money for the clinic is coming from, the services and equipment that are going to be available at the clinic, I would be interested—you know, the minister's talking about staff.

What will the staff complement be at the Brandon minor injury clinic? And has that complement been filled?

* (15:20)

MLA Asagwara: Just waiting for a couple of additional pieces of information. But, you know, while we have a couple of minutes, I just want to talk a bit more about why this particular step was taken in Brandon in terms of, again, primary care.

And I want to go back to our government and the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and I, our decision very early on, right in the beginning of forming government and being sworn into Cabinet. The decision to go out and

send an open letter to health-care workers and to subsequently let folks know that we would be undertaking a listening tour. And sharing with Manitobans and those on the front lines that it was a value of ours, a priority to get to the front lines and hear directly from Manitobans providing direct care to patients and communities each and every day.

This is something that I have to say I was shocked, that opposition members made all kinds of jokes about going to the front lines and listening to health-care workers. You know, folks mocked us, mocked me for saying—you know, for going out there for an hour or two at a time during peak times when we could access health-care workers. It was shocking to me and surprising, disappointing, that opposition PC members would actually criticize a decision to go to the front lines and listen to health-care workers. I thought it was a bit strange.

But then when I reflected on the previous seven and a half years, I guess it did make sense. It lined up. It was disappointing because it showed that behaviours and ways of thinking hadn't changed for the PC members. But it didn't deter us from doing the work of going to the front lines of health-care facilities and sites and meeting with health-care workers right where they're at and hearing what they had to say.

And, you know, when we went to Brandon and when we met with folks there, it was really enlightening to hear from those front-line health-care workers of all demographics. We're talking about nurses, allied health-care workers, facility support workers, housekeeping staff, environmental workers. There are even some folks who work in community primarily that have relationships to the hospital who actually attended to share their thoughts and their expertise.

And it was really, really enlightening to hear directly from these folks in terms of what they wanted to see. Really clear right from the get-go that what they wanted to see was improved access to primary care. And they wanted to see creative ways of addressing the inadequate access to primary care for folks living in Brandon and surrounding areas.

And so, you know, by way of sending out that letter saying we respect health-care workers and we're here to listen; by way of our listening-tour stops, including in Brandon; by way of building these relationships with folks in Brandon and surrounding communities, we were able to make the decision to invest in improving access to primary care and finding a creative solve to a real challenge they'd been facing

in terms of how do we make sure that more Manitobans have access to the services that they need?

How do we make sure that if your kid, you know—people always give the hockey example. I'm a little biased, I'll give a basketball example. If your kid is playing basketball and maybe they catch an elbow or something like that, and they need some stitches, that they have a place they can go that's not the emergency room to get that care.

You know, if you—it's wintertime in Manitoba for about, you know, so many, so many months out of the year. You know, if you slip and fall, and you hurt yourself, maybe you need casting, you know, where can you go that's not an emergency room to get that care?

And that's—those questions that Manitobans had been asking, you know, the answer resides with minor injury clinics, after-hours clinics, enhancing access to primary care in a way that reduces pressures in other ways but really is just about making sure that if your loved one needs a place to go that isn't in the ER, some place that's more appropriate, you can take your kid there, you can take your elderly loved one there, you can go there yourself.

You know, I'm already hearing the benefits from folks who have lived experiences accessing these services and how it's really helping them and their families in their time of need out. Makes a lot of sense for them to access these doors for primary care.

And so, you know, when we talk about why we take these steps—and it is, of course, in the budget, so the resources for this clinic and other investments are outlined in the budget—we are talking about team-based care. So again, physician, nurse, nurse practitioner. We're talking about team-based models of care that make the care that people access more comprehensive. And the hope with that is that it better meets people's needs.

And the evidence for team-based models of care is well supported and well documented. Some great success stories across Manitoba that we can point to, and that's why we've taken the approach, with this particular clinic, to make sure that we've incorporated that approach into the model.

Mrs. Cook: Did the minister's government instruct Prairie Mountain Health to find the funding for the Brandon minor injury clinic from within its existing budget?

MLA Asagwara: No. But I'd like to actually expand on what I shared earlier in terms of team-based models of care.

So there's a number of folks who are employed through that MIC, and again, you know, talking about team-based models of care and having been a nurse myself working on the front lines, I truly appreciate what team-based models of care allow for you to do as a provider. It's a really, really important approach that empowers all folks on the team to see themselves as participants in providing quality care to folks who are accessing that care. Everybody has a really important role to play in folks having a good-quality care experience in the system.

It's an opportunity for us to also evolve as we grow. And so when we look at taking creative and innovative approaches and building on successes where we've seen these models work previously, you know, as a government, we want to be able to be nimble and, you know, work with Prairie Mountain Health and work with our partners to identify if there are areas that maybe we've missed or we can improve access to care.

You know, I shared a few minutes ago about an announcement that we made around hiring a net-new 873 health-care workers. You know, what—I'm thrilled, there's actually a lot I can't wait to share here in this space in terms of what we've done since the last time we were at committee in terms of health care.

But you know, when you go to a minor injury and illness clinic, there's all—hosts of reasons why someone might present there. You know, maybe somebody needs a script for birth control. Well, good news, Manitobans: as of October 1, birth control is free in this province, which is pretty fantastic. And that is primary care. That is primary health care.

And, you know, there are so many different ways in which Manitobans need to access primary care, and we have an incredibly diverse, beautifully diverse province, and it's important that we have team-based models of care that can meet those diverse needs.

So again, we've added 873 net-new health-care workers. We've done things like introduce universal free coverage for birth control, which is fantastic; a really important step our government has taken. And all the places that folks can go to benefit from these investments, they include places like the minor injury and illness clinic.

You know, when you look at who's working there, when we look at who staffs a clinic like that, we're

talking about nurse practitioners, we're talking about nurses, we're talking about laundry aides, clerks, medical office-clinic clerks, we're talking about security personnel, social workers, managers, materials management handlers. We're talking about a very, very dynamic team of folks who are all contributing to the ability of Manitobans in rural Manitoba, Brandon folks being able to access care at this clinic.

And, again, I can't overstate the importance of having diverse teams, dynamic teams, multidisciplinary teams, folks who get to really work off of one another, with each other, to make sure that folks are getting the kind of quality care that they deserve.

And so, you know, the money was prioritized in our budget for primary care—enhancements to primary care, because our government recognizes the value of that. And we work with our partners so that we can work with them collaboratively to identify the best opportunities to get that off the ground, which has been really, really exciting.

* (15:30)

And I have to commend the leadership at Prairie Mountain Health. Those folks have been really good to work with. You know, folks like Trina, who just have a really deep understanding and appreciation for health care, just doing a great job as a leader, and who are willing to rise to the challenge of addressing seven and a half years of cuts, consolidation, mismanagement and mistreatment of health-care workers, to work with our government to move health care in a better direction.

Now, all of that being said, this kind of work doesn't create the changes in health care that we need to see overnight, right? This takes years and years of effort—sustained effort. You know, I sometimes would say it's not a sprint, it's a marathon. But it does feel like we're sprinting a marathon a lot of days in order to do this work and we'll continue to do that because that's what Manitobans elected us to do.

But, certainly, you don't fix the kind of damage that was done in a year. I wish we could. It doesn't work that way. It's going to take us years of sustained effort, partnership and collaboration, and learning from how things evolve after we action these investments to continue to move things in the right direction.

Mrs. Cook: I just want to state on the record that I've asked three questions now, and the minister has talked for nearly 15 minutes around the answers but has not actually answered the questions.

I'm a fairly reasonable person. I don't expect that the minister would have all of these answers at their fingertips or even that their staff would. The minister can always take these questions under advisement and get back to me later with the answers. I will try one more time.

I'm asking for information about the budget for the Brandon minor injury clinic. How much and where can I find it in the budget? What services and equipment are available at the clinic? And what is the staff complement?

The minister talked about the different types of staff that will be in the clinic; I'm looking for numbers. How many staff, and is that complement full?

MLA Asagwara: The member's previous question was asked and answered. I was very clear that we have provided the funding in the budget, that—not Prairie Mountain Health, but flowed through Prairie Mountain Health, but our government allocated those resources in budget '24-25.

The list of the staff that I provided, that's who was working at the site. We've got about 11, just under 12 FTEs—it's 11, 11 FTEs. We've filled 10 of those 11 positions. And you know what's really exciting about this clinic—like, you know, all clinics, primary care, that we are investing and enhancing in Manitoba across the province—is the ability for Manitobans to go there for a whole host of primary-care needs and issues.

And, you know, one area of health care that we really didn't hear a Health minister talk about for many years under the previous government was reproductive health care. We didn't hear a Health minister talk about menstruation, we didn't hear a Health minister talk about the importance of reproductive health care like pre-natal care, PAP testing, really basic—abortion health care, like we're talking basic aspects of health care that affect 50 per cent plus of the population.

Ask a Health minister five years ago, they would have said, I don't know. I'm not talking about it. Ask someone else.

It was confusing for health-care providers, primary-care providers, clinics to get an answer, because the Health minister of the day just didn't want to talk about basic, human health-care needs. Really a concerning approach.

And so as the minister now, it excites me to be able to talk about the ways in which we're enhancing

access to these services, that so—thousands upon thousands upon thousands of Manitobans count on.

You can go to a minor injury and illness clinic and you can get care and treatment for UTIs, you can get access to phlebotomy services, you can get care for suspected fractures, you can get preventative health-care needs met, chronic health-care needs met.

You can go in and, you know, if you're a young person or any person who let's say has never had access to, you know, particular reproductive health-care needs, maybe you want to have conversations with a provider about, you know, what does going on birth control need to look like for you, or you've had a change in your menstrual cycle that's concerning and you need to get somewhere that's not an ER and have that addressed and have that conversation. Guess what? You can go there and have those needs met. You can ask those questions.

That's all really important. Fundamentally, it's critical that you have a government that is not going to downplay the value of enhancing access to those kinds of health-care services and that work with providers to improve access.

And so, you know, when I list off all the folks who are employed and who are staffing the minor injury clinic, like I said, nurse practitioners, nurses, aides, clerks, security folks, social workers, managers, materials management handlers, social workers—I mean, that's huge, right? We're talking about folks who, not only are you going in there to talk about, let's say, your reproductive health-care needs, but perhaps you're going in there and you've got questions about, you know, I also want to talk to somebody about what services exist for me to meet my family's needs.

Maybe you're looking at some family planning challenges, maybe you're looking at some resource challenges in the community that—or you just don't have the information. Guess what? There's somebody there in this team-based model of care that can answer those questions for you.

And so on page 82, we've got a list of the investments our government has made to enhance access to provincial health-care services. You know, and as I stated, it's so important that we not only make these investments, but we talk about what they mean to Manitobans. And after a deficit approach, an approach previously that really just devalued the importance of talking about reproductive health care, women's health care, the health care of gender-diverse Manitobans, I'm thrilled to be in a position where we can invest in

primary care and also invest in the ways in which all Manitobans access that health care.

And we're going to keep learning as we go. And we're going to keep making changes, you know, the 11 FTEs now may look different in a year from now, or two years from now, based on what the community says their needs are.

And that's an openness that we have as a listening government.

* (15:40)

Mrs. Cook: Admittedly, I'm newish to the Legislature. I've only been here for a year, but I'm not afraid to talk about abortion or menstruation or birth control or reproductive health care or any of those issues. I'm open to that discussion any time.

I do want to talk about some bed issues. I'm going to ask for some information here. This is a big request for information. Feel free to take it under advisement.

The NDP government has made several bed commitments: 31 acute-care beds at the Grace in November 2023; 36 acute-care beds at St. Boniface in January 2024; nine new beds in Dauphin also in January 2024; 50 new beds for HSC in April 2024; and the 68 transitional beds that were announced over the summer.

I would like to know what the status of these beds is. How many of them are open and operational today?

MLA Asagwara: So part of the reason why our government identified very quickly that we needed to add beds back to the system was because we watched year over year as hundreds of beds were cut from the system.

Now, a lot of Manitobans rightly ask the question: man, why does this system have the challenges that it does right now? And we only have to look to the years of cuts and closures of emergency rooms, consolidation of services, during a time when our population was growing, aging and complexity of disease, burden of disease was increasing, to understand why cutting over 200 beds from the health-care system was not only the wrong move, it was the worst move that could've been made by the previous government.

Truly damaging. Truly damaging, because as we aptly state, when we talk about investing in the health-care system by adding beds, we always say that we're not really talking about beds, we're talking about people. That when we add beds to a health-care system, what we're saying is we are adding folks to the front lines

to provide care and appropriate settings to Manitobans where and when they need it. And so it's equally important that when we talk about the loss of hundreds of beds from the system, that we identify that that is, in fact, the loss of hundreds of front-line health-care workers who are staffing those beds and providing care in settings Manitobans counted them to be at for years under the previous government.

And so our commitment to add net new health-care workers to the health-care system is what allows us the ability to add beds to the health-care system. Our commitment to adding beds in a variety of different settings is key to us being able to make sure that we have more capacity, not less.

Now that being said, as I stated already, when you cut beds from a system, when you cut people, fire people from the health-care system, when you force folks to go down into a tunnel under HSC and talking with their colleagues for job postings, it's real consequences, and we're seeing those consequences in the health-care system today.

It is so important that the approach that's taken to this is one that is really meaningful and sustainable which is why our government has worked very closely with regional health authorities, with sites, to better understand their needs and to support them as they bring these beds online. As I shared, just during question period today, you know, our government is taking steps to add beds in ways that speak to the growing need, diversity of needs in terms of where people need to access services.

And so standing up transitional care unit beds, I want to give a quick shout-out to the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority who's really been a great partner to work with, strong leadership there; really, really working hard to find creative solutions to the challenges that were forced upon them by the previous administration.

And I had the chance to visit the new transitional care unit, their 15-bed unit that was stood up, and we didn't announce that; we shared the information after it was stood up and already operational, and it was great. It was great to tour there and meet with the staff who were so excited to have been a part of something first of its kind for them, and to meet with residents, meet with patients. We're talking about the quality—great quality care they received.

* (15:50)

I actually met a woman there, just an incredible person who hand-makes bears, hand-makes these really

adorable and wonderful bears that she gives out to other patients and families, and there was one sitting on the nursing station desk on the unit.

And I just thought, like, what a great culture they're creating and they're fostering there, you know, a culture in health care that we want to see everywhere, of collaboration, of partnership, of, you know, empowering patients, making folks feel seen and, you know, ensuring that when we make announcements and investments into beds, that we're able to staff them in a way that is, again, sustainable and really meets the unique needs of the folks who need them.

And so I think it's important to acknowledge the good work that folks are doing. These beds don't come online easily. Takes a tremendous amount of effort, and I want to thank all the leaders in the health-care system who've been working really hard with their front-line team members to get this done.

And I want to thank our department as well. Our folks here in the Department of Health have worked really hard to identify the opportunities in this regard and continue to assess the situation as it unfolds. And like I said, 68 transitional-care-unit beds; I shared that in question period today. And that's just one of the many steps we're taking in terms of adding bed capacity to the health-care system.

Mrs. Cook: It wasn't clear from that answer. Are all of these beds open and operational now?

MLA Asagwara: Something that I think is really important to highlight is the impacts of what it means when you bring beds online and how that works in conjunction with other investments like seven-day-a-week discharge capacity.

So, you know, there—we're hearing from different folks the impacts of that investment, right, seven-day-a-week ability to discharge folks previously in the health-care system.

And we heard this really early on in the listening tour, this thing called the weekend effect. Heard this from folks where, because you couldn't discharge anybody from a hospital because your staffing resources to do that dropped off Thursday, Friday, there's this weekend effect where folks didn't get, you know, physiotherapy, social work access on the weekend. Therefore, you could have this peak in the middle of the week where you could discharge and it just drops off.

So early on in our administration, we made the investment to add seven-day-a-week discharge capacity.

And very recently, you know, there was feedback that I was provided in terms of the benefits of that. That, you know, you've got physiotherapy available at a hospital on a weekend whereas previously, they weren't there. And social work.

And I can share that I was at Victoria Hospital, Victoria General Hospital, on a weekend not that long ago, on a Saturday. And I was in a hallway on a unit and said hi to one of the folks who are working. And she introduced herself and kind of carried on. And then she paused and she actually looked at me and said, oh, and thank you. And I said what for, and she said, oh, I'm working today because of the investment into the seven day a week.

So this social worker there on a Saturday morning, you know, we both recognized in that moment, oh, yes, before that investment was made, she wouldn't have been there working on the weekend providing care to Manitobans who need it so that they can get home to their loved ones more quickly and recover at home or, you know, get access to the resources they need and community.

And so, you know, it's not, again, just about adding beds, it's about adding people in ways that staff those beds and provide direct care that benefits Manitobans. And so, you know, there are steps that we're taking as a government that allow for discharges to improve and improve the flow through the system.

So, you know, we know that as a result of our seven-day-a-week discharge investment, that discharges on the weekend are actually improving. And, again, when you cut health care for seven and a half years and you fire people and you mistreat them, you don't see improvements right away overnight. But we're moving in a better direction, and that's what matters.

Like, we're seeing these positive steps being taken. We're seeing discharge percentages on the weekend go up. You know, 10 per cent on a Sunday in one location makes a big difference, right? Those are folks who would have been in hospital without access to social work, physiotherapy. You know, maybe their care isn't moving as quickly as it can in terms of their recovery because of a lack of access. We're making those investments to turn the tide on—in that regard.

We're seeing discharges really improve on Mondays and Tuesdays. Again, we heard about that weekend effect from front-line health-care workers who were like, this is obvious. Every other jurisdiction is doing this but Manitoba. What's up? And so we made the

investment and now we're seeing discharges improve on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Which means a lot to folks. Means so much to people who are in hospital, you know, wanting to get home to their loved ones, wanting to sleep in their own beds. And they're able to do that increasingly so because of the understanding that a bed is not just a bed. It's about how you staff it, it's how you work together and collaborate to make sure folks have access to quality care.

And so, you know, when I talk about adding 68 transitional-care-unit beds to the system, and a good number of those beds are already online, and we've—and the member has asked understandably about where we're at in terms of the beds that we've announced previously. And we're chugging along, we're well on our way adding these beds to the system.

It's exciting not just because, as I said before, talking about beds, but we're talking about a diversity of front-line health-care professionals who are staffing those beds and providing real care to Manitobans; has real, real impacts for Manitobans.

So the total number around, you know, what—how many of those beds have come online and where we're at in that regard, I'd be happy to get that number and those particular details to the member at a later time.

* (16:00)

But what I can say is that we are focused on not only restoring the hundreds of beds that were cut by the previous government, we're looking beyond that. We're looking about not just filling up the hole that they dug; we're talking about building up in the health-care system in a way that has positive impacts for folks for many years to come.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you, and just as a favour to our clerks, who I'm sure they'll be wanting clarification, is the minister taking this under advisement?

MLA Asagwara: To be more specific, yes, I'd be happy to take that under advisement and provide more clarity on that information for the member at a later date.

And I do want to share, and I made a point of thanking the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority, but I do think it's important to also thank board chairs and leaders, CMOs, CEOs, folks across the health-care system, across all regional health authorities, who we've been working really hard with in order to do this work.

You know, no regional health authority is the same and no site is the same. These folks have very unique needs, and it's been really a privilege to get to meet with folks and to work with them to understand their unique needs. Everyone is facing—and we notice it's a national challenge; it's an international challenge, the competition—use that word in a light-hearted way but it's very real, the competition for talent, for health-care talent, is serious.

You know, we see other jurisdictions undertaking really interesting approaches in order to recruit and to retain. It is a conversation that's happening at the national level in really important ways. But it's—I have to say it's a conversation that Manitoba only really just started participating in meaningfully. Previous government just really was taking sort of the opposite approach that other jurisdictions were.

While other jurisdictions were getting really creative about the ways that they would solve their health-care human resource challenges, here in Manitoba, previous government was, you know, saying—throwing up the peace sign to health-care workers and saying, see you later. You know, closing units, making decisions that saw us lose a tremendous amount of expertise.

Having worked on the front lines of health care myself and having most of my family, quite frankly, work in health care, I have a different, unique appreciation for what it means to be a nurse who—or health-care worker who specializes in a particular area.

You know, I've had the benefit of having another nurse in our caucus: the MLA for Tuxedo is not only just an outstanding person and already an outstanding MLA, she is a really outstanding nurse and has taught me a lot about what her experiences were on the front lines. She literally just basically yesterday came from the front lines into government and is doing a great job and is a direct connection for nurses and health-care workers to have their voices heard.

And, you know, it's really—it's been really wonderful to have her expertise at the table to help inform our approach and her relationships in the health-care system. It's been really useful and it's wonderful to have another perspective on the team. Our entire team is on board with making health-care stronger for Manitobans, but it's great to have another nurse in caucus who can speak to the nuances of the health-care system that we need to be paying attention to as a government.

And, you know, it's so important that leaders in the health-care system can see that not only are we, you know, undertaking a listening tour, we'll be—it's a

permanent listening tour as far as I'm concerned. We're going to be listening for the duration of our mandate to Manitobans and health-care workers on the front lines. Not only do they have a government that's committed to doing the work of addressing the culture in health care and making meaningful investments and adding beds, but they have a government that is attracting health-care workers in many different ways to get involved with making health care stronger.

And I can't thank the health-care workers, health-care leaders, folks across the system enough for being willing—despite seven and a half years of being mistreated—being not only willing but eager to work with our government to bring solutions forward. And bring forward concerns and ideas and criticisms and big hopes and big dreams and all of that, because hearing all of that is how we actually meaningfully engage together and move health care in the right direction.

So, you know, as I said, it's not something that we can repair overnight. It's not something that we communicate to Manitobans can be fixed in a day or that there's one size fits all to how we do this. But it is something that we believe, if we commit ourselves to building those relationships and taking steps in the right direction every day, we're going to continue to see more beds come online. We're going to see more diverse staff being hired. We're going to see seven-day-a-week discharge continue to have a benefit. And we're going to hopefully continue to see folks really engage with us because they believe in this precious and sacred responsibility that we have to make health care as good as it can be for Manitobans.

And so I can't thank folks enough across the system for their generosity and their partnership, and we're going to keep working with all of them to add more beds, more resources, more services to our health-care system for Manitobans.

Mrs. Cook: I want to move on to some capital questions.

So one of the actions that the NDP government took when they took office was to pause or to freeze a number of projects that were under way, including freezing specialized-equipment funding. And I'm concerned in particular for the catheterization labs at St. Boniface. As the minister will know, these are critical for the work that they do at St. Boniface, the life-saving cardiac work that is done there.

And I'm wondering if the minister can tell the committee what the expected lifespan is of the existing cath labs and what the plan is to replace them?

* (16:10)

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member for that question.

You know, cardiac health, heart health in Manitoba, is a really important priority. It is something that really hits close to home for me personally, and I know really hits home for many, many, many Manitobans, particularly women's heart health.

I'm sure the member is well aware—I'm actually, I'm not even sure if we were at a similar event or the same event together recently about women's heart health; I can't recall if the member was there, I think she was.

But, you know, it's so important that when we're talking about heart health in Manitoba—as we're talking about any issue, really—that we identify the folks in the groups that perhaps do not have the level of access to information that they should, the ways in which we can close the gaps in terms of improving heart health outcomes for Manitobans.

And, you know, for quite some time here in Manitoba, the cardiac care at St. Boniface—it was a cardiac centre of excellence, cardiac care centre of excellence. I heard this a few years ago, questions from cardiac specialists in the province who were very concerned about the fact that this program that had this really important distinction nationally, really a beacon of what can be done when experts are supported, was being eroded by the previous government.

I actually—I wondered if there was something I just wasn't putting together, because they were so concerned and they were adamant that the previous government was systemically dismantling that program. And I thought, no way, like, why would you dismantle, erode a cardiac centre of excellence, something that we shine so brightly at doing in Manitoba? And yet, it was true. It was true. That's exactly what was happening.

And now, you know, we've been working with local advocates and folks to understand how do we make sure that Manitoba is a centre of excellence for cardiac care, St. Boniface Hospital is a cardiac care centre of excellence. It's been wonderful to meet with leadership there.

These folks do jaw-dropping work in getting communities engaged to improve access to information and education and awareness. They go so far as to educate thousands of students annually. This is the St. Boniface foundation does this work in conjunction with the hospital and post-secondary institution, the University of Manitoba. They actually go out to reach

thousands of kids and engage them in cardiac sciences and get them interested in pursuing that as a path.

And, of course, these kids go home and they have these conversations with their families and they share what they're learning, and just by way of increasing those conversations in the household, you're supporting improved outcomes for Manitobans.

It is really a testament to be, again, the creativity and the generosity of the experts we have in the province that this work is being done. Thrilled to be able to work with these folks and support their effort to restore and go beyond that and really ensure that cardiac care at St. Boniface and in Manitoba is excellent.

And, you know, folks like Dr. Soni is a good example. Just an outstanding researcher, somebody who is now permanently in Manitoba doing this incredibly important work. Thrilled to be able to support Dr. Soni and her colleagues and their efforts to improve women's heart health outcomes.

It is a particular area of research that has been maybe not treated with the same level of investment or care due to systemic reasons. Quite frankly, you know, women's health issues have not been invested in in the same way. Research hasn't been treated with the same level of interest as it should've been. And it's incredible that we've got the top minds and talents right here in Manitoba who are dedicated to not only doing this work but creating future generations of health-care providers and professionals who will lead the way. Very exciting work being done in the province that we're happy to support.

You know, it's also important that we listen to those with lived experiences, so I want to give a shout-out to Jackie Ratz as somebody who spoke at the event and shared her personal story. Again, I have folks in my own life who are navigating cardiac health issues, heart health challenges that are very real and that, quite frankly, it's—I am relieved that they're here in Manitoba, knowing that there's experts like we have on the front lines providing this care. And it's so important to us that we're investing in making that care stronger.

The member used the word freeze earlier. I'm not sure where that came from. I know winter is coming, but—so maybe that's why that language was used. But we are making sure that we're working with our partners to invest in this area of health care, and I can provide—I'm running out of time, but I can provide

more information on that front for the member if she would like.

Mrs. Cook: I was at the same event the minister is referring to.

But just to restate the question: I am looking for the plan to replace or refurbish or whatever's going to be done to renew the cath labs at St. B and wondering what the expected lifespan is of the existing labs.

MLA Asagwara: I think, as the member can probably appreciate, that's actually a pretty technical question. It's a very nuanced question and, as the member has stated previously, I do not have all answers for everything, although I would love to, in life, at my fingertips.

* (16:20)

And, you know, that's—it's a question that's really technical and nuanced, and I do want to make sure that I'm understanding, because I—what I would like to take away, and what I think makes sense, is maybe to talk a bit about maybe generally at what point certain things are in place.

There's no standardized, you know, all the equipment would be replaced at the same time or anything like that. It's actually a pretty technical question. And, you know, obviously, as we all well know, equipment in any space for anything can, you know, maybe go longer than what we think or be required to be changed earlier than what we think, right? There's all kinds of reasons why equipment may need to be replaced or changed or upgraded or what have you.

And in terms of these labs, there's going to be variation there, as well, that we're going to have to dig into. And we wouldn't necessarily have that. We—that would be something that the regional health authority would have the details around and be responsible for managing and working with partners throughout the system, St. Boniface, to understand their needs. And that's really their direct relationship. That's something that we expect them to manage.

You know, I can say that technology in this space is ever evolving. It's incredible to see how cardiac sciences have rapidly evolved in recent years. I'm personally excited by AI and simultaneously terrified by AI, I think like a lot of folks. Watch one too many movies and maybe your mind goes places, but ultimately, I'm more excited about the benefits of AI and the rapidly evolving technology in that space. It's really exciting stuff.

I had some young folks recently talk to me about AI as a diagnostic pathway forward. So how do we use

AI to more accurately, more rapidly diagnose illnesses? How do we get that in the space of diagnostics? It's a really, really, again, rapidly evolving but very exciting space.

And something that, you know, maybe even 10 years ago, we would have thought to ourselves: not in our lifetime; you know, that's probably another generation that's going to be leaning into some of that. And we're seeing, you know, almost overnight it feels like, it's a space that it's happening right now.

And so when we talk about the life of equipment and technology, we're also talking about what does the future of this space look like in Manitoba? You know, where are we looking in terms of best practices? What is the science and the evidence telling us about, you know, what's emerging and what we should be paying attention to? You know, we've got some really, really bright, brilliant folks in the department, data scientists who have really cool ways of applying their expertise in terms of how we can improve health care. And certainly there are all kinds of proponents out there that are bringing forward their ideas as well.

And so whether it's cardiac care or other aspects of health care where we know that equipment does have a lifespan, you know, as we look to the future, we're having conversations about how do we take an approach that is meeting the needs—the future needs of Manitobans and the future evolving technological needs in health care.

It's a really, really exciting opportunity. I've had these conversations, as well, with Minister Moses in Economic Development because it's a space that he is minister responsible for Economic Development, that he's learning about as well. You know, and our government does take a—really an all-of-government approach to health care.

And so when we're having conversations about, you know, technologies, it's also the minister for post-secondary education, Advanced Education and Training. You know, what are students learning on? What equipment are they being trained on? Are they being trained on equipment—we had the opportunity to go to UCN recently. What I thought a simulation lab was, was not what it was. It was so cool. The technology there, the way folks are learning was, again, very, very exciting.

And it's wonderful to see that, across our departments, everybody's in this space of how do we make sure that not only we're addressing the immediate equipment needs in health care, and in cath labs and

other places, but what are we doing to think about down the road?

And so it's an exciting space. This is definitely something I've got to take away and get back to the member on in terms of the question she's asking, because it is pretty technical, and it's something that's we're going to have to go to the regional health authority and ask them for clarity on. And we can bring that back to the member at a later date.

The Chairperson: Before recognizing the next member, I'd like to remind all members to please refer to other members by portfolio or constituency only.

So now I'd like to acknowledge the honourable member for Roblin.

Mrs. Cook: I thank the minister for that commitment to provide that information.

Continuing on capital for a moment, in 2023 the previous government had committed to an expansion and redevelopment of The Pas clinic, and funding was allocated and approved for that project. I understand the planning and design work began in 2023 and construction was expected to begin in this fiscal year.

And I would just like to ask about the status of that project; if it's continuing and going ahead or if it's not continuing and what the reasons for that might be.

MLA Asagwara: Just going to get a couple of additional pieces of information.

I do want to talk about, you know, what the member raised, you know, commitments or announcements that were made by the previous government, because I think it's important.

I think it's important, I've learned a lot about process. Budgeting process, Estimates process, we've developed processes to make the processes stronger and better as a government. And I have to say, it's been fascinating in this role and really, actually, quite frankly, disheartening to see what happens when a government, the previous government, takes an approach to make announcements, commitments, communicate things to folks without actually having a legitimate plan in place to execute that.

We've seen it in many different ways across many different departments, but certainly in Health, you know, it's tough to sit down with different community members, organizations, health-care providers who come to you and say, previous government made an announcement. Previous government made a commitment when they were doing whatever they thought

they needed to do to get re-elected. And so I'm here, we're here, to talk about that.

And it's tough to be in a position to say, here, listen, going to be direct and say that the processes that a government would need to undergo and undertake to execute any sort of commitment weren't done, just didn't happen.

It's—in the totality of the approach in the previous election, what was going on last summer in July when those announcements and—that announcement and others were made, you know, when you look at—you step away and you look at all of the harm that was done by these announcements that weren't rooted in planning, weren't part of any actual capital expenditure plan, and attach that to a whole host of other decisions that were made in that campaign that were very harmful, it is—it's difficult to align how that approach could have possibly been taken knowing that the planning wasn't done in a real way.

And so what we have done as a government is had those conversations with Manitobans, with organizations, with service providers, with proponents, to say, listen, we're making announcements and commitments that we're going to follow through on. And it's going to require a ton of planning, an incredible amount of work and partnership to do it, but that's what you need to do to get it done.

And it's an approach that, you know, we said from very, very early on as a government, we want to repair trust that was broken. We want to rebuild relationships. We want to meaningfully engage, collaborate and partner to get things done. And we're seeing the benefits of that approach. Again, nothing gets resolved or fixed overnight, but we're committed to taking that approach as we move forward.

And you know, when we talk about health-care services in the North, our government's made specific announcements in terms of how we build the capacity there, how we improve care. Had the opportunity to go to the North and meet directly with folks. And you know, I've met with the mayor of The Pas, and we've met with community members, and we've talked about how we work together to actually legitimately have plans that can be achieved and advance health care in the right direction for those Manitobans.

Primary care. I'm going to go back to that, because we've done work with them to ensure that we can enhance and expand team-based care, My Health Team services, to The Pas.

* (16:30)

And taking tangible steps, real steps attached to real people to improve real outcomes for Manitobans.

And I do think it's important to acknowledge that there are commitments that were made that weren't rooted in any actual planning or ability designed to execute, which is concerning, but our government is focused on working with our partners now and keeping those lines of communication open so that we can chart a path forward that moves health care in a better direction in the North.

It's going to take time. We have made some progress—not enough, quite frankly—but, you know, we're committed to doing more and more work with our partners to continue to move in the right direction. Again, it's going to take us years to repair that damage but we're committed to doing that alongside our partners.

Mrs. Cook: I want to challenge some of the minister's assertions there. I mentioned The Pas specifically because funding for that project was allocated and it was approved, and the planning and design work had begun.

I take it from the minister's response—and I'm sure they will correct if I'm mischaracterizing their answer—that that expansion and renovation project is not going ahead. And if that is the case, I'm just wondering why?

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member for that question, and so I'll be very clear. The previous government did not have a plan to execute the development of that clinic; they didn't. They didn't have a plan. Millions upon millions of dollars that they announced attached to that, they didn't have a plan to execute it, you know.

And I know that's a tough, you know, pill to swallow; it's not easy to hear that. It's not easy to deliver that news to communities. But they did not have a plan.

And sadly, it's not the first item that was brought to my attention that the previous government announced and did not have an actual plan to execute, to see that vision come to fruition. The member, based on how she's framing the questions, I think is probably well aware of what is actually required to execute a proper capital plan. And I suspect, maybe—maybe—she is aware that there was no long-term plan to execute that whatsoever by the previous government, which is disappointing.

It speaks to other conversations I've had. I mean, we're talking other conversations where the previous government committed massive amounts of money to

initiatives. Went out to communities and said, we're going to allocate, you know, over \$100 million to initiatives that they did not bother—they didn't budget for. It didn't exist in reality. An incredibly irresponsible approach.

And now we're having conversations with communities, with providers, with entities, and saying, moving forward means that we actually have to have a plan. And it's been really, really positive to meet with leadership, community leadership, mayors, to have those conversations and to agree to work together to move forward in a way that does strengthen health care.

It is really something else to understand a process in the way that we understand it as a government now, the way that I understand it as a minister and to recognize sort of where—how strategic the previous government was at not being forthcoming with folks in terms of why the commitments they were making could not actually—or they didn't plan for them to be executed.

Because it's—once you understand the process and the details of the process and what is required for execution of a plan long term and how you take all of those steps, yes, it really is—it is quite something to understand what it meant for the previous government to go out to communities and commit, you know, again, in some cases, you know, millions upon millions—over \$100 million—and never having a plan in place to bring that to fruition, really.

You know, our government is taking an approach that is about partnering, it's about understanding the unique needs of communities, it's about building the capacity in our health-care system to execute. And so, you know, standing up capital infrastructure, adding beds, things like that; all of that is for none if you don't have staff, right, if you don't have people. Which is part of the reason why we've set such ambitious targets, because in addition to the previous government going out and making announcements with no actual plan to meaningfully achieve them, they were actually doing the opposite of adding more folks to the health-care system; they were cutting folks from the health-care system.

So you've got, on the one hand, making these announcements to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars that couldn't be executed, didn't have a proper plan. On the other hand, you have a government that's not only not hiring the health-care workers needed to staff the capital infrastructure they're saying they're going to build. They're actually cutting and closing

and firing and saying goodbye to the very folks you would need to staff those projects.

So, you know, it's tough. Can't really make that make sense. When you really sit and you look at it, what was going on for seven and a half years and what was going on during this sort of frenetic time leading up to an election where they realized that perhaps the approach they'd been taking was really harmful and folks weren't in support of it, weren't into it anymore, and they'd have to pivot away from what their previous approach had been.

And obviously Manitobans told them very clearly it was too late, long overdue that they started talking about health care in a way that was, you know, talking about building capacity and not cutting it.

And so, fundamentally, we're taking a different approach, which is to staff the health-care system, net new health-care workers so that the infrastructure and the capital projects that are executed, that are planned for, can actually successfully be operated because you need people. You need people when you're talking about standing up any capital infrastructure, operating any equipment.

And we're going to continue to deliver on net new health-care workers for Manitobans so that that can happen.

Mrs. Cook: One of the questions I've asked fairly frequently since becoming the Health critic surrounds RFSAs, or the agreements that were signed with both private and public providers to provide services to Manitobans.

* (16:40)

I've asked about this in question period, I've asked for information through FIPPA, I've asked in a written question, I've asked in Estimates in the spring, and I've been frustrated because I haven't been able to get a lot in the way of clear answers. And this feels like a very simple question to answer.

I'm going to start with a really specific question: Has an agreement been signed with Western Surgery Centre, for which procedures and how many procedures?

MLA Asagwara: We are just waiting on some information, but what I'd like to do in the—just provide a little bit of information on the record in regards to surgeries in Manitoba and our approach.

It—first, I want to thank all the folks in the system, all of our partners who have been really key and instrumental to us building more capacity in Manitoba. It is—it's been really great to work with experts in our own

province who understand the value and are very keen to make sure that we have more capacity in our province, not less, and that we are investing in strengthening access to care in our province.

And you know, it's the relationships with these folks, including with Western, that we've been able to deliver record numbers of surgeries and procedures and things like that. Recognizing that, again, the population is aging, complexity of care, burden of disease, all of these things in Manitoba are sort of unique based on our demographics and geographical reality and things like that.

And we're doing the work of making sure that we're taking a provincial approach, which is an approach that's more recent for our province. And it's an approach that really takes time to flush out and to build strong infrastructure around. So I want to thank our partners across the health-care system who've been working with us on that front, including folks at Western who have been really receptive and good to work with, quite frankly, in terms of understanding the opportunities in the health-care system to include capacity.

Certainly, you know, Manitobans need to ensure—they made it clear to us and to me that they want to know that they can get the care that they need in their own province. And there are proponents in our province who are—have reached out and we're working with in order to do just that. And you know, we're going to continue to build those relationships.

We meet with folks pretty regularly, even, you know, seeing people out and about at events who have really bold ideas for what health care can look like in the province. Post-secondary institutions, great ideas around what we can do to build capacity in Manitoba, all kinds of proponents, be it doctors or entrepreneurs and folks who have really great ideas. And so it's been wonderful to meet with them and to understand the space better. And, you know, again, as technologies evolve and things like that, it's going to be those partnerships and those conversations that really help us make those informed investments.

And I'm hoping in the next minute or so I'll have a bit more information for the member, but I do want to say that, you know, Western and other folks have been really good partners to work with in terms looking at ways that we can invest in having more capacity in province, not less.

And it's been great to also work with folks who understand the value and the importance of strengthening the public system. Obviously, you know, uni-

versal health care that is protected by The Canada Health Act is a Canadian value. It's a fundamental Canadian principle and value that needs to be upheld and protected.

And we see where that is eroded, in other jurisdictions, families with very limited means having to pay for, like, very basic primary care, things like that we don't want to see happen to families in Manitoba. And it's been wonderful that really no matter who you talk to, folks agree that universal health care needs to be protected.

I've had the opportunity to, you know, be in other jurisdictions, other countries, and see the impacts of folks who don't have access to universal health care and those protections that it affords. And, my gosh, you know, it's painful. It's painful to see the impacts of that. And it's painful to know how that affects families. And it really kind of grounds you.

It's grounded me, certainly, as a Canadian, someone who's very proudly Canadian, to know that we have a system here that prioritizes you being able to access health care no matter how much money's in your bank account, right? And that's an approach that we value and will continue to support but work with our private partners and other folks, as well, as we develop strategies that make sure that more Manitobans get access to that kind of care.

Mrs. Cook: I think that I would certainly appreciate, and I think Manitobans would appreciate, some more clarity and transparency from this government with regard to agreements or contracts that have been signed, with which providers, for what procedures and for how many procedures. I think it's worth noting that back in the spring the minister did commit to making that information available publicly, and it hasn't yet been made available.

So I don't want to create the impression that I have run out of questions. I have never, ever run out of questions, and I have plenty more, but I am ready to close this section of Estimates.

* (16:50)

The Chairperson: So seeing no further questions at the moment, we will now move to resolutions.

Resolution 21.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$13,244,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Health Policy and Planning, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$14,579,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Insurance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$32,750,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Public Health, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,528,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Performance and Oversight, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$39,104,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Seniors and Long-Term Care, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$788,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Corporate Strategy and Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,772,003,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Funding to Health Authorities, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$306,014,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Provincial Health Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.10: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,846,159,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Medical, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.11: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$450,099,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Pharmacare, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.12: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$207,890,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Costs Related to Capital Assets of Other Reporting Entities, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.14: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$524,954,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 21.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 21.1.

At this point, we respectfully request that the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of the last—you can leave your belongings, just—you just physically have to go. Okay. Thank you.

The floor is open for questions.

Mrs. Cook: I think this is where often—and I know this is something that the NDP did when they were in opposition—the critic will make a motion to reduce the minister's salary. I won't be doing that today; that's not my particular style.

But I do not want that to be taken as a vote of confidence in the NDP or this Health Minister. I hope that the minister takes very seriously the trust that has been placed in them in accepting this salary, and the responsibility that they have for fulfilling a great many commitments that they made.

I don't really have a question. I just wanted to make that comment.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Are there any other questions before we proceed?

Seeing none, I'll put the question on the floor on the resolution.

Resolution 21.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,226,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply for the—is for the Department of Justice.

The hour being 4:58, what is the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: Call it five.

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

The Chairperson: Committee rise.

ROOM 255

FAMILIES

* (14:50)

The Chairperson (Robert Loiselle): 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 Families.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): I don't have a question, so I thank my critic for allowing me to go.

We have two new additional staff since the last time we were here that I would like to introduce. Online we have Kris Piche, who is our new assistant deputy minister responsible for the Administration and Finance division. And at the table here with me is Lindey Courchene, who is the new executive director of Women and Gender Equity Manitoba and I would also like to say the first-ever Indigenous woman to be the executive director for WAGE.

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): All right. Thank you for introducing the new members of your staff.

I guess we've already met many of the staff that are already here today, so everybody else that was here—that's here was here last time? Okay. I am so sorry, I don't remember all of your names but nice to see all of you here. Thank you very much.

My question—I guess my first question would be: How many staff does the minister have in total?

MLA Fontaine: In the Department of Families?

An Honourable Member: Yes. In the department, sorry.

MLA Fontaine: Miigwech for that question, to my critic.

The Department of Families has, right now, give or take, just because we never know if somebody is going to be leaving as of today, but as of today, we have 1,810 FTEs as of March 31, 2024.

And I just want to—I want to share, I want to take a little bit of time here in my four minutes and 30 seconds to just share that—I think the critic will appreciate this.

When I was special adviser for Indigenous women in the previous NDP government, I remember thinking—and I knew this for a long time. I knew that if I ever had the honour of—because I always knew I was going to run. I knew from 2008 that I would run, and I knew from 2008 that I would run provincially. And I remember thinking to myself that if I ever had the privilege and the honour of being a minister that I would make it one of my commitments to meet the departmental staff.

And so when I became minister, that was actually in the first conversation that I had with our deputy minister, that was one of the first conversations that we had. I said I wanted to meet as many of our departmental staff, our team, our Families team, as possible.

And so in the last year, I've spent a significant amount of time going to different offices across the province. And it's interesting because so many of our Families teams in those meetings that I've gone and I've met everybody and had time to chat with folks, people have said, like, they've never had a minister come and meet with them or, you know, so I think it's really important.

Every opportunity that I have, I always take that time to lift up my team because they do phenomenal work. And Families—the Department of Families has—you know, we are responsible for, we have the sacred responsibility for, some of the most vulnerable of Manitobans. It's all in Families.

And so I really try to highlight and acknowledge all of our team because it's hard work, and we have a great team. And one of the first things that I did—I can't remember; it was maybe two weeks in—I hosted a

town hall. And I think we had almost like 700-plus team members on that call. And we're actually just in the process of scheduling a second team town hall with our team.

So, I really appreciate you asking that question because I don't think that our teams get the acknowledgment enough, and for me it is something that I've known that I've always wanted to do. And if any family member—any family team member ever go into Hansard and read this, I want them to know how much I appreciate them and how much I honour them for their work.

Mrs. Hiebert: Thank you for sharing that.

I am actually very much the same way. I'm very much hands-on relationally, and I really want to meet everybody that I work with and just see how they're doing because people that are on the ground working within the situations that they're in would know the best and they can help us to understand if we haven't been through some of those situations ourselves.

I mean, we've both been through, I'm sure, lots of things where we can actually have life experience, but it's just nice to be able to have a situation where, you know, you can—you're open and you're welcome to come and people can come talk to me whenever they want to.

So I appreciate that. And I am a similar person that way that I hope that people think of me as being open and approachable, and I always want to be that person who is listening too. So that's why it's very important to me as well, so I appreciate that.

One of the things I just was wondering: How many staff are in the ministerial office specifically?

MLA Fontaine: So, just for clarification, is—are—is the critic talking about political staff or civil service that are in my office as well? Or is she talking about political staff and civil service?

Mrs. Hiebert: Political staff specifically, first of all, that's—yes.

MLA Fontaine: Four.

Mrs. Hiebert: How many would be civil servant staff?

MLA Fontaine: Five.

Mrs. Hiebert: Going back to the number of 1,810, that's an amazing amount of people out there that are doing amazing things for the programs that we're offering in our province.

Can you elaborate more on where those people are all at, like what offices they're working in or what specific—how many are in this, you know, service that we're doing. How many are in different areas of the Families portfolio?

* (15:00)

MLA Fontaine: As of March 31, 2024, admin and finance has 53; Community Service Delivery has 1,552; Corporate Services Division has 122, 13 of which are with Women and Gender Equity; Child and Youth Services Division has 142; Technology and Transformation has 25.

Mrs. Hiebert: Appreciate that. It's nice to hear, like, where all the people are at and what they're doing, so thank you very much for that information. I appreciate that a lot.

With all of the—in general, there's a lot of short-staffed situations and in a lot of areas of our province and including health care and some other areas.

Do you find—or does the minister find that there are shortages? What is the vacancy rate that you have right now in your different departments?

MLA Fontaine: So as of August 31, 2024, there are 262 vacancies. However, having said that, 77 of those vacancies are from MDC. And as the member knows, MDC is closing so those are effectively gone.

Mrs. Hiebert: Just in that—on that same topic, how—what is—what are the biggest vacancies that you notice? What areas are you finding them in? Is there a specific career path that people are not taking that maybe we don't have people to fill those spaces? Is there a trend that we need to pay attention to in that situation?

MLA Fontaine: So I want to just share that I had said that our vacancies were 262, but if we take out MDC, we're sitting at about 185. That's pretty normal in respect of vacancies. That's kind of representative of our turnover rate and, you know, hiring and training that folks go through.

So I don't know if we're necessarily seeing a trend that I would suggest to the member, however, I would say that we do see that, you know, in rural and northern areas, not only in the Department of Families, but really everywhere, right. It's sometimes a little bit more difficult to be able to get folks in those areas.

And that's something we see throughout the province in every sphere, really. But it really is just, you know, the normal kind of turnover, predominantly maybe from front-line staff.

Mrs. Hiebert: Thank you very much for that information.

I just—like, just for my own knowledge, I just want to always make sure that I want to know if there is anything that's happening specifically in our education system, for example, or if the young people going into university or college are, you know, finding it difficult to get into school for certain things. And sometimes that just affects what's happening.

And my daughter-in-law just graduated with her social work degree, and I know she said there was a few—there was quite a few students trying to get into that program. And she was one of the lucky ones to get in, but there's a long waiting list.

So that was just one of the questions I had for that because I wanted to make sure that we weren't, you know—if we could do something to encourage more people doing certain things in schools. That's always something, if we could show that. So we need to have a need, but thank you.

Okay, my next question is: Has there been any changes to the ministerial organizational chart, and if so, other—could she share a revised version?

* (15:10)

MLA Fontaine: So I don't know—just maybe for clarification, if the member is talking about the overall department, because we did share that with the critic previously. So if it is that, there's been no changes since then. Yes.

Mrs. Hiebert: Yes, that was the question, which is if there were any changes. Thank you.

What just—I have one more question about the staffing side of it. If there's been any—just with all the different things that are happening, budgets and things happening, Chair, if there's been any hiring freezes at all across any of the departments or any of the services that have been offered through Families at all.

MLA Fontaine: No.

Mrs. Hiebert: Sorry, Chair, I'll make sure I try to get that put through to you. Sorry about that.

My next question is in regards to Clare's Law, the intimate partner violence legislation. When we had the opportunity to ask some questions or in earlier spring when I was sitting in for the previous critic, I had some questions about Clare's Law and I just asked the minister about some important questions regarding the proclamation of the critical piece of legislation, Disclosure to Protect Against Intimate Partner

Violence Act, which is also Clare's Law. I don't believe that the minister was able to give me a concrete answer at the time.

So I'm just asking if she could give me an update onto the—where they're—when they're expecting to do the proclamation for the Clare's Law.

MLA Fontaine: So first off, let me just say that, you know, I want to acknowledge our team that's working very, very hard on this alongside, like, our wage team and the Department of Justice as well. So our two departments and our two teams are working very, very hard on this.

And where we're at now is, we're in the development of the regulations right now with support and consultation from legal counsel, and the policies and the procedures are currently being developed.

Additional engagement with the working group, policy agencies and rural and northern communities will be required to ensure the development of policies and procedures are effective, and more importantly, are trauma-informed.

We have to make sure that, and I appreciate the member's question, I really do. I think that there's a lot of interest around Clare's Law but we have to make sure that the infrastructure there is doing what it's intended to do and that it's not causing further harm. So we are actively working on that.

And I think that we're hoping to maybe set a target for fall of 2025 to make sure that we have the infrastructure in place to operate, you know, essentially the spirit and the intent of the law, which is to, you know, tackle gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. So hopefully, fall of 2025, but again, I just want to reiterate that it's so important to get this right and that's what we're doing right now.

Mrs. Hiebert: Thank you very much for that information, and I agree that the people that are working on this, it's such an important piece of legislation, so appreciate everybody who's putting the effort in; definitely very, very important to all of us and to all Manitobans, especially women who are victims of intimate partner violence. It's such an important thing to do right, so I agree with that one hundred per cent.

You had—earlier in the spring you had said early—hopefully early 2025. Can you maybe—is there a specific part of it that's maybe holding it back the most? Like, what is the one thing that you could say, if you could pick one thing out, what is the main thing that you would say is what's kind of making—whether that's

you're making sure things done right in a certain area, what would that be?

MLA Fontaine: So in respect to the regulations—again, you know, the member would've heard us say this many, many times, we're a listening government—so in respect of the regulations we're co-developing the regulations. So we're co-developing it with stakeholders and communities and sector. So that's—in order to get it right, right, we don't want to expeditiously put something in and we do more damage than good.

And, again, you know, this is, you know, something that community has wanted obviously. And so we are working with community and those stakeholders to get it right. So that process, as I know the member knows, takes a little bit more time, right, little bit more time. So, as I said, it's justice and wage and—but alongside community. So we want to make sure that we're getting that right.

The other piece too, is that there's a little bit of, like, structural, like, IT piece that we're making sure, and that's that infrastructure that I was kind of referring to earlier. We have to make sure that we're, you know, balancing confidentiality as well.

So it's a lot of work, but we've got to make sure that we're getting it right before we just go too quickly.

Mrs. Hiebert: It is very important to get it right because, like you said, lives hang in the balance in many of these situations, and, as we've seen in the last six months or eight months there's been a lot of things happen. So it's very important to get that right, and I agree with that for sure.

So you were speaking about stakeholder groups or stakeholders. What is one of the—what are the—which stakeholders, specifically, in the community have you been talking with, and what have you been hearing from those stakeholders that their mine—main priority in this legislation?

* (15:20)

MLA Fontaine: So some of the folks that we're working with is Ka Ni Kanichihk, which I'm sure you know, Ka Ni Kanichihk, an Indigenous-led, phenomenal organization in the community.

The child—centre for child—the Canadian centre for children—or, child protection, which is another just phenomenal organization that I actually had the opportunity, I think like last spring, to go and visit, and they are doing some really incredible work there.

The association of women's shelters, of course, right? Again, doing phenomenal work, all of our women's shelters across Manitoba do incredible, incredible work.

And then of course working with Winnipeg Police Service, Brandon Police Service, the RCMP, because of course they are partners in this work. And then, like I said earlier, Manitoba Justice and WAGE. So we're all doing that work together.

And as I kind of alluded to earlier, what we're kind of hearing, again, is the things that I previously mentioned, that, you know, to ensure that this work is trauma informed. And then just the concerns about—and the, you know, the needing to ensure that we've got confidentiality.

So those are some of the pieces. And it's good because our community partners are really helping inform what, you know, a trauma-informed infrastructure looks like. Which, you know, I think that if we know and understand and appreciate the history of—or the lack thereof, of supports in tackling gender-based violence or dealing with intimate partner violence, those historically haven't been there, right?

And so, you know, the community partners are really, really helping to inform, and really ensuring that we've got a good infrastructure in Manitoba that not—that—again, I know I've said it a couple of times, but that doesn't cause any further harm.

Mrs. Hiebert: Thank you for that.

You—the minister had just referred to the IT side of it and also the confidentiality side to it. Just—I've had the opportunity to talk to a lot of women that have gone through intimate partner violence. I've gone—other people who work with them in different organizations.

And one of the questions, or one of the comments I heard a lot of was that different groups don't share information specifically about offenders or people who—men who are abusive and doing things to women, and women don't—so different let's say health-care or legal issues or the police, they're not sharing—or child and family, depending on what—who's all involved in the child or the woman's scope of life. So they're not sharing information.

And I've had this brought up to me several times, that there's a concern because if it—if they're concerned about—which we need to be concerned about, you know, sharing personal information and not letting people know what's happening in a lot of situations.

But is there something being worked on that can still help a woman, for example, in the situation that information can be shared from the police to a different organization so that they all know there's something—there's a problem in the home? Rather than having groups not share information with each other and then having something tragic happen to a family or a woman or a child.

So is there something being worked on for that, specifically?

MLA Fontaine: So I appreciate what the member is bringing forward, and certainly our team is well aware of that and myself, obviously, as somebody who is doing that work for many, many, many years.

And quintessentially, that is what Clare's Law is about, right: it gives that formal infrastructure for folks to be able to share that information. So there's that piece, right, that creates that infrastructure but creates the relationships for folks to be able to share information and really does put the power into, you know, the hands of women, predominantly—we're talking about women, obviously, but, you know—into the hands of folks that feel they need—they may need to be able to access that, where that never existed before, right.

The other piece that we're doing is, you know, we've got the MMIWG Gender-Based Violence Committee of Cabinet, and that Cabinet—so previously, that committee—it was just the GBV Committee of Cabinet. I'm not sure, you know, respectfully, how, you know, effective that committee was. And when we came in, when we assumed power, we expanded that mandate to include MMIWG2S, and I chair that committee.

And so, one of the things that we're really trying to do is ensure that all of those different departments—so all of my colleagues that are on that committee—that we're all working together in our various departments to ensure that we are, obviously, working together but also to identify any of those gaps.

So the committee meets regularly, and it certainly has a lot more engagement than I would suggest it previously did with my colleagues.

Mrs. Hiebert: In the last year, we've unfortunately all witnessed the horrific tragedies that have been a result of the intimate partner violence. We can all agree that more needs to be done to support individuals and victims, today specifically, as things seem to be escalating.

Can the minister share what steps have been taken by the department to enhance prevention and

protection for Manitobans—women who have or may experience intimate partner violence, right now?

* (15:30)

MLA Fontaine: So I appreciate the member and I think the member and I have had these conversations a couple of times now in respect of intimate partner violence and, you know, I would imagine, no matter where you sit on—in the House, that we can agree that more work has to be done in respect of, you know, gender-based violence and intimate partner violence.

And particularly after what we've seen in the last little bit, I say it every single time, like it is absolutely heart-wrenching of what we've—what our province has witnessed in the last year, and almost like, unbelievable, like you can't wrap your head around—you can't even wrap your head around that this is a possibility in our province, but of course, it is. We know that our province isn't different than any other province or territory across the country, or you know, no different than our neighbours to the south of us, right?

And then, you know, as I shared earlier, and I've said this many, many times, like I—you know, it's an absolute privilege and honour to be in this role. Like, if you had asked me 20 years ago, did I ever think that I'd have this opportunity, I don't know if I would say yes, right?

So I take this role and this responsibility incredibly seriously and if you know anything that I've done for the last 26 years, it has been all about gender-based violence and addressing it and, you know, prioritizing the protections of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited that face some of the most, like, horrific, savage levels of violence, right?

And so, when I was able to come into this position, you know, luckily I'm part of a team and, you know, we have a Premier (Mr. Kinew) that truly understands and appreciates and is committed to tackling gender-based violence and intimate partner violence.

And, you know, I want to say this—I want to just highlight, you know, when Carman happened, you know, the Premier was out there multiple times, including the funeral, and so I want to—that truly is a testament to our government and where our commitment is in respect of tackling these issues.

And as I say, you know, often in respect of, you know, people that say, you know, I believe in reconciliation but don't action it and don't really do anything—it's really just words, right? So our government put

money where our mouth is in respect of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence and so, you know, this budget, we've—we have \$20 million that's specifically to tackle and to prior—to tackle violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited and to prioritize their protections.

But we also have—how much is it for the [*inaudible*]-it's like 13? But in total, it's about—we have about \$13 million that goes towards the gender-based violence national action plan dollars. So that's a cost shared with the federal WAGE, with Canada, and I just want to read out—it's quite a long list, but some of the things that we support. But I'll focus particularly on prevention.

So we've got educational materials and engagement from the YMCA; we have Indigenous cultural education through northern men and boys programming; we've got educational engagement through EmpowerMen program at Ma Mawi; we've got counselling services through the newcomer men's GBV program at Elmwood Community Resource Centre. They do phenomenal work there. I just love them there. Women's counselling supports through MAPSS; and counselling services through NorWest Men's Relationship Program.

And that's just highlighting a couple of the programs that we're supporting, and why I'm noting those is because that's prevention, right? That's before we get to a place where we've got folks that are, you know, participating in intimate partner violence. I think everyone around the table knows we always say this: We have to be engaging with men and boys. And as a mother to two boys, I take that very seriously in the way that I've raised my boys and how I expect them to behave and walk in this world.

Mrs. Hiebert: Thank you for sharing about—I'd like to thank the minister for sharing about her passion and her—what drives her to do what she's doing. And I can totally agree with how I've been set up. I believe my life has put me in a trajectory, without me even knowing it, to be here today to do this work.

Different things have happened to me in my life as well, and I'm just—I'm honoured to be able to sit here and try to make a difference in our communities and our province and in our world for women and for children, and that's my heart. And when I was asked to be the critic for this, I just was really—I felt at home because this is something I can really understand.

And the incident that happened in Carman was close to where I live, and I did spend time at the vigil

there and I did spend time in Carman with some of the community members there and was actually talking with the Premier (Mr. Kinew) during that time, so definitely something that really touches my heart.

And it's just—it's horrific what's happened. And we can't change what's happened, but I believe we can change what can happen and keep things from happening in the future. That's where I believe I can make a difference and that's why I'm here today too.

So, but one of the things that I do have a passion for is both urban but also rural Manitoba. Just seeing the things that have been happening in rural Manitoba, specifically it's very different receiving services in rural areas than it is from urban areas. There's a lot more condensed people close by, so there's a lot more services close by for women who might need it.

So in rural areas, it's a lot harder for women to get somewhere, to get the help. I've experienced personally a woman who needed help to get to the shelter and having to—and we called the local taxi and it's—there's a lot of things that are very specific to situations like that, to get them to where they need to be safe.

And so, what would be the thing, or what would be some of the things that you're doing specifically right now for prevention and protection in rural areas? Is there specific things in rural Manitoba around the whole province that are being done specifically right now?

MLA Fontaine: So—and I agree with the member about the differential access that we face and we see, you know, for big urban areas versus rural and northern.

I wanted to share a couple more things and then I've got some other pieces that we are funding and working with, which are all across the province, so I think it's really important that that GBV NAP dollars that I'm talking about, including the MMIWG2S dollars that we're talking about, that's across the province.

You know, our team is very cognizant, and in all the work that I've done for these last many, many years, always very cognizant about the divide between the North and the south and to ensure that we are supporting initiatives and programs, you know, as much as we can across the province.

* (15:40)

So I do want to share this, too, when we talk about doing things upstream, right? Preventing gender-based violence, preventing intimate partner violence. I want

to share that, and I don't know if a lot of folks know this, but Manitoba, for many years, was a leader across the country in respect of engaging men and boys. And a lot of folks don't know that, because of course there was some—obviously that work kind of stopped a little while ago.

But I remember—what year would that have been? Maybe that would've been like—I don't quote me on this, but between 2012 and 2014, somewhere around there. At the time, I was the special adviser on Indigenous women's issues for the former NDP government, and I worked very closely with WAGE. Our executive director at the time was a woman by the name of Beth Ulrich. And WAGE, for many, many years—many years—has engaged in a relationship with the United Nations, so the status of women commission and the women's program at the UN.

And Beth had nurtured really good relationships with them. And I remember one year we were at CSW, I can't remember what year that—what—I think the last one I was at, which was just last March, was the 67th CSW, so, status of women for UN.

But back then, I don't know which year it was, but there was, at the UN, when you go there for status of women, they're called side events. And so countries from across the world organize side events and—on a particular topic. And this side event was co-hosted with BC, Canada and Manitoba, and it was about the programming that we were doing about engaging men and boys.

And so one of the things that we had back then—and started here in Manitoba, which then kind of paved the way for other provinces and territories, was like the don't be a bystander campaign. And that was done in partnership with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers. And so WAGE at the time, which was at that time called status of women, but status of women had worked really closely with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers to develop this public awareness campaign, and it really called on men, right?

Like, you and I—the member and I—can talk about this for forever, until we're blue in the face. And really, if you think about it, because we're talking about male violence, it shouldn't be up to women and gender-diverse folks to be doing that. It really should be men that are calling out other men on their male violence, right? And so that was some of the work that we did back then.

And again, we did another project with women—UN Women, and it was to look at—they were identifying

cities across the globe that they were going to be looking at really how unsafe women are in their particular environments, urban areas. And Winnipeg was chosen as the first North American, and maybe, I don't know if they added any at the time, the first and only North American city.

But so Manitoba and Winnipeg have been a leader at tackling intimate partner violence and addressing gender-based violence for years. Again, that kind of, you know, fell by the wayside in the last, you know, seven and a half years, but regardless, right, Manitoba is—has done that work for many years, to go back and go upstream to work with men and boys.

Mrs. Hiebert: Thank you for the—for that information.

What is being done now currently with men and boys for educating them and bringing them up like a—in a situation where they're learning and they're treating women differently, with respect and—yes, what's the government currently doing now?

MLA Fontaine: So I did note some of those programs, those prevention programs. Again, fundamentally, those are about working with men and boys, so I did mention those.

But I do want to highlight some other things that we're doing in respect of GBV NAP. So we've got a drop-in program at the Aboriginal health supports through Ndinawe; we've got culturally safe wrap-around supports from Ka Ni Kanichihk, and Klinik's sexual assault response program; we've got the drop-in centre at the Share Program; we've got wrap-around supports for survivors from the mental-health program at the Thrive Community Support Circle, which, you know, I think most people around the table would know Thrive, and they do really, really good work.

We've got counselling and youth services for survivors from community-based sexual assault services in Brandon, Westman, and honestly don't get me started on Brandon. Brandon is—I never would've thought—I love Brandon so much. They are doing such phenomenal work in Brandon. You know, the member earlier talked about how people aren't communicating. Brandon, all of those that are on the front lines of doing this type of work in a variety of different capacities; my gosh, they do such good work, they all work together, they're always in constant communication because they'll have the same folks coming to their door here and to their door here and their door here, and so they all routinely collaborate and communicate with one another.

I've been out to Brandon like, I don't know, four times now, like on official tours; they're doing such phenomenal work, so I just love them so much, so I have to give out a shout-out to everybody in Brandon and all the amazing work that they're doing there.

We've also got wrap-around supports and cultural programming from Clan Mothers Healing Village, we have our strategy that's coming up in respect of MMIWG2S, and what I'll share with the member just—is when we had made our platform and our commitment when we assumed government, we had, you know, noted our commitment to a MMIWG2S strategy—and maybe I think I shared this maybe last time we were here—that we're not calling it the MMIWG2S strategy.

I'm really moving us away—and I've doing this for many years now—moving us away as Indigenous women that we're only centred or entrenched in our trauma, right? Like Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited are so much more, and accomplishing so much more, and also transforming so much. We're not only just this.

So, shortly, we're going to have our announcement on our—what was previously called the MMIWG2S strategy—and we're really leaning into, you know, I want Indigenous women to know how powerful they are. Like, I want them to know that I as the minister responsible have their back, us as a government, as a team in all of our departments have their back. And I want them to know that they are, you know, they're not only just victims but they are really agents of transformative change.

So I'm really looking forward to that and I will actually give an invite to the member when we have our—I'm not quite sure when it's happening—but I will invite you to that because I think you're going to be very happy about that.

And then, you know, the other thing that we're doing with the GBV NAP is we've supported Blue Thunderbird Family Care. Again, I know I keep saying this about everybody, but they do such phenomenal work as well.

The executive director is—her name is Dana—honestly she is, like, she is such a phenomenal leader and is really doing extraordinary work to ensure that folks in the community that need those supports—a variety of supports—know that they can go to this Blue Thunderbird infrastructure that they have and they can get the supports that they need. And I think I shared with the member one time that, you know, they offer a safe space for mothers that may need a bit of extra

support, so you can go with your kids if you need, if you've got a doctor's appointment or you have something overnight; so they're really also on the front lines of protecting.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Hiebert: Thank you very much. I want to thank the minister for sharing that information. I'm a firm believer in that any woman, no matter where they're coming from or their background, has the power within themselves to overcome and just do all these great things. So I believe that strongly. So I'm happy to hear that that's going to be happening in that organization with those—with women.

So I would like to change the question line a little bit.

I was—can the minister provide an update figure on how many children are totally—children total are currently in care in Child and Family Services in Manitoba?

MLA Fontaine: As of March 31, 2023, right, 8,919. So as of March 31, 2023, 8,919.

Mrs. Hiebert: Thank you.

An Honourable Member: 2024.

Mrs. Hiebert: Oh. That was my question. I was thinking that that was over a year old. I was hoping that the minister had more accurate information there. Okay.

Okay, can the minister provide a breakdown on how many children are in care by each agency?

MLA Fontaine: I need glasses. Oh, boy. Okay. Here we go. You know, what I'll do is—let me see if I can see this. Oh, okay.

How about—would it make more sense if I did it through authorities. Okay.

So the First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority has 2,780; the Southern First Nations Network of Care has 4,216; the General Child and Family Services Authority has 925; the Métis Child and Family Services Authority has 1,069. And so, that's a total for 8,919 children in care.

And then, I guess what I would like to just—oh no, I didn't. Sorry. Oh, I'm still speaking. Okay, sorry.

You know what, I need my glasses. I need the Chair's glasses.

Let me reread those numbers. These numbers are very, very small. Let's try that again, critic.

Okay. First Nations—so, the northern authority actually has 2,863—sorry. The Southern Network of care has 4,241; the general authority has 832; and the Métis authority has 983—sorry—for a total of 8,919. I apologize.

Mrs. Hiebert: Okay. Thank you to—thank you for that—thank the minister for that information.

Can the minister provide an update on the First Nations that are currently in process of establishing co-ordinated agreements with the Province for Child and Family Services?

MLA Fontaine: Perfect, now I can see. Okay.

So, as I've shared with the member before, and in this very Estimates committee, we are very, very close to having a co-ordination agreement with the Manitoba Métis Federation. We are good to sign, so we've done all of the work on our end. Our amazing team has done a lot of work with MMF and the authorities and all of their folks to get us to a place where Manitoba is ready to sign the co-ordination agreement.

We are still waiting on Canada, because as I shared with the member last time, co-ordination agreements are trilateral agreements between Canada, the province and the rights holder. So we're still waiting to hear back from Canada, but in respect of Manitoba's role and partnership, we're ready to go. We're ready to sign; we've done everything that we need to do. We just need Canada.

So we're really, really looking forward to when Canada comes on board. It's going to be a—my folks already know, I want like a big hoopla about this, because this is really, really important, and a lot work has been done.

So, MMF is almost ready to go. We are working with Fisher River Cree Nation, actively working on a co-ordination agreement with them. They are close-ish. Again, it's really important to understand that all of the work that our team does in respect of jurisdiction is only as good as our partner in Canada, in respect of, we need Canada at the table. So all of these that I'm sharing with you, we do need Canada at the table.

So, but our team has done our work and continues to do our work. So we've got Fisher River Cree Nation, we have Brokenhead Ojibway Nation; we've been doing a lot of work with them. In fact, our team has been out there several times and is—and again, let me just say this, like, our Jurisdiction Transition Office is in constant contact with a variety of different rights holders and First Nations in respect of jurisdiction.

So this work is, every single day, really actively moving us towards jurisdiction.

So Brokenhead is another one of those First Nations that they're actively working with them. And then we've got WIN, which is Wabaseemoong Independent Nations, which are on Ontario. I don't know if folks know that co-ordination agreements of jurisdiction is also for folks outside of the province, right? Because WIN Nations actually have some of their children in Manitoba, and they already actually have co-ordination agreements, so they now have to enter into a co-ordination agreement with Manitoba on the Indigenous law for their children.

We've got notification from folks from BC, I believe, so they're—those are also going on at the same time. So we've got our rights holders, our partners here in Manitoba, but then we also have other ones across the country.

We're also actively working with Long Plain and with Waywayseecappo. We just signed something the other day with Waywayseecappo in establishing something that they need. They believe it—they need for their path to jurisdiction. So there's a lot of work going on.

* (16:00)

We just had a meeting, I think maybe two weeks ago, with Sagkeeng Anicinabe First Nation, which is my First Nation, as the member knows, and that was a really good meeting, indicating that we're ready to work with them as well.

I can't even name all of the First Nations that we've—Island Lake, we've been trying to work with Island Lake. They just had a leadership change, so we're just—I've sent out a letter and looking to meet with their new grand chief. And there's been a lot of work on Island Lake communities as well. So I cannot stress—and this is my favourite subject as the member knows—how much work is going on in respect of jurisdiction and really restoring jurisdiction, First Nations' jurisdiction, First Nations and Métis jurisdiction, over child welfare.

And, again, I can't stress this enough that, in the next five to 10 years, child welfare in Manitoba is going to look fundamentally different.

Mrs. Hiebert: I just—a quick question for the minister.

Just listening to your conversation there, you mentioned that teams have been out there already, several visits out to—I'm thinking that the Indigenous agencies that are taking over, are you—what were you meaning

when you said that several teams had been there already?

MLA Fontaine: No, we have a team within Families. It's called the jurisdiction transitional office—transition office. Our team there routinely goes to First Nations, right?

All those First Nations that invite our team, but also that were actively working on a—towards a co-ordination agreement or towards jurisdiction, our team will go out and go meet with them. But also, when leadership and they're co-ordinating—because they've got technicians, right, and so they often come here and we meet in my office or they meet in their offices.

So what I meant is that our team is supporting First Nations and Métis where they need us. Either it's in the community to have those meetings, which, of course, First Nations are going to want to have meetings in their communities—that's what that means—or sometimes, we have them here in the city, or sometimes I'm hosting them in my office, yes.

Mrs. Hiebert: Thank you for explaining that to me; I wasn't sure.

Can the minister explain how funding is provided once the co-ordination agreement is established? For example, Peguis First Nation, how do dollars flow?

MLA Fontaine: So, again, jurisdiction is a nation-to-nation relationship so, you know, the money that's in the system that would go towards agencies or the—well, the authorities, then to the agencies to deliver those services, then just go to the First Nation, right? So the, let's say, Peguis, that—those dollars would've gone through the authority, then to the Peguis, but now the dollars just flow from Manitoba to the First Nation by way of agreement. So those are agreements.

So the money that goes into the system to deliver that service would just then directly flow to the First Nation to deliver the service.

Mrs. Hiebert: Just a quick question in regards to that, to the minister.

So the funds go directly to the First Nation. Then, like, would that also include money for infrastructure that they need or any kind of education or training? It would encompass everything, or is it just specifically for the child care that they need, to help with that or, I guess, just a little more?

MLA Fontaine: Okay, so just two things.

So it's important to note that, for child welfare, Manitoba funds child welfare, but also so does Canada. So as I said previously, you know, any relationships that we're talking about or jurisdiction or co-ordination agreements, Canada must be at the table because they also fund child welfare, right?

But all of the money, like for instance Peguis, that infrastructure, we—their agency, the Province already paid for, right? So they already had that, and that was gifted over in this jurisdiction and in this co-ordination agreement. So they would've gotten all of that money already.

Yes. I don't think I explained that properly.

Mrs. Hiebert: Just a few more questions for the minister about funding, just to kind of get some—just to get that clear in my mind.

Is there an escalator, or is there something built into the agreements to increase funding with inflation of cost of living, how has that been structured?

MLA Fontaine: Yes, so again, the funding that's provided to Peguis is to ensure that service delivery to their nations and to their citizens. And we will, you know, continue to fund that. Yes.

I want to just say, again, you know, there are First Nations right now that are working really, really hard on their Indigenous laws and working with our team here and, you know, working with Canada to try and get their co-ordination agreements done and their Indigenous law enacted.

* (16:10)

And, you know, as I said, Canada has a role in that, and I'm hoping that we will see a lot more other than just Peguis. I'm really hoping that we're going to see some co-ordination agreements signed in the next little bit.

And it's really important to recognize that, you know, those co-ordination agreements, when they're signed, and we have our big hooplas and our celebrations, those are really important historical moments for Manitoba, and I feel like that's what people are kind of missing in this discussion, right. I've heard people say, well, you know, are you going to have oversight or, you know, how do you know First Nations are ready, and, you know, what are you going to do about this, and what are you going to do about that.

And, you know, to that, I say, again, that this is—our people have always known—have always taken

care of our children—always, right. It's colonization that really, you know, disrupted and violated that; what is a human right to be able to take care of your children, and but, you know, that's the colonial history here.

And so, when we enter into those agreements, all of us really should be so proud that we're part of a province that is working really, really hard to decolonize a system that has caused so much harm, right.

I don't, you know, I—what I think about sometimes is that, you know, 20 years from now, 30 years from now, you know, when history goes back and looks at, you know, the work that Manitoba has done to decolonize it; that's something we can all be proud of, you know, to support that process and to have been part of a team that does that work, which is, you know, is difficult work but exciting work. And I'm so proud of our team in Families and these folks here that are at the table that are doing this work.

But more importantly, as much as I love our team, I'm so proud of our people. Like, I'm so proud of our people, you know, dismantling, you know, colonization and restoring those, you know, what has always been for our children.

So I feel—I share that with the critic to also get excited about this, because this is a great moment in history for Manitoba. And, to that end, you know, we are working very, very hard to ensure that, you know, we have First Nations that are ready to go and that we're signed, and we're doing that decolonizing work.

Mrs. Hiebert: Thank you.

I am very excited to see this happen. I've been involved or in different aspects in child care in different situations over my lifetime, and I'm excited to see things change and progress, because the work that started with bill C-92, we just—Manitoba was one of the first provinces to get on board and start making it happen.

So I'm excited that—for that, and that's one of the things I'm really excited about doing and being part of in my critic role, and—but just that I'm able to continually work on this; things that were started already five years ago, three years ago by the previous PC government, and I'm happy that I can be here to start working with the minister to continue this work, because it is important.

And I think it's important for us to see the—that we need to work together, and we need to be excited together, like the minister said, because it is important

work. And we both—I agree with her, with the minister, that this is something that needs to continue, and I'm excited to see how our province is moving forward. And so that's very important for me, as well. And it's important for me—or our province and for, you know, for things to continually move forward to set up for success. I think that's one of the biggest things that we can do, is set those up for success.

And one of the questions I just have—and I know we've talked about education, and I think it's just so important because—for our kids—our safety, and the kids—what they need and just setting up First Nation communities up for success.

One of the questions that I do have about that is that with Child and Family Services: Will there be an increase in, like, education opportunities? For example, if anybody would like to go to school, will there be an—increased spaces, post-secondary institutions or colleges, programs like that specifically for Indigenous students that want to go to school just to help set them up for success and make that path way open for them?

I think that's important. And is that something that's a possibility as well that we could do, or that's happening?

MLA Fontaine: So I'm going to get to your question, and then I'm going to ask if we can have like a five-minute break, just for a washroom break.

But before we get to that, I just wanted to share this, that I think is really important for folks to really understand and appreciate. You know, any advancements, any legislative advancements, any dismantling of a colonial mindset in respect of child welfare, wasn't done by governments.

So I know the member said, you know, it started—this work started under the previous government. And I understand why the member would say that; I get that. But, actually, you know, all of this work in respect of child welfare and any changes, both at the federal level or provincial level or territorial level across the province—or, across the country is not because of us. And I say us now as the minister or us as a politician. It's not because of us.

It's because of Indigenous moms. It's because of Indigenous communities that—it's because of Indigenous women predominantly, who, for the last 30, 40, 50 years, even longer than that, has been demanding to have the care and control of their children. You know, any advancements that you see in respect of Indigenous peoples, I submit, always goes back to Indigenous women.

And I'll share you—a story with you. When I was the director of justice at Southern Chiefs Organization, so I was there for about 10 years, I can't remember what year this would've been. It would've been—maybe I'd been there like for six or seven years, I can't remember. We had a chiefs assembly, so like AMC, MKO, SCO, MMF, AFN, you always have chiefs assemblies, right? So you bring all the chiefs together and you make decisions on whatever it may be.

And I remember we had this chiefs assembly at, I'm pretty sure it was at Brokenhead, Brokenhead Ojibway First Nation. And the agenda for a chiefs assembly is always set well in advance, right, because you're giving notice to chiefs, like here's what's going to be on the agenda, dah dah dah. And I remember—and I always did resolutions, so I was always in the back of the room writing all the resolutions. So the resolutions are basically like the direction that's given to, you know, the organization.

And I remember there was like, I don't even know, I'd say like 10 or 15 women who came into the assembly and they demanded to speak. And at chiefs assemblies, it's usually only—it's only the chiefs or technicians. And they asked the chiefs to speak. And I'll always remember this, always. And the chief said, yes, you can speak. And those women stood at the front, in front of all the chiefs, and they said, we want our children. We want our children home. What are you—predominantly men at the time—what are you men doing to bring our children home? We want our children home.

That's one example, right? That's just one example of how long and how hard Indigenous women, Indigenous mothers, Indigenous peoples have fought to decolonize the system.

So if you notice, even in my language, when I talk about this work, I don't say I'm doing it as the minister. I usually talk about our team. I talk about our team or—but I would never take—I would never stake claim to this work. Even as an Indigenous woman, like in this role now, I would never stake claim, because really, it's important for us to position where this work, where we are today, it's important for us to position who did that work, who did that labour.

* (16:20)

And so I just want to share that, because this isn't about—it really isn't about governments. This is about the community, this is about moms, this is about grandmas and, you know, everybody that's fought so,

so long to decolonize this system. Everything belongs to them. All of the acknowledgment and the recognition belongs to them.

The Chairperson: Is there leave for a five-minute recess? *[Agreed]*

Committee is recessed.

The committee recessed at 4:20 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:25 p.m.

The Chairperson: Would Committee of Supply come to order.

Mrs. Hiebert: Sorry. I didn't notice you come back there. Just get my questions back in order here.

Did have one more question for the minister. Here you go. My question for the minister is a little different, but it's on the same topic but a bit of a new topic.

Can the minister share how many eligible youth have transitioned or are transitioning out of the care of CFS that have received the Manitoba Housing benefit? Yes.

The Chairperson: Could the member please repeat the question, please?

Mrs. Hiebert: On a new topic, can the minister share how many eligible youth have transitioned or are transitioning out of the care of CFS, have received the Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit? And were there any potential applicants impacted by the pause in August about the—when the program was oversubscribed?

MLA Fontaine: So as the member knows, housing in its totality for all of our citizens is a No. 1 priority of our government. I know that the member knows that.

And I would be remiss if I didn't take an opportunity to just, you know, shout out my colleague, Minister Smith—am I allowed to say her name? Yes, I believe so—who's doing really innovative and important, extraordinary work in respect of housing. And so I just want to lift her up for that work. I know that's not easy work, and she takes that job very, very seriously and that responsibility and that priority really, really seriously. So I just want to take a minute to just acknowledge my colleague for that work.

And we know that—and I know that the member opposite will know this as well—that, you know, housing plays such a crucial role, right, in respect of children aging out of care. And I believe the member and I shared one time already, like, when we talk

about our children, they're like our own children. But you know, when children are aging out of care, they're still babies. They're just—right? They're still—they're just—you know, they're still babies, and so they need those supports, right?

And so our department takes that very seriously and, you know, works with a variety of different stakeholders in respect of child welfare to ensure that we're—we have those supports for children exiting care and that they have those continued supports.

So we take that very seriously and are working on that.

Mrs. Hiebert: Can the minister list the current programs that exist to support employment and training programs for individuals that receive EIA?

* (16:30)

MLA Fontaine: Miigwech for that question.

So, of course, we are providing pathways to the labour market and we know that labour market attachment is an important part of the EIA program. In 2016-2017, Jobs on Market, based in Winnipeg, and Jobs on 9th, based in Brandon, were established to support and provide case management to EIA participants who were working towards employment.

Jobs on Market and Jobs on 9th work with EIA participants to access and identify their needs and strengths, and refer the participants to programming that helps them secure paid employment. We're just trying to also find a list, but I thought I would—we're hoping to find that list because, of course, we work with lots of community partners as well, right, that provide those services and get folks that are in EIA onto—into employment.

The other piece that happens as well is that we will have, like, EIA case workers also refer citizens to adult education or other education opportunities because—I know the member knows this, right? Like, education is such a key component as well in respect of being able to access employment, particularly, you know, if you're looking at something very, very specific, right?

So we do have EIA case supports that will refer folks to that stream as well, so it's kind of like doing both. So you're, you know, obviously trying to get folks into the labour market, but also helping support them get the education or the training to get them that labour market job that they want; so, two pieces.

We can't find the list right now, but we will certainly venture to get it to you. Oh, oh, maybe I spoke too soon?

Okay, so we've got—and these are organizations that help citizens, right, get into the labour market. So we've got Centre Flavie-Laurin [*phonetic*]-I don't know if I just butchered that.

An Honourable Member: Laurent.

MLA Fontaine: Laurent, okay; provisions for low-income families; Community Unemployed Help Centre; we've got Community Unemployed Help Centre, again; we've got Deer Lodge Centre, we've got Opportunities for Employment—I'm sure the member knows about that group, and they've got several programs that they do. They've got the maximize opportunities; they've got the CHSP Community Home Services Program, they've got the Stages of Change.

We've got SEED Winnipeg, who's got support savings initiative; Taking Charge!—I was just there a little while ago—doing really, really good work and are looking to expand a little bit; employment assistant services.

And then, of course, we've got Ka Ni Kanichihk, their Honouring Gifts program, and then Ndinaweno, this is Giganawe [*phonetic*]-oh, it is Ndinawe, yes, sorry; their—that's their child and youth care worker program.

So we do certainly have those community agencies and organizations that we work with in doing that work as well.

Mrs. Hiebert: I'm just going to hand it over to my colleague. He would like to ask a couple of questions, if that's okay.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): First of all, thank you to everyone that's here today for giving me the opportunity to speak at Estimates today. My question is regarding MDC, because MDC is in my constituency.

Can the minister share an update on the status of the MDC residents that have been transitioned out of the centre, specifically where or what programs they were transferred to?

Thank you.

MLA Fontaine: Yes, so that's a really important question, so I appreciate that.

And so as the member knows, folks are transitioned. So we had, as of October 1, 2024, 106 residents have

transitioned to the community, and only two remain at MDC. And so folks—those citizens—have gone into shift-staffed homes, home shares, purpose-built, and I have to share with the member—first off, let me share two things—or, maybe even three things.

The way that the department executed folks transitioning was, hands-down, the most compassionate, the most caring, the most bringing together everybody that needed to be a part of that plan to ensure that families and the citizens and the communities were all co-ordinated and all on board, was hands-down, like, just extraordinary work.

* (16:40)

So I cannot stress that enough for our team and the way that everybody came together to ensure that safe transition was extraordinary. And I think that families and community and citizens have really appreciated that, that there was so much care and attention that was done. So first and foremost, let me say that.

Second, I had the opportunity—I don't know how long ago, several months ago now, I don't know; everything's a blur some days, so I don't know. But I'll say in the last five or six months, I think, I went to MDC and, you know, saw—you know, I went to the—what's it called? The gravesite and saw the plaque there and, you know, heard about all of the individuals.

I've met with some of the staff. I've met with some of the family. I've been to our purpose-built homes. Our purpose-built homes are amazing. Like the—again, the thought and the consideration that have gone into our purpose-built homes. I've met, like, the residents and the citizens that are living at these purpose-built homes and I just—they're just such special human beings. I just love them so much.

And it's—again, the care that these citizens are receiving from our staff and our team is amazing. And so I just want to, you know, share that on the official record for historical context.

And then, you know, I want to say this. My third thing is, I guess that would have been last winter or whenever, I had the opportunity—there was a documentary that came out. What was that—These Four Walls. And so that was at the human rights museum and met with the documentarian and met with the folks.

And you know, they're—I don't think that, you know, Manitobans really appreciate all of the work

from, you know, the '70s and beyond that went into, you know, ensuring that citizens are treated with compassion. And you know, that their human rights are acknowledged and respected.

And so, you know, I just want to shout-out all of those individuals—former residents, citizens, supporters, allies—that have done such amazing work. And I'm so proud to be part of a team that did extraordinary, extraordinary work at transitioning all of these citizens.

MLA Bereza: Thank you minister for the answers there.

Just to add a little more clarity to the actual gravestones at MDC, it was a high school project a number of years ago that named all those gravesites and that.

Unfortunately, a lot of the people that were last to be transitioned out of MDC were quite aged. Again, talking to some of the former nurses that were working there, there has been, unfortunately, some that have passed.

And I'm wondering if the minister has any indication of how many of the last 106 people that transitioned out of MDC have passed or if their life expectancy had been shortened?

Thank you.

MLA Fontaine: So I appreciate the question

Unfortunately, I can't answer that. That is health information, as I'm sure the member recognizes, is protected information, right? And so I just can't possibly answer that and put that on the record.

MLA Bereza: Thank you again for your candidacy on that. I appreciate where you are with that.

Of the people—there was quite an amount of people that worked at the Manitoba development centre. Were all the jobs, the FTEs from MDC protected? Were they transferred or relocated, redeployed? Was there any loss from the system; was there—I know there was some people that retired, but was there any numbers out there that you could help me with?

Thank you so much.

MLA Fontaine: So I think that the member is asking—so first off, let me just say this: there are currently 38 part-time and full-time staff that remain, and then we had the workforce—we were working with the regional health authorities to identify—no, sorry. The workforce adjustment team continues to focus on retention strategies as well as securing future careers

within the department and the Manitoba Government, and has secured a formal transition agreement with the Manitoba Nurses Union.

I think what the member is probably interested in is whether or not anybody lost their jobs. Nobody lost their jobs. Of course, as the member did say, some folks retired. That's just normal, right? So some folks did opt to retire, but nobody has lost their job. *[interjection]* And some did choose a lay-off, as well.

MLA Bereza: That was my final question. Thank you, honourable—thank you, Minister, for the answers.

Thank you.

Mrs. Hiebert: I just wanted to say thank you. I've got so many more questions. I could just talk all day about this. I'm very passionate about our province and about the people here and the communities, so I appreciate the information that you've gotten. I would love to be able to just have a dialogue some time, if you and I can just have more questions or just have a chat, I'd love that. I would love that if the minister would be okay with that.

But thank you very much, and I think we need to wrap it up, because it's 10 to five, and I was told to be done at 10 to five, so.

MLA Fontaine: So I just want to say miigwech for the really thoughtful questions, and I really appreciate the approach that you took. I think that you and I are able to establish a good working relationship, so I really want to just appreciate you as well.

This is my first Estimates as minister, and so you've made it very, very good. Let me just say that. So I appreciate you—yes, we're—it's both of our firsts, so I just want to lift you up for that and say miigwech as well.

The Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions relevant to this department.

I will now call resolution 9.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,525,687,000 for Families, Community Service Delivery, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$64,124,000 for Families, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

* (16:50)

Resolution 9.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$524,618,000 for Families, Child and Youth Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,024,000—sorry. I will say that again—a sum not exceeding \$4,022,000 for Families, Digital, Organization and Strategy, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 9.1.(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 9.1.

At this point, we request that the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

Hearing none, if no motions are forthcoming.

Resolution 9.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,283,000 for Families, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Families.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning.

The hour being 4:52—thank you.

What is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

The Chairperson: Committee rise.

CHAMBER

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (14:50)

The Chairperson (Tyler Blashko): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Executive Council.

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber and we ask the members to please introduce their staff in attendance.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I present to you: Sarah Thiele, the clerk of the Executive Council; Mark Rosner, Tories' worst nightmare.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Introducing Mr. Braeden Jones, chief of staff.

The Chairperson: As previously stated, in accordance with subrule 78(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ewasko: Just taking a quick scan back, and I'm sure, hopefully, the Premier took some time to take a look over Hansard from the spring to refresh his memory, considering it took us a long time to get back into Estimates. It's unfortunate that, again, the Premier and government seem to be dodging some of these questions.

So I guess I'll carry on with a question that I asked earlier today during question period, just to see—we talked about expenses. And so it was reported earlier on in the Winnipeg Free Press that the Premier enjoys a \$17 or \$16 salad each and every day. I'd like to ask, how does the Premier pay for that salad?

Mr. Kinew: On questions of salad, typically I use tap; sometimes I use the Scene card first. That's if I'm at Safeway. If I'm at Black Market Provisions, which is a great LBTTQ-owned business in my constituency, they don't take Scene cards there, so in that case, I just use the tap. And sometimes, them being the great small-business owners that they are, they might even deliver. And then I'll just settle up with them via credit card over the phone.

So there's a whole range of payment scenarios and options I could walk the Leader of the Official Opposition through if he likes. Again, health care is the No. 1 priority of the people of Manitoba. Affordability and the economic impacts of inflation is right up there as another big priority.

* (15:00)

Member opposite wants to talk salad. He wants to take some shots about the last time we were in Estimates and it took us a while to get back here, I think, was the words that he used, but I'm honestly surprised to even see him again.

Last time we had an Estimates hearing, he left. He was still talking on the way out the door. He couldn't get his whole question out and he left. He ran away.

That, of course, is not a reflection on his presence or absence in the Chamber, but rather is a reflection on the trail-off manner in which he delivers the queries here.

And we all remember why he was leaving his thoughts unfinished, as it were. It's because that day, the PC caucus split on a question of whether or not to support the rights of trans people in our society. And so the member opposite yielded his time and we've noticed since that he cannot sustain an entire question period even though he's paid to do so. And I wonder whether he'll be able to sustain an afternoon today, or a question period tomorrow.

Again, I'm proud of what our team has done one year into office, and you know, the members opposite—I got to say, today was a lot of nerves, a lot of butterflies—that PC leadership deadline coming up at 12 p.m. Was anyone going to run at all? Most people were running away from the PC leadership and, apparently, they were able to wrangle some folks into putting their name on a ballot there.

But yes, you know, of course, we welcome vigorous contested leadership. Hopefully, there will be an ability for an opposition to serve the important accountability function that they have in this democratic institution here. But, again, we have an opposition leader who yields his time, returns with the butter-would-not-melt-in-my-mouth-type attitude of condescension and then proceeds to lead off with questions about salad.

I mean, I guess. Yes, that is in opposition, nominally, but perhaps we will see a reinvigorated PC opposition at some point in the future. But, again, as somebody who led a party through a process of renewal, I can tell you it doesn't happen overnight. It takes a lot of hard work. And I know that our team certainly put in the work.

We developed a comprehensive plan, a plan to repair health care after the damaging cuts, closures of emergency rooms and other health-care facilities in Manitoba. And a plan to repair the education system, as well, after teachers were given an air of disillusion when they regarded the prospects under a successive third PC administration.

Many young teachers wondered whether there would be a future for them in their chosen profession. I'm happy to report that today, they tell us, yes, there is a future in the education system. And that's thanks to the good work of our team in the Education Department.

So when we look at affordability, health care, education, the environment, social services, things are looking better in Manitoba today. And so, I guess if, you know, the member opposite wants to clarify what Scene points can be redeemed for what this week, we can delve into all of that and I can explain.

Mr. Ewasko: Once again, Manitobans are seeing the Premier (Mr. Kinew) sit in his spot and a level of arrogance, once again, is shining through. Maybe not quite fully bullying from his spot as he did in the spring, but that being said, continues to put misinformation—if not disinformation—on the record to you Manitobans.

So the question was: How does the Premier pay for his salad? I guess I should have been a little more clear, thinking that the Premier might understand what the question was, but obviously, not so much.

So the Premier, until, I believe, just a few days ago finally decided to table some of his expenses or put online some of his expenses over the last year after being pressured to do so.

And the Premier sits in his spot today, honourable Chairperson, and doesn't deny the fact that he's eating on a—everyday basis a 16- or a 17-dollar salad. Matter of fact, he brags the fact that he's using Scene card and he's tapping his card. And then he puts on the record some more disingenuous information when it comes time for actually talking about what had happened in the spring Estimates time.

You see, honourable Chairperson, I know that the Premier and his level of arrogance and self-serving manner doesn't quite understand the word team or allowing other members of this Chamber who have been elected to be here, time to actually have time during Executive Council Estimates to be able to ask the Premier some questions.

In the springtime, actually, I didn't overly—I didn't run out of questions at all. I actually gave the amount of time to the Leader of the Liberal party some time to ask the Premier some questions. It's unfortunate that once again, Honourable Speaker, and I've said this multiple times, it's unfortunate that the media refuses or doesn't want to be in here during this time, because it's the little things that the Premier ends up doing.

The level of arrogance, his level of toxicity that is burning inside of him, he can't hold it in, honourable Chairperson. And I think the worst part is that he hides when the cameras are off and the microphones are off, that's when he does these little bullying tactics. And I'll remind the member, the Premier, the MLA for

Fort Rouge, that I've worked with students in the past with emotional and behaviour disorders. And I think the Premier (Mr. Kinew) maybe checks off a few of those boxes.

And so he sits here and tries to belittle not only myself but other members in the Chamber, and I'll just let him know that there will be opportunities for independent members to bring forward questions to the Premier as well as there may be an opportunity for some of my colleagues to bring some questions to the Premier.

So I guess, you know, back to the salad thing, so the costs of refreshments, tea, coffee, snacks, meals for the Premier's office, costs of refreshments, tea, coffee, snacks, meals for Executive Council, costs of refreshments, tea, coffee, snacks, meals for ministers' offices, out-of-province travel expenses for the Premier, including Executive Council staff, inter-governmental staff, overtime for Executive Council staff, cost of all newly purchased electronic devices, et cetera, and the list goes on.

The Premier—I don't believe he's been very accountable or transparent up 'til today, October 15. I believe that there's incomplete expenses that are not being shown to Manitoba taxpayers and I'd like him to start answering some questions and stop this immature game and answer some questions on behalf of myself and Manitobans.

Mr. Kinew: All right, second set of questions on salads.

I paid for them myself, out of my own pocket. Today's salad was 10 or 11 dollars, I can't remember exactly. But it was an off-the-shelf Safeway salad. Again, this is at a time when health care is the No. 1 priority for the people of Manitoba. Affordability is a top priority for the people of Manitoba.

So one of the interesting things that we discovered in office, in addition to the fact that the PCs didn't cost any of the election year commitments that they tried to run on, was that there was no system for regularly disclosing ministerial expenses in their government.

* (15:10)

And that's why they didn't disclose any ministerial expenses in the election year or in the lead-up to it.

Much as we are fixing up their mess in health care, much as we are fixing the meth-mess in education, we are fixing the mess that they left in the delivery of public services in Manitoba. We are fixing up their mess in this regard as well.

You'll note that it was our team that posted the PC government's final ministerial expenses, not themselves on the way out the door. And, of course, we are updating our website and internal processes to ensure that this will be done automatically and on a systematic basis going forward. Did not occur to the member opposite nor was this a burning public policy question for anyone in his administration for a number of years.

But folks have asked these questions and I'm very happy to respond. And so we are fixing the PC mess when it comes to disclosures as well, too.

We have quite a few disclosures that we can share regarding the former PC government, of course. The member opposite, we know he travelled abroad, as well as many other former Cabinet ministers, many of whom were defeated in the last government. Such was the overall shoddiness of their aptitude when it came to public administration but also the generally toxic campaign that they ran last year.

The member opposite, of course, is engaging in a bit of revisionist history. I think we all remember that last afternoon in Estimates. It happened in the wake of his caucus fracturing over a vote on whether or not to acknowledge the visibility of trans people in Manitoba.

And I haven't been here the longest of everyone, but I've been here for a few terms now, and for the first time ever, I saw a caucus splinter when it came to a vote. And it was with LGBT recognition. Not even necessarily taking a huge service delivery change or new direction in terms of The Human Rights Code but just to acknowledge that we see and recognize trans folks in the community.

And that was too much for the PCs to be able to support or even to abstain. Four members had to come and vote against the prospect of seeing, you know, perhaps literally, but maybe more so in the symbolic sense, trans people in our communities.

And, of course, I guess if the member opposite would have it, coincidentally that day, the member opposite yielded his questions because he didn't want to entertain being pointed out to him that that is inappropriate.

And there is, of course, an important context in which that vote happened, which is that, in his first opportunity to do national media, the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Ewasko) sought to revive the question of parental rights. And he sought to wade in, into a failed PC campaign tactic which was very divisive and very toxic, to not just trans people but

people in Manitoba generally who are concerned with equity and equality.

And so given the chance to share his vision for a renewed PC Party, he chose to revive the failed 2023 campaign talking points from his former colleague, Heather Stefanson. Then, when his members split about whether or not they should support a continuance of that direction, the member opposite yielded his time. That's what happened.

Mr. Ewasko: The nice thing is there's this thing called Hansard, which the Premier (Mr. Kinew) fails to tell Manitobans, of course, as he sits there. And he likes to think that Manitobans won't read some of it and won't fact check some of the information that he continues to put on the record.

In regards to being in the same Chamber as the Premier, I've told him multiple times: I'm not afraid of you. I think, you know, there's a lot of potential from the Premier to actually answer some questions.

And honourable Chairperson, I say to you that I'm not scared of the Premier. And I know the Premier doesn't like to be challenged, because he brought up the fact of toxic and dysfunctional—I'm going to add abusive behaviour—and that's just talking about the Premier.

I think you're going to have—I think he's going to have to answer, and I know that he is now, again, if the media were up in the gallery, they'd be able to report on some of this, but he's worried and he's trying to use his influence over the Chair of the committee, again. It's a different Chair than who was in the Chair during the springtime.

They're not going to—they're not worried about you either. Or maybe they are. Maybe that's why some of these things are not coming through.

Point of Order

The Chairperson: The leader of—sorry, First Minister, on a point of order.

Mr. Kinew: I just want to remind everyone in the committee that questions are supposed to be referred through the Chair, which would mean phrasing a question directed at me in the third person rather than in the second person, as the minister—or, former minister rather, current Leader of the Opposition, has done three times in the preamble for which presumably will eventually result in a question regarding a public policy matter.

The Chairperson: So there was a point of order in that questions should be referred to—through the Chair, and we should refrain from using the word you, because—should be coming through the Chair.

* * *

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, honourable Chairperson, and I appreciate the fact of your clarity. The nice thing is that the Premier finally put it on the record of how he was going to educate you on the functions—the functionality of this Chamber and how questions are worded and all that.

And partially because, honourable Chairperson, is that he is getting a little uncomfortable, especially when we start talking about toxic and dysfunctional workplaces. And he's the one who brought it up. So I'm glad he brought it up, and we will get to that.

I've said, multiple times, on—within different media as well, that the Premier is unfit for office. Unbecoming of a premier, many of his behaviours. And we will get more into, you know, the serious allegations of assault and abuse within his own caucus and party.

But so, honourable Chairperson, Manitobans expect their Premier to lead with dignity and professionalism. But what we're faced with today is deceit and dysfunction, and we see it on display today already during Estimates. We have seen this shown by this Premier time and time again, that he's unfit for the office that he holds. We aren't just talking about his many, many early policy failures, or even broken promises.

For the record, the Premier presently stands accused of bullying, screaming, demeaning, lunging, grabbing and assaulting people within his own party. This is consistent with a past he claims to have left behind in which he has also had a problem with violence. The Premier's reaction to this leadership crisis of his own making has been denying it outright and attacking others, and he continues to try to do the bullying tendencies that he—that we see on display today again.

Manitobans are unfortunately dealing with some very serious, deeply troubling and honestly disqualifying character flaws in their Premier that makes him, not you, wholly 'unsuitable' to lead our province.

* (15:20)

And there were signs, unfortunately. A lot of people pointed out red flags about the Premier for years. For those red flags were overlooked while he

was enabled to gain power. We know that the NDP, under the Selinger government—matter of fact, Greg Selinger himself put his arm around the Premier (Mr. Kinew). That was a little bit before the knife came out and got the previous premier Selinger a bit of a knife in the back.

We know that the most recent allegations of aggression, bullying and manipulation that has no place in public life. We know that the MLA for Fort Garry had put on the record that Premier had lunged at him, grabbed him aggressively and yanked his arm during a campaign event in 2019.

This just isn't another heated political moment. And I've got other examples if the Premier wants to go there. Or he can start maybe answering some questions. Again, this isn't leadership; it's bullying. It's aggression. And it's definitely not an isolated incident.

Premier has consistently demonstrated, time and time again, when he's backed into a corner or even challenged, he ends up lashing out, whether it's physically, verbally or through his manipulation of those around him. He makes others pay for his mistakes.

There's a growing list of apologies the Premier has had to give over the years. A second, longer list of apologies that he has yet to give but really should. And a third, even longer list of people who he hurt but who he will never, ever apologize to.

Honourable Speaker, how many apologies need to occur for the Premier in each of those three categories before he gives his final apology as Premier? And will that occur during a resignation speech or a concession speech?

Mr. Kinew: The member opposite has a lot of free time on his hands to engage in various hypothetical scenarios, none of which are currently in front of me. And so I'll resist weighing in on his various thoughts about me and what may become in the future and all those things.

I would point out, though, that he is paid to ask questions during question period and during Estimates. And so if he wants to ensure that he and the PC caucus do their job and fill the Estimates time and fill question period each day, he'd probably start doing some of the work of rebuilding the PC Party's standing, I guess we could say, in the eyes of Manitobans.

As an interim leader, though, his—probably his first thing is just to do no harm. And I wonder whether

his time in office has done no harm or if he's kept digging that hole for the PCs a little bit deeper.

Inside their caucus room, I wonder how they view his opening comment today, that he's thinking there's going to be time for independent members and maybe, quote, end quote, time for his own caucus to ask questions. Not good for internal caucus dynamics, just like that vote earlier in the spring sitting.

And certainly, when we're—talk about the public-facing task of rebuilding the PC Party's not even electoral prospects but just, like, ability not to be laughed out of a room in Manitoba, I'd say his foray into trying to earn national media by weighing in on the parental rights missteps of the 2023 PC campaign were ill-advised, to say the least.

Anyway, such as it is, that is the state of the opposition. And we see on a daily basis in question period when they're scrambling to come up with question 10 on the fly or looking at each other to see if they've got anything after the independent Liberal asks something or in Estimates when they yield their time, time and time again. Supposed to be opposition time but—be charitable to say the opposition is doing their job these days when it comes to showing up for work and doing the basics. Our team did it year after year, even in the wake of 2016, team that's in government today was here in the building, putting in the work rebuilding the political project, and we're very humbled to receive a mandate from the people of Manitoba.

So we could be doing, you know, bilateral meetings with the other levels of government. We could be doing economic development projects. We could be exercising oversight and strategic planning with the health service delivery organizations. There are any number of important business and government tasks we could be operating here, but, you know, the Estimates and budgetary process are important, too, so we're here in the Chamber listening to the various musings and hypothetical scenarios being constructed by the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko).

So why don't we talk about some substance? I mean, geez, there's a personal-care home that's going to get built in Lac du Bonnet by our government; was very proud to be there. The excitement in the room was tangible. I've never been to a government announcement where pompoms were used by people in the crowd, and while you may think, hey, that would be nice if that happened some day, certainly wouldn't think that that's going to happen in a blue PC riding, at least currently. But that's what happened earlier this

year. And so I recognize that folks in the community are rightly very skeptical after having been strung along by the member opposite for many years. But we are moving ahead with building a personal-care home.

Lot of due diligence had to be put in place that was disregarded and not carried out by the previous PC administration, but I'm happy to report that we have conducted that due diligence, and we will have shovels in the ground this year. Construction, of course, will continue, going into 2025, and then, yes, we'll have a ribbon-cutting ceremony there in Lac du Bonnet. And perhaps the member opposite, the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson), will show up at the announcement too, and that's great; the more the merrier when it comes to rolling out the good news agenda of our administration.

Mr. Ewasko: Once again, Premier (Mr. Kinew) with the level of that arrogance that he has not yet been able to shake and the self-serving platitudes that he gives himself on a daily basis, I don't think is starting to echo across this great province of ours, Honourable Chairperson.

So I will. I'll give the Premier a little bit of a history lesson, and I'll take a couple of quotes from him as well.

So 2012, then-premier Greg Selinger, his mentor, had strolled out to the community of Lac du Bonnet. Didn't bring the Health minister, didn't bring anyone else besides some staff. Not sure if the Tories' worst nightmare was there or not; I don't actually remember. But I'm looking for a reaction; didn't quite get a reaction. I'm not sure if Mr. Rosner was there or not; I can't say.

But then-premier Selinger had said that there's going to be a Lac du Bonnet personal-care home built, 80 beds, and they were going to start construction in 2014. Nothing happened. The community put up a sign. The NDP government didn't even leave a weed whacker to trim the weeds around.

Fast forward to the fall of 2023—oh, by the way, and then, of course, when we get into government in 2016, we're looking and there was no money set aside. There wasn't even a shred of evidence that the committees back in the day in Lac du Bonnet received any confirmation from the Selinger government that they, in fact, were actually going to build a personal-care home. So the committee, plus the town and the municipality, received a letter from us, the PC government, that it was okay to get going on a personal-care home.

* (15:30)

And so they started, and they broke ground, and then the election happened, 2023.

And to correct the record, the Premier pats himself on the back when he knows himself that he didn't win the election, we lost it. He didn't win it. He likes to take some credit, but really the only credit he's got is for failing on so many promises that he made during the election and before the election.

So then he, right after, assumed office in October of 2023, what did he do? He cut the project. He cut the personal-care-home project, and then comes out for an announcement to the community of Lac du Bonnet as if he thought of this himself. And he says, for real this time.

I was hoping that maybe the former premier Selinger was maybe listening, because he just confirmed—the MLA for Fort Rouge confirmed that Greg Selinger had no intention of building a personal-care home in Lac du Bonnet. He said it himself. Those were the—now the—today's Premier's words.

So then he comes out, and he brings, you know, lot of his staff and a couple other ministers out to an announcement in Lac du Bonnet and announces a personal-care home. But he says, trust me. Trust me this time, he says. The Premier, the MLA for Fort Rouge, says, trust me, we're going to build it for real this time.

Well, still no paper, still no evidence that the community has received. Matter of fact, there's a letter dated September 27, 2024, from the municipality and the Town of Lac du Bonnet addressed to this Premier asking, when is this happening? Why have we not heard anything? Asking for a response. I don't even think the Premier's office has responded.

This is what happens under this leadership of the MLA for Fort Rouge. Lots of promises, no action, and I am encouraged, and hopefully, that shovel will hit the ground before the end of the year. But I doubt it.

Will it?

Mr. Kinew: I thought the ground was already broke. What is going on in the member's preamble?

So they broke ground last year, and now he's optimistic that our government will break ground. So there you go. That's everything you need to know about the PC approach.

He's now heckling across the aisle, and I'll—*[interjection]* No, no, the member's time is up, and I'll

remind everyone in the committee that heckling is against the rules. So I may do a point of order; we'll see how it goes. But at this point, I think I'm happy just to know that the member has taken the bait. And he's trying to do the grinning thing and talking while I'm talking.

But the point is the preamble is logically inconsistent with itself. The PC government had a long history of not doing the work necessary to back up announcements that they made in the lead-up to the 2023 election. And the member's commitment to that message track is so deep that he didn't even recognize that he tried to repeat the idea that ground had been broke on this project before concluding with his rhetorical flourish that he's optimistic that our government will break ground on this project.

So, I mean, you can look at all the different announcements that they rolled out, stuff that was in the 10-year capital plan that they tried to get some credit for, they tried to get some clout for, in the lead-up to the election. And again, no paper, no backup.

People in Lac du Bonnet, of course, are skeptical not because of any particular 2012 or 2013 or 2014, but for the entirety of it, including the fact that their MLA was in government for two terms and did not deliver this care home. Their MLA was sitting around the Cabinet table. And only when his party was severely behind in the polls did this appear to all of a sudden become something that had a bit of urgency behind it.

But, again, no work was done because at the time of the writing of the letter that the member reads from but does not table—perhaps it was just a reference, to be charitable to him—we were doing due diligence, important work that had not been carried by health service delivery organizations or the Department of Health under the former failed PC government of Heather Stefanson, of which this member was a part.

We're asking important due diligence questions relating to financing, relating to governance. And it was clear that these questions had not been entertained by the previous government. So we are very happy to recommit and to reaffirm and to say that we are moving ahead; that questions that we had have all been answered and that work that was carried out over the summer on the due diligence side proceeded in lockstep with some of the early prep work and feasibility and engineering and design steps that were required in order for us to put shovels in the ground this year—this calendar year, of course.

So yes, again, moving ahead. Good news. There is a government in Manitoba that's building personal-care-home beds again, where the PCs not only didn't build any but we actually lost personal-care homes. The story was exactly the same when it came to social housing in the province; nothing built, and actually a net loss in the hundreds of beds, when it came to personal-care homes and the hundreds of units, when it came to social housing.

So yes, good news. Things are on the mend. There's, you know, a lot that the member opposite could be asking about since I was able to put this Lac du Bonnet personal-care home on the docket and ensure that we're covering at least some substantive ground before, you know, he gets to his extemporizing and meandering discourse.

Perhaps we could talk about some other important issues. Maybe we could talk about southwest Winnipeg fire hall; the Waverley fire hall. We can talk about that; that's a good one. We could talk about initiatives in northern Manitoba to bring health care into communities. That would be a good one.

Anyway, there's lots of good things that we could talk about and again, we'll put in the work and then we'll do the press conference later, unlike the PC administration. Next time you see us at a podium for a Lac du Bonnet personal-care home, there will be a building behind us and the member is welcome to join.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you for the work that you're doing during these committees, as well, honourable Chairperson, because I know that it's probably not an easy task having to sit there with your boss educating you on every couple of seconds. But I know that you have my faith that you're doing a good job.

Talk about—the Premier (Mr. Kinew) talks about due diligence. Well, due diligence; yet the same result that the personal-care home needed to be built. And the only ground that he is covering is the ground that—we actually had broke the ground and then he came and decided to cover it back up so that he could do a little bit of an announcement there in February and March.

And the letter, or what I was reading off of, is actually in his inbox and it's really not from that long ago. It's from the—you know, he might even have that coming in as we speak but it—maybe he should respond to the community that are asking him these questions.

He continues to put that misinformation on the record. We backed up the personal-care home with a letter. He came with the pomp and circumstance, just like Greg Selinger did; his mentor. Left the community again with some hope because he said that, really, this time. Basically, he was confirming the fact that Greg Selinger never had any intention on bringing the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home to fruition.

* (15:40)

So he rolled in and, again, I'm hoping that what the Premier (Mr. Kinew) is saying is true, that there will be shovels in the ground again, but by the NDP, the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home, this calendar year, which I'll remind the Premier is prior to December 31.

Here's part of the problem that the Premier doesn't understand—and here's economics 101—is the fact that any day, any week, any month that this continues to be delayed, costs go up. I know he really doesn't care, because at the end of the day it's taxpayer dollars.

And so the original costing of the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home was going to be around 75, 80 million dollars. The Premier says he's done his due diligence and he's taken the summer, even though, technically, they did the announcement last February or March, so I don't know what he's talking about, again, talking out of both sides of his mouth and trying to pat himself on the back.

So if he's done his due diligence, what's the new estimated cost on the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home?

Mr. Kinew: Happy to engage in some questions of substance with the member opposite, but just want to point out the stark difference between what he says to the media and how he behaves here in the Chamber of the Legislature. Here, you know, he's about to, you know, take the covers off a vast conspiracy of how ground was broken and then dirt was covered up onto the broken ground to make way for this announcement earlier in the year or whatever chem trail type theory he's working on these days.

That's what he says here in the Chamber, but what does he say to the public and what does he say to the media? Well, I'll read you a quote from the Clipper newspaper in his constituency. Quote: I'm happy this personal-care home is going ahead. This is great news. End quote. That was April 4, 2024.

So there you go. Very interesting juxtaposition from the member opposite.

Also when we were reviewing the media, this is funny because I can actually see the paywall, so you know it's actually the Winnipeg Free Press's real site that I'm reading off of here. Going back to 2017, so you know who was in power at that time, in 2017. Headline of the article is: Province penny-wise, pound-foolish on health care. And it begins: Lorne Shinkel would find out in a most impersonal way. It was the early evening of February 8, and the reeve of the rural municipality of Lac du Bonnet had just arrived home. He turned on the television to watch the news only to find out that the Province had cancelled plans to build the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home.

So that was Brian Pallister. That was the member opposite when they had their chance to be able to get this thing built. The member opposite was around the government table for two terms. And it's interesting, I never heard any friendly questions about the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home when the PCs were in power. You know, there could've been some activist work. There could've been some advocacy work done by the member opposite.

He was also elevated to Cabinet around the rally-the-troops stage of Brian Pallister's time in office, and so, again, he had a number of years to get this thing built. I don't recall exactly how long he was in Cabinet, but I suspect that he was in Cabinet long enough that if they would've started when he went in, there would be a personal-care home standing in Lac du Bonnet by the time he left office as a minister of the Crown. Perhaps not, but I think that that timeline roughly works out.

And, of course, since I like to take the bait, the member opposite says economics 101. Well, you know, economics 101 from the member is one thing, but he certainly pales in comparison to the great Costas Nicolaou, who was my undergrad economics prof for first year economics. God bless his soul. He's no longer with us.

But he was great. He helped to inspire a love of what is sometimes called the dismal science, but is certainly very, very important to me and to many, many others in Manitoba, including folks who take a keen interest in public policy and fiscal matters. Which would preclude basically the entirety of Heather Stefanson's Cabinet but does include a lot of other people in Manitoba.

So PCH cost is actually less than what the member opposite put on the record earlier. So I don't know if we're going to keep going back on salads and, you

know, long preambles, but if we are we can maybe draw this out for a few more answers.

I can maybe tell the member opposite if he's getting hotter or colder when it comes to the numbers, inaccurate as they are, about what this building costs. But in the interest of transparency and for the good people of Lac du Bonnet, I'll go ahead and say it's \$66.4 million.

The Chairperson: Before I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition, I'll just caution the use of the term speaking out of both sides of your mouth. It has been cautioned in the past. That implies someone is lying, so it would be best if we steer clear of that term.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, honourable Chairperson, for that advice. I will—when referencing the Premier (Mr. Kinew), I'll be careful saying the term speaking out of both 'siveasis' of his mouth. So thanks for that guidance.

And I actually didn't realize that the term speaking out of both sides of your mouth was a reference to—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Mr. Ewasko:—inferring that the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) is lying—

Point of Order

The Chairperson: First Minister, on a point of order.

Mr. Kinew: So just want you to also be able to refer to what was just said there, as you were in the process of interjecting.

But I just wanted to say that, clearly you had provided direction that a certain term is unparliamentary. And I think we're all able to discern that the member opposite was trying to repeat said unparliamentary phrase multiple times for some sort of, I guess he would believe, rhetorical effect.

My concern as a serious parliamentarian being, though, that it showed a disrespect for the Chair in the process and went on to use another bit of unparliamentary language, which I won't repeat, but begins with the letter L and is probably the most commonly referred to term when we're talking about unparliamentary language.

So, again, I think it's important that everybody here show respect for the Chair. I think the rules of the Chamber show that this is well established. And in the immediate wake of you correcting any one of us, I would submit that there should not be repeated reference of the same unparliamentary language.

* (15:50)

The Chairperson: So there was a point of order with that, in the reflection on the decision of the Chair. And I would encourage all members, once being cautioned not to use unparliamentary language, to refrain from continuing to use it in your transition to parliamentary language.

* * *

The Chairperson: So with that, I will recognize the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Ewasko: Once again, I'll take your guidance and, I guess, you know, repeating your message to me. You know, I take that as advice, as well, from you to not repeat that on the record again. So thanks for your advice.

Again, pointing out that the Premier is taking up time from Estimates to take the time to educate the Chair of the committee, but that's what the Premier does. He—little, subtle bullying tactics—and as Manitobans see, we do have a new Chair in the Chair position this time around but I'm sure, hopefully the Chair will listen to what the Premier's saying so that he's not replaced in the next set of Estimates.

So, last spring, I opened by saying it's an honour to be here in this Chamber in this role representing His Majesty's—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Mr. Ewasko:—official opposition.

Point of Order

The Chairperson: The honourable First Minister, on a point of order.

Mr. Kinew: The member was literally reflecting on the Chair. So again, I'll leave it to your judgment as to whether this fits the bill, procedurally speaking, about what is meant in the parliamentary tradition about it being inappropriate for a member who's recognized as having the floor in the Chamber to reflect, using quotes here to make clear that I'm talking about the literal procedural definition of reflecting on the Chair. I'll leave that to your judgment as to whether this fits the bill of that.

But I do want to point out that the member opposite literally did just reflect on the Chair, and what he laid out is that in some way, your role serving as the Chair of this committee, being as we are in the Committee of Supply, is in some way up for debate, or may not be assured or that you may not be the Chair going forward into the future.

Certainly, just on, I guess, like, a substantive measure, there's nothing to that. You are the Deputy Speaker, you will be chairing many, many committees, this one and many others going forward into the future.

But I do think, at the very least, it's inappropriate for the member opposite to draw you, the Chair, who has an impartial role to play here in adjudicating disagreements or debate or back-and-forth between myself and whoever's asking questions in the Committee of Supply. And, so yes, drawing you into that is inappropriate, and on-the-record reflections about your role as the Chair strike me as inappropriate as well.

And so again, I would like to discuss substantive public policy questions like health care and education and the economy, but I do think it is necessary for us to conduct ourselves in a parliamentary fashion. It's not as though, like, points of order are to be won or lost, but if we were keeping track the member opposite has lost two points of order already and this one, at least from a lay perspective, comes perilously close to being that third strike.

So I did just want to flag for you that I find that reflecting on your role of the Chair is inappropriate and I submit it to you as potentially being another breach of the rules insofar as we are not supposed to reflect on the guidance that you provide, the sanctity of your role or your ability to carry out your impartial function here in the committee. And I believe he was reflecting on your ability to carry out those functions above the fray, so to speak.

And so I do submit that to you for your consideration.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: So I will actually acknowledge that I was conferring with the Clerk at the moment that the point of order was referring to, so I feel not in a place to actually rule on the point of order.

But I will just offer a reminder of reflecting on the Chair is not—is inappropriate.

And I would also remind all those in the Chamber that a concise point of order is appreciated, and the use of point of orders for furthering debate is also inappropriate.

* * *

The Chairperson: So with that, I will offer the floor to the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Ewasko: As we all were sitting in here and watching an expert rag the puck in a couple pieces of points of order—an expert, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) is, the MLA for Fort Rouge, on breaching of rules. And so once again, you know, multiple chances, comes in here and basically, honourable Chairperson, using his point of order time to rag the puck so he can get in various documents.

And so maybe the Premier, after I'm done asking the question, might want to table the documents that he has been waiting—and again, ragging the puck with points of order—to get in here, as opposed to allowing some questions that I am bringing forward on behalf of Manitobans to the Premier during his Executive Council Estimates time.

So as I was saying, honourable Chairperson, last spring, I did mention that it's an absolute honour to be not only the MLA for Lac du Bonnet but also representing His Majesty's official opposition. And so again, I repeat that today, and I welcome all the Chamber staff and the Premier—even the Premier—back to the committee.

So given how tightly the Premier controls his message, this really offers a rare opportunity for transparency and accountability with a little bit longer format than oral questions, and we get a chance to see whether the government's promises align with its actions.

Manitobans deserve to know where their hard-earned money is going and where the government is breaking their promises. We've heard many promises before and during the election and even after the election. What we've witnessed instead is a new government that had no plans—they had no plans ready. They spent seven and a half years in opposition, no plans, and have taken no action outside of leveraging taxpayer dollars to bolster their own image.

And that's what we've seen, honourable Chairperson, over the last year. We've seen a lot of bolstering of images—especially of the Premier's.

* (16:00)

The Premier's disinformation machine is able to spin pretty much anything as progress, when in reality it's nothing more than smoke and mirrors. Far more showman than statesman, and he continues to do that today, honourable Chairperson.

It is nice to hear today that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has confirmed that the building of the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home is going to cost \$64 million. And so the constituents of Lac du Bonnet

and the roughly 200,000 Manitobans and visitors to our great province who see that the Lac du Bonnet constituency is their seasonal home as well, are going to be happy to hear that, and they'll be even happier once that shovel hits the ground.

But I guess time will tell, and we'll see if the Premier holds to that \$64 million personal-care home. I'm not sure if he has cut the amount of beds that are in there, but we've already seen—I mean, the fact that the former PC government left a \$373-million surplus, which is a good start. Good starting point for the NDP.

But what have they done? Under this Premier's leadership, they've squandered it. And, again, no letter backing up the \$64-million personal-care home to Lac du Bonnet, I don't believe anyway. Maybe he might want to table that today, and I would be happy to correct the record.

The NDP inherited one of the fastest growing economies in the country. That economic momentum should have been a springboard to further prosperity, but again, this Premier—no plans.

I'll ask the Premier to explain his recent public rhetoric about belt-tightening, and specifically on which specific programs, projects and progress he plans on cutting in the upcoming year. They cut schools, they cut daycares, they cut summer programming to—for kids. They cut Parks budgets, they cut the forest firefighting budget and much, much more.

So again, to the Premier: What cuts should Manitobans expect in the upcoming year?

Mr. Kinew: Well, to date we've repeatedly cut the size of the PC caucus, and will continue doing so if there are any by-elections called by members leaving the Leader of the Opposition's team.

And I only wish that the PCs had left office on March 31, 2023. Just imagine how much we could have saved financially. Imagine how much better the society would have been last year, had we avoided all the dog-whistle politics of their stand firm billboards and the parental rights campaign.

It's been said—not by me, but I've got a lot of time for the person saying it and the thought behind it—that politicians have a moral responsibility not to elevate divisions within the society. And I think it would be a charitable lesson in brevity for us to say that the PCs failed in that task last year, under the leadership of Heather Stefanson.

I really wish they would have left office on that date, but of course they clung on right through the

election, which resulted in their defeat, some inappropriate actions on behalf of third parties during the transition period and then, of course, ultimately they relinquished power at 9:49 a.m. on October 18, 2023.

And a new bay—new day began, and it's been very cool to see Manitobans greet a new administration with open hearts and open minds, and to have people, including long-time PC supporters, willing to work with us, willing to bring forward good ideas for the betterment of all Manitobans.

And so it's been a very great year, and when it comes to the fiscal situation, immediately following the October 3 election day, we started to get briefed on the transition, and the earliest briefings we received is that there was a fiscal crisis borne out of irresponsible PC funding commitments that had not gone through the proper Treasury Board process.

And as a result, it took a lot of heavy lifting, led by our Finance Minister and the deputy chair of the Treasury Board to get us to the position where we are now, where the—even the rating agencies welcomed our first budget.

And the talking points that the member opposite uses on fiscal matters might persuade newly elected PC MLAs, but those are the only people that I've heard talking about that. Everyone else recognizes that, under the leadership of Heather Stefanson and the member opposite, the PCs were very fiscally irresponsible.

And that matters to the people of Manitoba because you need to be responsible with the books. You need to be responsible with public finances. Otherwise you're always going to be going back to the working person and asking for more, and that's not right.

So the members opposite, again, there is a sense of entitlement, I assume; a sense of urgency borne out of the election. And all sorts of promises were made, bills were racked up, all sorts of double-dipping into ISA and enabling appropriations, and here we are. Even on what is sometimes referred to in political sciences as a brand strength of the PCs, we're cleaning up their mess.

And so, you know, whether or not Manitobans credit our team, such as those ministers and the many, many others, with doing this heavy lifting, it is important so that we can sustainably deliver health care over the long term. It is important so that we can ensure that new initiatives, like free birth control and a school food program, can be sustained over the long term.

And I like the school food program so much because it is a generational investment in the social determinants of health. It is a generational investment in the future of young people in Manitoba. And I hope that the members opposite don't cut it the next time that they're in office, because I do think that this one will produce results over the long term, much after our time in office.

And of course, a balanced budget helps to ensure its continuity.

Mr. Ewasko: So unfortunately, the Premier (Mr. Kinew), you know, I'm not sure if he doesn't have his handlers kicking around and sort of giving him the hook of the action and no action, when he should or should not be speaking, but we've seen lots of that over the last year.

So honourable Chairperson, so the question was in regards to the various different programs and that, that the Premier, you know, what is he going to be cutting when we talk about this belt tightening that the Premier likes to use.

So we're going to assume that he's making cuts all across the board, and he's also going to be raising taxes on Manitobans—those hard-working Manitobans. He's going to be raising taxes.

What he could do—he could be raising the economy—growing the economy. But he chooses not to. Why? Honourable Chairperson, why? Because he's got no plan. You're in caucus with him. So I mean, I don't know. It's unfortunate. I feel sorry for you.

But again, making sure, for the record, that the NDP didn't win the election. We lost it, and we are going to turn things around for the 2027 election. Unless, of course, this Premier is carrying on with his next ladder climbing and this self-serving momentum of this Premier where he's going to want to go to federal politics. But time will tell.

Honourable Chairperson, let's talk about the lack of progress, or rather the NDP's very generous dishonest interpretation of progress.

The Premier and his disinformation team worked very hard to spin their lack of results into something that sounds like a success story. But when we dig deeper, what we find is a government that has coasted along by collecting the fruit of the trees planted by our PC government while still blaming their predecessors for anything that they are failing to address.

They're in government, but they still act like an opposition party with their insults and political

attacks. It's getting old, and it's time for the Premier to start governing.

* (16:10)

The NDP made specific promises with regards to things like jobs and growth to gain power. They then inherited the third-fastest-growing economy in Canada and had an audited surplus to work with.

Since October 2023 there's been no net increase in full-time employment in Manitoba. Let that sink in. No new full-time jobs in nearly a year, despite promises to create thousands of them; just a bit behind pace.

But what should you expect when the Premier is truly more showman than statesman? There are plenty of tricks up his sleeve, but after he leaves the stage, Manitobans are left questioning the act and they talk to each other. They can tell that the job market is stagnant and they read the news stories about big businesses investing elsewhere and closing their doors. Closing their doors in his own constituency.

Everyone knows that the NDP's tax increases have made Manitoba less competitive; it's only going to get worse. We can't retain and attract talent or investment as long as the NDP are in government.

One of the first mistakes the NDP made taking office was disbanding the previous PC government's economic development board. It's a huge mistake. The comparison is actually staggering: we, when we were in government, fostered economic growth and the NDP is standing still, letting opportunities pass them by, multiple of them, many of them. The only thing progressing under the NDP is government debt and we will soon be seeing major tax increases.

So Honourable Speaker, my question is for the Premier, according to the book by John Lawrence Reynolds, which the Premier has accepted awards for and claimed as his own work. The Premier had trouble with various different substances during his undergrad when he apparently learned economics, so I'll forgive him for not knowing the answer to this question but it must be asked for the record. And after the Premier answers this question, I'm going to turn the floor over to an independent.

Is he going to be cutting more projects, projects and priorities, or all of the above, honourable—

The Chairperson: The member's time is expired.

Mr. Kinew: Well, I'm not surprised the member opposite is yielding his time. And it's not even

Wednesday. It's the first day of the week after the long weekend and he's already yielding his time.

Anyway, on the economy, good news to share. Employment is up: more than 5,000 jobs created in Manitoba last month. Building permits, up; a 16 and a half per cent increase in July. Motor vehicle sales, new vehicles—this one probably hurts the members opposite; up 18.5 per cent.

In fact, when we speak to the people who sell cars and trucks in Manitoba, they're not just happy with the boom that's going on with business, they're very appreciative of specific steps that our administration has taken, in particular the EV rebate, which provides a rebate not only for new electric vehicles, but also for used, so that there's help for people across the affordability spectrum. There's a boom going on in that sector of the economy for sure.

Food and drinking places, bars, restaurants, that's up 5.6 per cent. Manufacturing, up as well. Retail, that's up too.

The only thing that's down is inflation; inflation has considerably improved over the PC time in office.

Again, it may pain some of the undergraduate progressive economics profs that I had once upon a time, but it has definitely been shown in this past year in office that if you cut a consumer-facing tax such as the gas tax, that it does actually slow inflation; we saw it on January 1 of this year.

And gas prices in Manitoba are more than 30 cents cheaper year over year, particularly in September, from when the PCs left office to a year later with us here.

So again, gas tax had an impact. But of course, the macroeconomic effect of the policy lever that our government has pulled has also had an impact.

When we think about the future of the economy, the members opposite did not have an economic plan. I travelled the province extensively. I spoke to the chambers of commerce. I spoke to the business council. I spoke to business leaders in every corner of the province. And I would ask, with a dramatic pause at the end of my query, what is the PC economic development plan?

And no matter where I went, that's exactly what I heard: silence. Nobody could articulate an economic plan under the former Heather Stefanson government.

And so I was elected on a promise to bring forward a very solid plan, which is to continue building the diversified strength of our existing economic sectors, to lean in, to standing up a low-carbon future-

focused economy in the province and also to engage in workforce development. Which is to ensure that folks in historically marginalized communities and regions of Manitoba that not only were ignored by the PC Brian Pallister and Heather Stefanson administrations, but for far too long were overlooked over the course of Manitoba history.

And so when we look at that three-pronged approach of 'disersified' strength, low-carbon future, workforce development, finally, the business leaders tell us, there's a government in Manitoba with a plan. There's a plan for growing the economy.

And with a great deal of humility, I would like to acknowledge folks from all different walks of life: business leaders, community leaders, academics, thought leaders, people from social sectors who have taken up the mantle and have worked with our administration.

It's been very amazing to see the calibre and quality of people who've stood up to participate in the Premier's Business and Jobs Council. It's been very awesome to see people step up to participate in the Minister of Infrastructure's blue-ribbon infrastructure panel.

And as we move into this second Throne Speech, there will be many more exciting pieces of news for us to share as well too.

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank my colleague, the Official Opposition Leader—interim leader—for some time and thank the Premier (Mr. Kinew) for his time here this afternoon, as well.

I know when I reflect back on the spring, we were doing Estimates right here in this very room, and the Premier and I were able to work through quite a few questions, which I really appreciate and hope to be able to continue to do here today.

Just a few general questions, honourable Chairperson.

The Premier will often speak to the importance of a healthy democracy, and I'm hoping that he'll speak a little bit to the importance of legislation moving through the House to best represent all Manitobans, why this is important, why all political parties should be included in this important process, the process of first reading, second reading, committee, to third reading and just his opinions on it.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, thanks. It's an important question, as are all aspects of upholding democracy in Manitoba.

When we last sat, meaning not necessarily the last day of Estimates but the last sitting day of the spring

sitting, the liaison for the military, the member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz), and I left immediately following question period and after a few short tying up of loose ends, to go to Normandy.

And visiting the D-Day commemorations, 80th anniversary, was one of the great honours of my life, and it was the trip of a lifetime—not because of the amazing people or scenery or, you know, any of those things but because of talking to the veterans. And to meet Manitobans from Selkirk, from Winnipeg, from other parts of the province who ran across the beaches to defeat the Nazis when they were 19 years old, you know, 20 years old.

* (16:20)

It blows one's mind to think about it, not least of all because I have a 19-year-old son. And so to reflect on what they did and how I view my own children and to imagine what it must have been like for parents, for friends and others to know that that was happening in the name of democracy is certainly a sobering and important reminder for all of us.

The government was elected to pursue a policy, budgetary and legislative agenda, which we have begun to implement and enact. And so, obviously, the government's legislative agenda kind of carries the day, the budget being probably, I would say, the single biggest focus among the many various legislative apparati that we have at our disposal. Of course, we're in Committee of Supply as part of that budgetary process, but it also includes the budget implementation bill, the budget speech and the successive stages of committee that we'll go through.

Private members have—including the opposition, I would say—have a role to play; government members as well, too. And independent members, I think it goes without saying, given the context of who's asking the question, have an important role to play in bringing forward new ideas, new priorities, food for thought. And of course, when an independent member can win support for an idea, then to see their legislative priorities and agendas, as it were, win support in the House.

So the member brought forward a bill in the spring that I recognize has an important public policy consideration at the heart of it. And so, as I said in the spring, we would bring that to committee because I do see a public good in having members of the public share their perspectives and share their views on why this bill is important. And when did that committee happen?

An Honourable Member: Last week.

Mr. Kinew: Last Thursday? I believe last Thursday is when that hearing happened. So, again, we followed through on the commitment to the member.

This being something that has, in previous engagement in the public sphere, raised questions around the interaction between government and the independent judiciary, I think that it's important for us to proceed with—well, it's going to be an unfortunate pun here, but like a very judicious approach.

And as a result of that, I know that the Attorney General (Mr. Wiebe) has been doing a lot of work on this subject, broadly speaking, if we can say that. And from what I understand, because we do recognize the important role that the independent member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux) has, I believe that there's been engagement between the Attorney General and herself on this topic.

And so we've seen the bill receive support, we've called it to committee. And now I think, with the resources of government and having access to, you know, counsel in various forms, including the literal meaning of the term counsel when we're talking about legislation but also just, you know, counsel in terms of people with insight and able to offer advice, I do think that it's important for the Attorney General and Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) to spend some time working on this.

I guess there's a bit more I can share with the member but my time is drawing near. So happy to expand on that but, you know, I think that gives a start as to where we're at.

MLA Lamoureux: Thank you, honourable Chairperson, and I do mean it very, very sincerely; I appreciated the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) comments last spring during Estimates, as I do believe that's why the bill was able to move forward to committee.

And committee was an incredible experience. I hope he's had the opportunity to chat maybe with the Minister of Justice or just to refer to Hansard even with the testimonies and the stories that were shared, and the much-needed timeliness of this legislation.

And this sentiment was shared by everyone around the table: by the NDP, by the PCs, by independents, as well, honourable Chairperson. Every single party—political party—in this House has supported the legislation, whether that be at second reading, whether that be through comments and questions, sentiments and thoughts shared at

committee. We've even seen it supported at a national level in different provinces as well.

This legislation has been—or, very similar legislation has been introduced in this House previously by various parties. So we see it going across party lines. I've had the opportunity to speak with the Justice Minister a couple of times today. Today was an important day, because we know by the end of the day there are going to be report stage amendments; they have to be brought forward, at least some sort of notification for them.

And after speaking with the Justice Minister, he did share with me that the government didn't have any amendments for the legislation. So I'm choosing to see that in a positive light, that they have—that the government likes the legislation, they approve of the legislation. It was drafted through many, many hours of consultation, honourable Chairperson. And it was drafted based off former pieces of legislation, some that had previously been introduced by our current Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine).

So, again, I believe that the current government will view this legislation as a positive step, and my hope is that they will continue to see it through and move it on to third reading for a vote here in the House, honourable Chairperson.

So my question for the Premier is: Will he consider bringing this piece of legislation to a vote on November 7?

Mr. Kinew: I appreciate that the member opposite has acknowledged the Minister of Families' work on this topic as well. I know that it was a personal, and is a personal, priority for her. It's something that she's devoted a lot of time to, going back, I guess, since 2017, if I recall correctly. And so some seven years or more on the subject is important.

And so, for the member opposite to recognize that is important too, because it shows a bipartisan or cross-partisan spirit which I think is important for us to move forward here.

I do also recognize the work that the member opposite put into bringing participants out to the committee. I think there were some very important voices there. And I know that our Minister of Justice, the Attorney General (Mr. Wiebe), there in his ministerial capacity, to be clear, were really moved and really honoured by the words that were shared there.

And among many other things, including, you know, the reminder of this topic, there is also, I guess, a very, very direct imperative there of the important

work to continue ending intimate partner violence and to do the work of the missing and murdered Indigenous woman, girls, two-spirit plus calls to justice from the inquiry.

And so we're working on a comprehensive approach. We're working on the prevention initiatives. We have \$20 million in the budget this year for the MMIWG2S+ strategy, 15 of which went to establishing a foundation, and that is separate from searching the landfill. We have been engaging on this topic. I know that it's an important one the member has brought forward a few times and obviously, with the committee participants, has been doing a lot of legwork with the stakeholders and other voices in the community, including the jurisdictional scan.

I can tell you that I've personally had a few conversations about people with, I would say, some pretty serious expertise on the matter and—just sharing for information purposes with the committee. One thing that was shared with me is that the work that the member is calling on the judiciary to undertake is happening, and perhaps in the future we could provide some opportunities not with government but rather to just facilitate a conversation with her and folks from, I guess, the other very old fancy building on the other side of Broadway to be able to hear maybe directly from them about some of the initiatives that are going on regarding training and formation and things like that.

* (16:30)

And so that was an important piece of information for me to hear because that doesn't always come through in some of the public coverage of the topic. But that's not to say that everything that needs to be done is being done. Rather I would recognize, especially given the committee voices that we heard last week, that's there is an important continuance and opportunity for further engagement on this.

So when it comes to that, yes, I agree with the member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux). I think our team agrees too about the importance of this as a priority. In government now, you know, we're weighing, you know, some of these comments that I'm putting on the record here, additional considerations that I think are bandied about within the Department of Justice, and it's important for us to balance all of these things when we take a look at passing bills into law here in Manitoba.

So I know that the member opposite had a very recent, relatively speaking, at least, engagement with the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) on this topic, so

perhaps before providing an answer on the next steps here, I'll take this away and have a conversation with the minister so I can get a better sense of where his thinking is at, you know, how his deliberations are going, so to speak.

But we know that there's systemic change required. We know that there's investments in community supports that are required—health, mental health, addictions, economic, all sorts of investments that are needed for us to grapple with these questions. We're moving in that direction, but we also, I think, recognize the importance of the work that the member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux) is doing as well, too.

MLA Lamoureux: This will be my last question here this afternoon.

I do appreciate that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) is taking away from this conversation a new conversation to have with the Justice Minister. Again, I spoke with him a couple—on a couple of occasions earlier today, and walked away from the conversation feeling like perhaps this legislation will be moving forward. So, again, my hope is that he'll take this back to the Justice Minister and confer on what the Justice Minister is perhaps thinking on this legislation.

I do think it's really, really important, and I know our Premier has spoken on this quite a bit: the importance of democracy is huge, here in Manitoba, throughout Canada, arguably all around the world. And for one of 57 MLAs not to have their legislation brought forward but to have both legislation from the PCs and NDP legislation move forward, it does raise a bit of a conflict. I think it's really important that this government allow for legislation to move through the process that it is intended to move through.

When I think about each and every single MLA representing over 20,000 people, these individuals, these constituents of ours, they deserve to be heard, and that means allowing legislation to move forward. I think that it's important for the presenters, for all of those who took the time, all of the organizations who took the time, who contributed to this legislation, who presented at committee, waited long hours—we were at committee past 10 p.m., honourable Chairperson—I think it's important, and we owe it to them to at least bring a piece of legislation to a vote.

Why would we not do this? Why would we have this legislation go through first reading, second reading, committee of a whole, going late into the evening hours but then not have a vote on it? I think it's very important that it does move forward, and I am appealing to the Premier to do this.

I'll leave my remarks at that.

Mr. Kinew: No, I really thank the member opposite for her statement, and like I said, I'll take that bit of encouragement over to the Minister of Justice and have a conversation about it with him.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): As MLAs in—all MLAs are required to complete a mandatory respectful workplace seminar. And of course, I personally have completed one after 2019 election, and again after the 2023 election.

On January 19, 2024, the Manitoba NDP caucus met and had a respectful workplace seminar at that time. The Premier will recall he was not present.

I'm wondering if the Premier can share why he wasn't present on that day and what date the Premier completed the mandatory respectful workplace seminar that all MLAs are required to complete?

Mr. Kinew: Well, after a lot of swiping through my calendar on my official government phone, looking at the calendar app, I think I have an answer for the member opposite. But I'm just going to take a bit of time to verify the specific date in question so that I can provide accurate information to the member.

So as a result, I'll take that question under advisement for the time being and simply say that an answer on the date aspect of the question will be forthcoming.

* (16:40)

In terms of the rest of the question that the member posits here, there were, of course, training sessions offered for members of the government caucus, the opposition caucus, independent members, et cetera.

And this being a very, very busy time for our government, within the first few months of administration, there were subsequent follow-up training sessions offered to ministers of the Crown, in particular, but to other folks—it was open to other folks who, for whatever reason, would not be able to attend one of the other sessions that were in place.

So I took advantage of that generous offer from the Leg. Assembly folks who deliver this program, and I attended a session with other MLAs, and I found it to be a productive exercise. It's always interesting to work through the specific examples that are shared within that training. And, of course, having been sworn in and operating in government for a little while, though not a long time—by that point, of course, there were also, I guess, additional considerations that, you know, were being discussed and new consid-

erations that were being asked of the people delivering this training.

So I was a participant in this in 2019. Prior to that election, we did a lot of work internal to our side of the House to bring in systematized and—informed by experts in the field—human resource approach within the NDP team. And we did both our own—prior to 2019—we did our own training in which we hired a facilitator. But we also participated in one which was led by the Legislative Assembly.

And so, as it stands, we've witnessed successive iterations of this program, and in the most recent iteration of that, I had the ability to participate in it as a member of the government for the first time, which, of course, brought with it, I guess, an additional dimension of consideration when we were participating with the members both present but also, I guess, the facilitators.

To a person, I find them to be a thoughtful bunch. We ask serious questions, and, you know, we're bringing forward scenarios that aren't always contemplated in other venues in which this training is delivered. We live and we work in a unique environment. And of course, that certainly holds true not only of this Chamber but also of the various different venues in which we serve our political and legislative functions.

And so, yes, I'm very grateful for this training—you know, your kind of hustle and bustle of daily life, work life, going here and there and then you have some time to sit and contemplate some bigger questions. And so we had the ability to do that on that day, and I appreciate the opportunity provided by the Assembly for us to participate.

Mr. Wasyliw: Just want the record to reflect that it took the Premier (Mr. Kinew) four minutes to come up with the answer: I'm taking it under advisement.

Now, on July 6, 2023, Heather Stefanson told Manitobans she would not fund the landfill search. Same date, I tweeted my support for the landfill search, and I criticized the former premier for her decision. About 10 minutes later, after I posted, the director of communications called me up, and the conversation went a little bit like this: What, are you, stupid? The leader doesn't want to search the landfill. And I was told that I wouldn't be allowed to tweet further about the landfill.

Now, subsequently in a caucus meeting, the Premier advised not only myself but the rest of the caucus that it was in fact David Eby, the Premier of

BC, who convinced the Premier to search the landfill and that it was the right thing to do.

So my question to the Premier is: Why didn't he want to search the landfill, and how many months did it take before he changed his mind?

Mr. Kinew: The families of Morgan Harris and Mercedes Myran are the people who convinced me to search the landfill.

I believe it was in either late November or early December of December 2022, and there was an announcement about the search not happening immediately. And Cambria Harris, I remember, memorably said something to the effect—and I'm paraphrasing here but I think it's close to the proper verbiage—that when the comment was made that a search was not feasible, she asked: Are our lives not feasible?

And so I don't have the media coverage of the following period, but I could tell you that it would have been at Heather Stefanson's final state of the province address in front of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce that I was asked about this.

So that would likely have been early December, probably the last sitting day or whatever that was in 2022, in which I was asked about this in front of the media. And, again, I paraphrase because I don't recall the exact verbiage that I used, but I said I've been moved by the words of the daughters. So we offered our support there.

* (16:50)

Another significant inflection point happened in July 2023, where some colleagues and I invited in family members and leadership from First Nations community into what was then my office—I think it was 172 in the building—the Opposition Leader's office.

And we smoked a pipe together. And I had the opportunity to hear from them—their priorities—and to tell them in the right way, meaning after listening, after having the opportunity to sit with them in a ceremonial context but also in a social context and get to know them a bit, that, yes, we were willing to not just support them in their desire to have a landfill search, but we were willing to go to the wall on this issue in the election.

And we did. And everyone on our team can tell you that this was a tough issue for us: tough for many of us on a personal level because, obviously, there's a personal dimension to having not just the dignity and humanity of Indigenous women in particular but Indigenous people, generally, used as a wedge political

issue; but also it was tough because when we would talk to people on a doorstep about this, often the reaction we would get could be hostile.

And we were able to prevail. The PCs chose to wage a very ugly campaign, a very divisive campaign, on this issue in particular but also on the issue of parental rights. And following the election, was happy to invite the families in again to smoke the pipe again at my new office—204—and to recommit to them now, with the election having been decided, that we were going to make good on our commitment to them.

That began a series of messages and engagement with the federal government and the City and First Nations leaders. And earlier this year, we followed through with \$20 million in the budget to move ahead with the search of the Prairie Green Landfill.

I would be happy to share more about David Eby in a subsequent answer, but I think the most important thing I can say now is that we smoked the pipe together a third time at Prairie Green and indicated in the most direct way possible that Prairie Green is being searched.

Mr. Wasyliv: I want to thank the Premier (Mr. Kinew) for his candour in admitting that he initially was opposed to the landfill search.

He didn't answer as to the reasons why he was opposed to the landfill search. He did state in his answer that it was Cambria Harris that finally convinced him that it was the right thing to do, and it was that conversation that was the tipping point.

I wonder if the Premier can share with us: What was the date of that meeting with Cambria Harris that changed the Premier from being opposed to the landfill to now being a supporter of the landfill?

And I'll remind the Premier, it was August 9, 2023 when he made his first official announcement that he was going to search the landfill. That didn't happen prior to that date.

Mr. Kinew: I don't have the date of Cambria Harris' comments about are our lives not feasible, but it would have been in late November or early December 2022. I can tell you that I responded publicly on the record December 8, 2022.

And as I outlined there, we've always put the families first on this issue. In addition to not having the PCs, I guess, politicize and use these family members who are related to the murder victims of, like, a terrible, terrible crime, one of the worst crimes in Manitoba's history, committed by a serial killer

against whom a conviction was secured. You know, I'm loathe to have this issue politicized further.

And so as a result, when we engage with this we engage with it seriously, substantively; we put ceremony first, we put the families first.

And throughout a good chunk of this past year, 2024, I had to go out in public and, you know, be criticized by people I care a lot about, hear criticism from these very same families on occasion, commit over and over again that we were going to search Prairie Green but without saying—to find a way to also say that we needed to respect the matter that was before the courts and to allow that to proceed.

When the verdict was rendered, I believe it was the next day or two that the families were here to hear our plan, worked into granular detail of how to search Prairie Green, fully costed and to be delivered in a fiscally responsible manner. And so, at their request, if you visit Prairie Green today, there's a healing space for them, there's a search facility being stood up.

We're on the precipice of moving material from the target zone of the landfill. But, of course, as always, I will hold back further detail until we have an opportunity to ensure that we put the families first in providing further updates on the matter. Their wishes have to be paramount and they always will when it comes to our administration.

So we've been listening to the families' voices, we've been supporting them through the election. We contested a very cynical campaign from the PCs and emerged victorious thanks to the good hearts of the people of Manitoba and their commitment to health care, and we have made good on standing up a search of the Prairie Green Landfill.

And we will continue to put the families first and hopefully, even though there's no guarantee of success, I do pray that we can deliver what they want, which is for us to have two funerals with the remains of their loved ones. Hopefully we can do that very, very soon, but where we go from here is out of our hands.

* (17:00)

The Chairperson: Order.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise and call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

The Deputy Speaker (Tyler Blashko): The hour being 5, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 15, 2024

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