

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, October 7, 2019

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Please be seated.

Good afternoon everybody.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 2—The Public Services Sustainability Amendment Act

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler), that Bill 2, The Public Services Sustainability Act, now be read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Fielding: These amendments, who—are to enhance the bill, to enhance collective bargaining decisions made by both the Province of Manitoba as well as some of the unions that are associated.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to table the following report: The Brandon University financial—Annual Financial Report for the year ended March 31st, 2019; the University of Winnipeg Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ended March 31st, 2019; the University College of the North, 2018-2019 Annual Report.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): It's my pleasure to rise today in the Assembly to table the Material Distribution Agency Annual Report for the year ending March 31st, 2019.

It's also my pleasure to rise today in the Assembly to table the Manitoba Financial Services Agency 2019 Annual Report.

Madam Speaker: Pursuant to rural—rule 83(1)(d), I am pleased to table the letter documenting the new standing committee membership composition for this Legislature.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The Minister for Growth, Enterprise and Trade—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

Fire Prevention Week

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): This is Fire Prevention Week, the week of October 6th to 12th, 2019.

On behalf of the Office of the Fire Commissioner and the fire departments across the province, I remind all Manitobans that this year's Fire Prevention Week campaign—Not Every Hero Wears a Cape. Plan and Practise Your Escape!—works to educate everyone about the small but important actions they can take to keep themselves and those around them safe.

That message is the theme of this year's campaign and it's important because home fires today can burn faster than ever. In a typical home fire, you may have as little as one or two minutes to escape safely from the time the smoke alarm sounds. Escape planning and practice can help make—help you make the most of the time you have, giving everyone enough time to get out.

This year's campaign works to educate people about three basic but essential steps that will ensure people know how to safely escape in the event of a fire.

First of all, plan ahead for your escape. Draw a map of your home, visit each room, find two ways out—typically a door and a window—make your home escape plan.

Secondly is practise your home fire drill. Talk about your plan with everyone in your home. Make

sure your home has smoke alarms. Push the test button to make sure each alarm is working.

And thirdly, escape quickly and safely. When the smoke alarm sounds in a real fire, it is too late to start making a plan. You could have only minutes to escape safely once a smoke alarm sounds. Go to your outside meeting place, which should be a safe distance from the home and where everyone should know to meet, and call 911 or your local emergency number.

When it comes to fire safety, maybe you are already a hero in your household or community. If not, maybe you are feeling inspired to become one. It's easy to take that first step. Make your home escape plan today.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Not Every Hero Wears a Cape. Plan and Practise Your Escape! As some of you may know, this year's—it's this year's theme for Fire Prevention Week. It is true that not all heroes wear capes and that is why Manitoba families are encouraged to prepare and plan for escapes in case of fire.

The old adage, stop, drop and roll, is a phrase we have all heard of and we know. It's short and simple to remember, but it doesn't in—tell the importance of families establishing a plan that involves quick and safe escape routes for—and a safe meeting place. This week is a reminder of the importance of such fire safety techniques and to keep ourselves and our families safe.

Fires do happen, it's a possibility and a reality in our communities. In the last few weeks alone, we have had a number of fires in Manitoba.

Last Tuesday a fire broke out under the Osborne Street Bridge in the homeless encampment. Last Saturday morning, there were two fires in a space of two hours in Waverley West in two storage buildings.

In the North, fires have left people homeless without a place to turn to. Many of those who were injured got the treatment they needed. However, we know that in Gilbert Plains, tragically one of these fires resulted in a fatality.

The loss of one person in a fire is too many. I note this all to highlight the need for fire safety precautions and plans for us to promote fire safety is important not only during this Fire Prevention Week, but all throughout the year.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I ask for leave to speak in response to the minister's statement?

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

Mr. Lamont: This week, through Saturday, is Fire Prevention Week in Canada.

This year's campaign—Not Every Hero Wears a Cape. Plan and Practise Your Escape!—recognizes the everyday people who motivate their households to develop and practise a home fire escape plan.

Ensuring your family has a known plan can have a life-saving impact in the case of a fire emergency.

This week works to educate as many people as possible about the important actions they can and should take to keep themselves and those around them safe.

It's important to note that you may have as little as two minutes from when the smoke alarm sounds to escape, so a well thought out plan is important to have in place for every household.

Manitobans can go online to the National Fire Protection Association to access a checklist and more information on making a fire escape plan.

It is important to note that when the smoke alarm sounds, it is too late to start making a plan.

We would also like to thank firefighters and first responders for their remarkable courage and commitment to public service when faced with dangerous emergencies in Manitoba.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Red River North Constituency

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Municipal Relations): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize the Red River North constituency that I now represent.

I am honoured to serve as the first MLA for the new constituency, consisting of areas previously represented by my colleagues, the MLAs for Selkirk and Springfield-Ritchot.

Red River North constituency is made up of East St. Paul, St. Clements, the villages of Narol, Gonor and the communities of Lockport, East Selkirk, Libau, Scanterbury, Grand Marais and the east beaches. The communities of Red River North are located in

part on the shores of the Red River and a portion of the south basin of Lake Winnipeg.

In my short tenure as the MLA for the Red River North, I have already had the opportunity to meet and interact with some of the best families, farmers and business owners in the province, and I truly am honoured to have the opportunity to serve this very diverse area of our province.

As in the past, I will be attending many local events, including upcoming Halloween at the Plaza in East St. Paul. My wife and I and our five grandchildren will be going there to the Centennial Plaza on October 12th for a magic show, face painting and more fun activities. There is no better way, Madam Speaker, to meet my new constituents—by being involved in the community and the events that are near and dear to their hearts.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to welcome mayors of East St. Paul, Shelley Hart, and mayor of St. Clements, Debbie Fiebelkorn, to the gallery today.

Thank you.

The Maples Constituency

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): Madam Speaker, today I want to express my sincere gratitude to the community of The Maples. I am deeply—I deeply appreciate the support shown to me during the campaign period.

I have been a resident of The Maples since I was 16 years old, so, for roughly thirty years, I have had the opportunity to see the growth of our community.

The Maples first became a riding during the provincial election of 1990. I believe it is one of the most diverse ridings in Manitoba.

In the recent years or so, the population has been rapidly increasing and constant—of people who come from different backgrounds and cultures. With this happening, our community grows and becomes more diverse. I am deeply honoured to be part of the community, as well as their representative.

First, I would like to thank my wife and children for their support during the campaign period. Second, I am grateful to my volunteers and staff for their strong dedication during and after the campaign.

This was an opportunity for me to interact and engage with members of The Maples community and to receive feedback on the issues that need to be

addressed. These include health care, education, road expansions—and these are only a few of the issues.

I was able to gain a clear understanding of our community's needs. I am thrilled to be part of The Maples, and their advocate.

I acknowledge the people who have worked hard towards making The Maples a better community, and the people who have supported me, continue to do so as my—so in my role as MLA for The Maples.

I am looking forward to be working with all the members of the Legislative Assembly and the community to make The Maples and Manitoba a great place for all of us.

Thank you.

Friends and Family Appreciation

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): Madam Speaker, I've got to say, I'm feeling thankful. I know we still have one week to go before it's officially Thanksgiving Day, but I have reason to be thankful every day of the week and especially so today.

I'm thankful that, once again, I get to have a seat in this venerable Chamber. I'm thankful that the people of Radisson have trusted me enough to re-elect me. I'm thankful for an amazing campaign team that helped along the way.

I'm thankful for my campaign manager, Nicholas Cherlet. I'm thankful for my volunteer co-ordinator, Andrea Van Delden and my constituency assistant Belinda Squance, who are all in the gallery. I'm thankful for my canvass co-ordinator, Alan Forbes, and my official agent, Rudy Van Goor.

I'm thankful for super-volunteer Jonathon Nyhof and his father John who's here today. I'm thankful for the entire Blue Crew and especially to two local members Daniel Mulder and Melannie Teitsma, my daughter.

I'm thankful for my sign crew: Bob Axford who's here, John DeVries, Phil Versteeg and his crew, as well as Larry Swar and Uncle Jake Kuik ably assisted by his wife, Aunt Rita. I'm thankful for all my volunteers and for all those who made financial contributions to my campaign.

Madam Speaker, I'm thankful for my family: for my lovely wife Joanne, who is here, and our six children—yes, six—Michael, Melannie, Megan, Matthew, Marissa and Mark—Mark's here, too.

I'm thankful for my mom who's here today. I'm thankful for my dad, even though he passed away last year. I'm thankful for the example they showed me and the values they taught me and the faith they shared with me.

And above all, I'm thankful that I am not my own but I belong, body and soul, to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ. God the Father watches over me and his Spirit works within me and together they give me matchless comfort in any and all circumstances.

Madam Speaker, I'm thankful to live and serve in this beautiful province. I'm thankful to be a citizen in this amazing country where we enjoy unparalleled rights and freedoms. I'm thankful to be led by a Premier (Mr. Pallister) who will defend those rights and to be part of a team that embraces those freedoms.

Madam Speaker, I'm thankful for the opportunity to speak today.

You know I could talk for hours, but I only have two minutes, so with the few seconds I have left I just have one thing to say: thank you, Madam Speaker.

Methamphetamine Crisis

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): The Premier's response to the addictions epidemic in our province has been to sit back, blame people and hope it all goes away. Well, it's not going away. Families are paying the price for his inaction and lack of compassion or concern.

Instead of investing in harm-reduction strategies, prioritizing the safety and lasting recovery of those who are struggling with addictions, the Premier has repeatedly turned his back on them while simply ignoring the advice of health-care professionals. While meth is ruining lives, the Pallister government is dismantling our health-care system, despite the high numbers of people getting treatment for meth-related issues.

Treating people who are struggling with meth addiction is uniquely challenging because they need long-term addiction recovery programs and because meth-induced psychosis can result in violence. Front-line workers are not equipped to deal with the issue of meth-induced patients.

Despite the Premier's rhetoric on offering services, we know that he has repeatedly underfunded or done absolutely nothing. There is simply not enough resources dedicated to addictions and mental health services to have any impact on the meth crisis. The supports that do exist are unequipped to keep up

with the current demand, exasperating the sense of desperation that is permeating this very province.

We know Manitobans are struggling in the current system. Helping them—in fact, this Premier has made a very conscious decision to abandon all of our relatives with mental health crisis here in Manitoba.

The question is, how many more Manitobans' lives will have to be ruined before this Premier takes action? The Premier needs to quit turning his back on the meth crisis and address it now.

Manitoba Tourism Award Recipients

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Two individuals and an organization, all with connections to my constituency of Riding Mountain, were recognized as the best of the best at the 21st annual Manitoba Tourism Awards held in Winnipeg on September 19th.

Megan Dudeck won the Aspiring Youth Award. Her work with Parks Canada in Riding Mountain National Park elevated the park's marketing campaigns and events, including the first-ever Pride event in a national park in Canada. Her work has contributed to increased visits, especially during the spring, fall and winter seasons.

The Third + Bird Clear Lake Summer Market was recognized with the Partnership Award. Partnering with Clear Lake Country, the first-ever Third + Bird market outside the city of Winnipeg was held in Wasagaming, boosting the profile of both events.

The Award of Distinction—Ambassador went to Karly McRae, who has grown into a fierce leader and champion for tourism and economic development in Clear Lake Country in Riding Mountain National Park.

At the age of just 30, Karly became the owner of Lakehouse Properties, and with the revitalization of the property into a boutique hotel has set the bar for business growth throughout the community. She is also the chair and founder of the successful Clear Lake Country destination marketing organization.

Madam Speaker, I am very proud of my constituents for their contributions to having Manitoba recognized by Lonely Planet as one of the top 10 regions in the world to visit in 2019. Congratulations to Megan Dudeck, Third + Bird and Karly McRae on being named winners of a Manitoba Tourism Award.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce to you.

We have seated in the public gallery, from River East Collegiate, 16 grade 9 students under the direction of Anita Stepaniuk, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable minister of Rossmere—honourable member of Rossmere.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Public Services Sustainability Act Timeline for Proclamation

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, in 2017, this Premier passed but then did not proclaim his unconstitutional wage freeze legislation, which puts it in the odd position of having received royal assent but not actually being a law, technically, here in Manitoba, but the impact has been very clear.

For more than 100,000 public sector workers, they have seen their wages frozen, even as the cost of living rose higher each and every year. This is a real concern for nurses, for teachers, for people who fix our highways. They're wondering when are they going to get a raise to help them keep up with the ever increasing cost of living.

Question for the Premier is simple: Does he intend to proclaim that bill into law?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I thank my colleague for his comments, Madam Speaker, because they allow me to make mention of the fact that, yes, the impact is becoming increasingly clear. The finances under the previous administration were a mess. We had not one, not two, but three credit rating downgrades, costing the people of Manitoba tens of millions of dollars—money that had to go to increased debt costs because the NDP doubled our debt in just the last few years before they were finally thrown out of office—and now, just last—late last week, we see that our government's work is being recognized as internationally respected Standard & Poor's global ratings has announced that because we have delivered better than expected financial results, we're now a positive ranking, which saves millions of dollars that we can now put towards the things that Manitobans value most.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, Madam Speaker, that's not very reassuring for the people here in the province who have seen their wages frozen even as this government continues to cut essential services like health care.

Again, Madam Speaker, the Premier has brought forward an interesting proposition. He is, today, looking to amend a bill which is not actually a law. We can set that aside for the legal scholars to debate and to examine, but the real-world impact for the people of Manitoba is this: teachers, nurses, people who fix our highways—they have not received the cost-of-living increase for years because of this Premier, even as all their bills get more and more expensive.

The question for the Premier and for his ministers today is: Do they intend to pass and proclaim their wage freeze legislation into law?

Mr. Pallister: Well, where was all this sympathy in the part of the NDP for front-line workers, Madam Speaker, when they were dipping into their pockets and raising taxes on them year after year after year. This was an administration, under the previous government, that led the country in only one category, and that was in taxing more from the front-line workers and families and seniors all across the province.

The incredible thing with the accomplishments of this government in its first term is that, despite an increasingly fragile global economy, despite the inherited incredible levels of debt from the previous NDP—the highest in the country—we didn't raise taxes. No, we left more money in the hands of Manitoba families, and, in fact, we lowered taxes like the PST.

So, while lowering taxes and putting more money into the pockets of Manitobans is our priority, taking the money out was the NDP's priority.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, I don't know why the Premier is afraid to negotiate, and yet, that is what he's done in his time in office.

He ran away from the negotiating table with the federal government, just because Justin Trudeau was on the other side of that table. And then here in the province of Manitoba, he's been afraid to negotiate in good faith with those people who deliver our public services. He has not negotiated with teachers, or with

nurses or the people who fix our roads across the province. That's more than 100,000 Manitobans who haven't gotten any sort of cost-of-living increase, nor have they received good faith negotiations from this government.

He is now trying to amend a bill which is not a law.

Does he intend to proclaim either of them into law here in Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I appreciate the member making reference to negotiation skills, Madam Speaker, and running away. The member has some expertise in both those things—well, not the negotiating skills, just the running away part.

The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that we are asking all our front-line workers to put their hands on deck. We're asking all managers to put their hands on deck. And, in fact, we've reduced the size of management at the top of the organization, which is what the NDP built up. They didn't strengthen the front lines; they strengthened it up at the top.

So we're trimming at the top. And we're finding savings. And we're redirecting those savings to the front line. And companies like S&P Global are recognizing that and giving us a high rating, saying we've overachieved on our commitments, delivered better than expected financial results and we're addressing the need to prepare for headwinds that are coming all across the Western world, Madam Speaker.

So, while we're strengthening the financial situation and the social situation here in Manitoba, the NDP weakened it. While they broke the system, we're repairing it.

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

Spring Flooding Concerns Government Preparation

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): There has been a massive amount of rain in Manitoba over the past few weeks, I think as we can all attest. And we know that, unfortunately, later on this week, there's more rain to come and potentially even some snow.

Now, while that is always cause for us to keep refreshing the weather apps on our phones, there are some serious issues that this raises. It does, when there's heavy—heavily saturated soil here in the

province during a fall, we know that the next spring there can be an increasing likelihood of flooding. It's always a concern with climate change here in Manitoba.

So the question for the Premier that I have is this: What specific steps are his—is his government taking in light of this recent weather pattern to prepare for the possibility of flooding next spring?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, I appreciate the new-found enthusiasm for the weather on the part of the member. I would tell him that we are proceeding to do flood protection after investing close to half a billion dollars in getting people back home, in the Interlake, that the NDP never got home. We're now making sure that they're going to be safer around the Lake Manitoba basin with a historic investment in flood prevention there. And that is important and significant because those people have the right to get their lives back.

And so we would hope that the NDP would use the occasion to support our project in this respect and to make sure that we work together to strengthen the security that people around the Lake Manitoba basin deserve to have.

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

Sale of Amphibex Machines

Mr. Kinew: So, we know that flooding could be a concern next spring and, unfortunately, we also know the steps that this Premier is already taking. And I'll table a request for proposals that was recently just issued by this First Minister.

They're looking at selling off the Amphibex machines, which are used to clear ice from the Red River and from other places to prevent spring flooding here in Manitoba. Directly quoting from that document: Divestment from the Amphibex machines and associated equipment: this option could include sale of Manitoba's Amphibex machines to the new service provider. End quote.

Now, Manitoba has invested millions of dollars into these Amphibex machines. They are a made-in-Manitoba success story, if you will, to help prevent spring flooding.

Why is the Premier trying to sell off our Amphibexes?

Mr. Pallister: Well, we're interested, Madam Speaker, in making sure that Manitobans are secure,

as secure as is possible, given Mother Nature's vagaries. That's why we've invested significantly—the most significant investments, by the way, in the history of Manitoba—in restoring the rainy day fund.

The member speaks about readiness. We agree that we need to be ready in the event of possible flooding or other disasters in the province. The NDP actually used that rainy day fund to try to create the false impression that they were able to manage the finances of the province, when they were not.

* (14:00)

They depleted the fund from well over \$800 million down to around \$100 million—in good times, Madam Speaker. And now we are going to restore it and have begun the process of restoring it so that those funds are available in the event of future flooding, forest fires and the like.

So where they mismanaged, we are managing well.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the question was about Amphibex, the machines. The answer—well, there wasn't much of an answer there, was there?

Again, these Amphibex machines are used to protect communities like Selkirk, like St. Clements, like St. Andrews—tons of communities upstream from Lake Winnipeg and other areas of the province which are prone to flooding.

We know that these Amphibex machines—their use, their application—was in many ways pioneered here in Manitoba, and as such they represent an innovation that we ought to be proud of in terms of fighting climate change and keeping communities safe from flooding.

However, we now know that this Premier is looking to sell off these machines. It's a questionable decision at best; could potentially put communities at greater risk of flooding.

Will the Premier stand in the House today and commit that he will not sell off our Amphibex machines?

Mr. Pallister: Well, it reminds me, Madam Speaker, of a few weeks ago when we made a commitment as a government to invest an additional \$2 billion in health care, and the member opposite went out and

proclaimed that he'd give people a toonie for parking. His priorities are all wrong.

The fact is we're investing hundreds of millions of dollars in flood prevention while he's talking about a machine that is a fraction of the investment. While we're investing hundreds of millions of dollars in a Conservation Trust, he talks about smaller items.

Madam Speaker, his ability to prioritize is something that's on display here today.

The fact of the matter is flood prevention, investments in a rainy day fund totalling over \$1 billion—just those two initiatives alone—are tremendously significant preventative measures that we are taking as a government to protect Manitobans against disaster.

One of those disasters we know, in the past, was an NDP government that failed to do exactly that.

Manitoba Public Insurance Online Insurance Services

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): Madam Speaker, the Pallister government spent millions of dollars creating an online system for basic insurance services. By the government's own estimates, this would have saved Manitobans tens of millions of dollars, but the Pallister government chose not to implement this system to protect their friends in the insurance industry.

Why are they only concerned with their political friends?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): Certainly, the NDP under—or, MPI under the NDP didn't—had, what, 17 years, I believe, Madam Speaker, to move towards online services and, quite frankly, ignored it like they do with almost every file that they were presented with in the 17 years.

We're looking forward to working with MPI, as we go forward, through their GRA process, which commenced today, Madam Speaker, and certainly looking forward to working with them.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Madam Speaker, MPI rates are up—8 per cent in just the last few years.

Through freedom of information, we have discovered that two consultants, Deloitte and Avasant,

both provided the government advice on use of the online services.

I ask the minister: Did these firms—recommended to the government that they go through online sales, and how much did their work cost?

Mr. Wharton: You know, the NDP were happy to give away, you know, reserves to fit their political needs, Madam Speaker, as they did in many cases, in particular to MPI.

It—we—I 'cer' the member had an opportunity to read the paper today, because I know that's where a majority of the news comes from from the NDP side of the House, but rates are projected for passenger vehicles, Madam Speaker, to be 0.9 per cent decrease for 2020.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Madam Speaker, the—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sandhu: —answer, of course, is that Deloitte and Avasant recommended implementing online services, but the Pallister government ignored that advice, threw millions of dollars away, all to protect their friends in the insurance industry.

Why does the minister and the Pallister government continue to interfere with our Crown to protect their well-connected friends?

Mr. Wharton: I can tell the member opposite that both MPI and the brokers are focused on providing the best service and products for Manitobans, Madam Speaker. And I can also tell the member that we've also directed MPI to enter into conciliation with IBAM.

Conciliation will bring together—both together to find a solution that benefits all Manitobans.

Infrastructure Investments Federal Funding

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Manitobans rely on strong infrastructure investments to grow our economy, to build our province and for their livelihoods. But instead of making smart, strategic investments in infrastructure, this Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his minister have decided to leave federal infrastructure money sitting on the table.

These are much-needed upgrades to our roads, to our highways, and they are being passed by. These

are also projects that would help reduce our environmental impact.

Why is the minister depriving Manitobans of much-needed investments in infrastructure?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): The member for Concordia knows that he's gotten it all wrong.

In fact, our government has invested historic amounts since we've been elected, and we're willing to put our record up against the NDP record any time. In fact, I'd like to point out to the Manitoba Legislature, the Department of Infrastructure has now tabled the environmental impact statement for the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin outlet. We've gotten accomplished in three years, which—something that the member for Concordia and every one of the NDP members never could have—get accomplished in 17 years.

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

Mr. Wiebe: The reality is, Madam Speaker, that important projects are stalled under this government, and their own documents now show that they've spent less than 10 per cent of the federal funds for infrastructure in our province that they had available to them.

These are good jobs for Manitobans, these are needed upgrades that families count on. But they continue to drag their heels and fight the federal government every chance they get.

Why is this minister leaving important infrastructure investments on the table?

Mr. Schuler: Well, again, the member for Concordia has his facts all wrong.

First of all, it is a 10-year program and, yes, we've already taken 10 per cent of that money in the first year of the program. Madam Speaker, what I'd like to point out to the member opposite, while he's on the topic, if we want to talk about investments in infrastructure, the first full year of the NDP, when they got into office—2000-2001—they spent \$98 million on infrastructure. Our government, first year in office, spent \$443 million on infrastructure.

Manitoba—when it comes to investing, our government has always been No. 1. We need no lessons from the member from Concordia.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Once again, Madam Speaker, the minister refuses to be accountable for the under-spending that his government is undertaking. And it couldn't be clearer, when the facts are this clear, when it comes to the North End treatment plant. Manitobans understand this is an important project that would make our environment better and is an important priority for them.

But they refuse, this government does, to provide municipalities the much-needed funds to upgrade and repair roads. They refuse to fix Manitobans' highways. And the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and minister continue to cost Manitobans in more ways than one.

Why is the minister refusing to use federal infrastructure dollars on the priorities of Manitobans?

Mr. Schuler: The member for Concordia is like a pickerel on a dock: he's just flopping all around.

I'd like to point out to the member, when it comes to underspending, the first year—full year of government, they spent \$98 million; the second year they had government: \$93 million; the third year: \$111 million.

Madam Speaker, in the first three years of their government, they didn't even spend what we spend in one year, every year consistently on infrastructure.

* (14:10)

And I'd like to point out to the House our government has spent on amazing projects. And I'd like to point them to Freedom Road, which the community begged for for 17 years. Member for Concordia, the Leader of the Opposition, the NDP couldn't get it done. Under the leadership of our Premier and our government, we got it done on time, on budget, Madam Speaker.

Agricultural Crown Lands Leasing Concerns

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Madam Speaker, for nearly two years our party has raised concerns in this House about the minister's Crown land reforms and the devastating effect it will have on family farms.

The minister ripped up a balanced approach that ensured young people could expand their herds and remain in Manitoba. In its place, the only criterion the minister now considers is who has the most money,

and he's doing this right in the middle of a crisis, as producers struggle to find feed for their animals.

Why has the minister pursued such an unreasonable approach to Crown lands?

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Agriculture): I thank the member for the question.

In fact, The Crown Lands Amendment Act—there's something there for our young farmers. Something's going to be modernized.

We had an antiquated system that was a point system that didn't work. In fact, land stayed in the hands of people that weren't even using cattle anymore. So, certainly, in subletting it, this is a chance for our young producers to finally have an opportunity to get this Crown land.

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

Mr. Brar: Madam Speaker, nearly 400 beef producers gathered in Ste. Rose du Lac last week to express their outrage with these changes.

Many producers explained that over 90 per cent of their operations are Crown lands and they risk losing their farms should an out-of-province corporation outbid them for the land they have held for years. Others explained that these changes make it unlikely that their children will carry on their farms. This spells the death of the family farm for many beef producers.

Why is the minister putting dollars ahead of the continuance of our family farms?

Mr. Eichler: The member is dead wrong. I'll be happy to provide a briefing to the member in order for him to understand exactly the technicalities of The Crown Lands Amendment Act.

This gives the young farmers the opportunity to lease this land for 15 years, with two more automatic renewals if they so wish. So this is an act that's going to be benefitting young farmers, not holding them back, like they did for 17 years under their watch.

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

Mr. Brar: Madam Speaker, the minister knows full well that what he is doing is a radical departure to how agricultural Crown land is leased in Canada.

Many of the producers at the meeting in Ste. Rose du Lac fear skyrocketing increases in their lease payments, and they know our western

neighbours, including Saskatchewan and Alberta, don't have systems like the one the minister is imposing.

The minister still has an opportunity to change course.

Will he restore the point system that ensured young producers had a fair shot at building their herds and staying in Manitoba?

Mr. Eichler: Crown land is a very important asset for Manitobans. It belongs to all Manitobans, and all Manitobans should have access to that Crown land. The Crown amendment act will do exactly that: give them the accessibility that they need in order to provide new beef herds for our Manitoba farmers.

PC Election Candidate Issuance of Fishing Licence

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, during the election, the Minister of Sustainable Development claimed through the media that she did not intervene to benefit Tory candidate Ron Evans with a fishing licence. It turns out that's not true.

Through freedom of information, we now know that it was in fact the minister's decision to grant Mr. Evans a licence, and I would like to know why the minister misled Manitobans.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): Madam Speaker, our department has a fair process for all commercial fishers, and the department had processed the application just as they would any other candidate. And the result was to grant Mr. Evans a portion of that fishery, as he was entitled to. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Wolseley, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Naylor: Madam Speaker, it's still perplexing why the minister misled Manitobans through the media. The decision document dated April 9th, 2019, regarding Mr. Evans reads: that a decision is requested as soon as possible.

So, just before he became a candidate, the minister decided to award Mr. Evans a fishing licence against the wishes of the local fishers co-op, and then covered up that decision, telling media during the election that she did not intervene—but it is, in fact, right here in black and white in these documents.

So why did the minister mislead Manitobans?

Ms. Squires: Well, Madam Speaker, what is perplexing is this NDP's fixation on misleading and fear mongering and secret deals for their friends. That's something that that party was an expert on.

Our government has a process. We followed a process thoroughly, and we stand behind the decisions that we have made.

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

Ms. Naylor: Madam Speaker, let's be clear.

The minister told the media that she did not intervene on Mr. Evans' behalf. We heard a little earlier that perhaps the other party doesn't follow the news and we do, and so that's how we know about this.

But, the facts are pretty clear—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Naylor: —in the tabled document. She—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Naylor: She made a decision, based on the document that I submitted, to award Mr. Evans a licence. She refused to explain that to the public because she knows it's entirely inappropriate to award a licence to one of her party's candidates right before an election and to not follow the process that was in place with the fishing co-op.

So why does the minister continue to mislead Manitobans on this point?

Ms. Squires: Well, Madam Speaker, the only one who's misleading anyone right now is the member for Wolseley.

And I can understand why the NDP are a little bit sensitive on the handling of the fisheries files. For years they did nothing to address the sustainability of the fisheries in the province of Manitoba.

Since our government took office, we have addressed very challenging issues. We're working very collaboratively with fishers so that we can have a sustainable fishery, that we can grow the fishery in the province of Manitoba, unlike members opposite, who literally turned their back on the fishers, allowed Lake Winnipeg to become the most endangered lake in the world and also allowed zebra mussels to come in at an unprecedented rate.

That's their record on managing the fisheries. We've got a record that we're very proud of.

Lead Contamination Sites Weston School Playground

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We all know that there have been ongoing issues of lead contamination across Winnipeg. Last week in Estimates, the Minister of Health had this to say about lead tests in soil. He said, and I quote: Members of the NDP knew and took deliberate steps to not disclose levels of lead in the soil at the Weston School playground.

Does the minister have evidence of who made these decisions and what the discussion was? Or is the minister or the Premier (Mr. Pallister) willing to release any documentation or emails the government has to support these allegations?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): Well, I appreciate the question on transparency in regards to the contamination of soil in the province of Manitoba.

Where the NDP hid the reports in 1988–Mr. Pawley hid the reports, and all throughout the 17 years that they were in government, they hid the reports on lead contamination in various neighbourhoods throughout the province.

Not only has our government released all that information, made it publicly available, we've also undertaken additional soil samples, we've also hired a consultant to give us proper advice on how to move forward to ensure a healthy, natural environment for all members of the community.

* (14:20)

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

Kavanaugh Park Air Monitor

Mr. Lamont: Thank you, Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*—sorry about that.

The issue of lead contamination from old sources is long standing.

We know there were smelters in Weston, near Point Douglas and other areas, that could've been sources of lead and other heavy metals, but it is an open question about whether residents of St. Boniface are still being subjected to new pollution from modern scrap metal recycling when burning metal may be vaporized and raining down on people's yards.

An air monitor was promised. It was installed. The website says it's working, but it isn't sharing

the data. So—the Kavanaugh Park air monitor has completely disappeared from the government's website.

When will this be fixed, Madam Speaker?

Ms. Squires: I'd like to point out that the member's opposite fear mongering, mudslinging and putting incorrect information is certainly not helpful to the debate.

What I can tell him also about the additional air quality monitoring station that we—that our government provided after the NDP had slashed the funding for air quality monitoring; we've been restoring that funding. We have a mobile unit as well as a new stationary unit at Kavanaugh Park.

They are uploading the data. That data is reporting on a very regular basis, and if the member opposite would like a briefing on how to interpret the data, I'd be more than happy to provide that.

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

Testing for Individuals

Mr. Lamont: No, I would appreciate that the information just be posted on the website for all to see.

On the issue of lead contamination and ingestion, we are having to beg and plead for air, water and soil testing. There is another option, which is that we should just be testing people for exposure to lead and both treating them and finding the source. It was blood tests for lead in children of workers in the 1970s that first proved there was an issue with lead contamination.

Will this government consider following the example of other jurisdictions and test individuals for lead, then find the source and follow up with remediation later?

Ms. Squires: Well, unlike members opposite, who irresponsibly just announced a pot of money for actions that had absolutely no outcomes when it came to the lead contamination issue, our government has hired expert advice.

We will be following the advice from our experts in terms of what next steps should be taken to ensure that we have a natural environment that is protected, as well as public health.

Public Service Sustainability Act Introduction of Legislation

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): On Friday, Standard & Poor's bond rating agency improved Manitoba's outlook from stable to positive. This is another sign of—our commitment to fixing Manitoba's finances is getting positive results.

In the continued interests of responsible fiscal management, today the Finance Minister introduced Bill 2, which further encourages an all-hands-on-deck approach to repairing the financial mess left by the previous NDP administration.

Can the minister please share with this House why this bill is so important to the sustainability of our public services?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Well, thank you for the question.

S&P is right: the outlook for Manitoba is very positive. Today I introduced The Public Services Sustainability Amendment Act. This bill broadens sustainability savings and really increases the opportunities for employers, as well as unions, to bargain and work together.

We've been listening to employees and employers, and these amendments will make collective bargaining more flexible and more responsive, Madam Speaker. It will allow for greater discretion in compensation and will also enhance innovative ideas to meet the needs of both taxpayers as well as employees.

This is part of our plan Manitoba—to make Manitoba one of the most improved provinces in Canada, Madam Speaker.

Clinical and Preventive Services Plan Timeline for Report Release

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, Manitobans deserve more answers from the minister and his government on what's to come in their health-care system.

We know that a draft of the next provincial clinical preventative and services plan was submitted to the minister's office in June, and we know that the minister has used the first clinical preventative and services plan as validation for all of his cuts and closures.

Manitobans deserve to know what's to come.

Has the minister approved the draft plan?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Acting Minister of Health, Seniors, and Active Living): I appreciate the question, and Manitobans were very delighted to know what was next to come: a \$2-billion health-care guarantee that our government announced.

That includes a \$90-million enhancement to the St. Boniface Hospital, an additional hiring of 200 nurses, as well as the opening of the dedicated heart—or, the stroke unit at the HSC campus. So Manitobans have a lot to look forward in terms of health-care guarantee delivery.

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

MLA Asagwara: Manitobans are continuing to experience the effects of the minister's health-care cuts each and every single day.

Every time a family tries to find a family doctor, the wait list continues to grow. Every time they try to access preventative primary care, they can't, because this minister continues to close clinics. Every time they step foot into the remaining ERs and urgent cares, they're waiting longer and longer. And when their parents and grandparents need physiotherapy and occupational therapy post-operation, they're paying more and more out-of-pocket.

Could the minister please inform the House when the provincial clinical preventative and services plan will be released?

Ms. Squires: I'm pleased to be able to stand up and refute the member's opposite misinformation that she put out in her preamble.

In fact, our government has hired 300 new nurses since we took office; we spent \$414 million more on health care than the NDP ever did; we've guaranteed a \$2-billion additional enhancement in health care; and this morning we made a wonderful investment in mental health services where we are getting real action.

We've got many new initiatives to address mental health concerns in the province of Manitoba. We're transforming the health-care system, something members opposite lacked the courage to do.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, the phase 2 updates left a glimpse of what's to come for Manitobans in the health-care system.

The minister's planned changes are another step towards creating a two-tier health-care system. We know the minister is planning on privatizing services, and that's not all. They're also planning on more business cases for other areas of our health-care system.

Could the minister please inform the House when the provincial clinical preventative and services plan will be released, so all Manitobans can get the answers and the information that they deserve?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I guess, Madam Speaker, the NDP's pessimism isn't based on fact, because the fact is that our wait times have improved at all Winnipeg hospitals.

Grace Hospital, since the NDP were put out of office: 19 per cent improvement in waits; Health Sciences: 5 per cent improvement; Concordia: 17 per cent shorter waits; Seven Oaks: 4 per cent; Victoria: 35 per cent; and St. B: 29 per cent.

Madam Speaker, worrying about phase 2—I think Manitobans are tremendously excited based on the success so far of phase 1. Let phase 2 get underway.

Consumer Protection Government Record

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): My question is to the Premier.

This government has done nothing to support consumer issues in the last three years. We have consumers victimized by home builders, shoddy construction of new homes; we have direct sellers, who have been—duped residents into signing long-term contracts that they didn't understand for goods such as water purifier equipment. We have companies offering free samples of beauty products online, only to have customer cards be charged multiple times when they failed to cancel in the time frame specified in mice type, buried deep in the online contract.

When will this government wake up and start defending consumers?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I know that the member failed to protect consumers, as did the party he belonged to, for many years. And he knows it too, Madam Speaker, and that's why he just campaigned for the second time in a row without the words New Democrat on his sign.

The fact remains, whenever the NDP had a chance to raid the pockets of Manitobans, whether it was on raising car registration fees or adding the PST to home insurance, they did it. They grabbed the money. They said, we can spend it better than you people.

And that's what this member over here was part of, Madam Speaker. He was part of that raid on the purchasing power and the affordability of the people of Manitoba. He should apologize to the people of Manitoba for picking their pockets for so many years.

* (14:30)

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

Mr. Maloway: The Premier should have driven around the Elmwood constituency. He would have seen hundreds of signs with NDP prominently displayed on the sign. But he takes a route around the constituency any time he has to come into Rossmere because he won't drive through—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Maloway: Now, Madam Speaker, many new home buyers have had new houses falling apart shortly after possession.

When will this government take action to protect these homeowners?

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, I know he's trying to lobby the leader on this repositioning away from the Liberals but I don't think it's going to work. He's stuck over there—[interjection]—stuck in the outlands of the Legislature because he never stood up for Manitobans when he had the chance.

He was part of an NDP government that raided the bank balances of Manitobans year after year after year, that picked the pockets of Manitobans, that made zero progress, for example, Madam Speaker, on helping Manitobans get more online insurance products. Something he could have advocated for but failed to.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral—[interjection] Order.

The time for oral questions has expired.

Petitions?

**MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC
IMPORTANCE**

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

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I rise to present today, under rule 38(1), a matter of urgent public importance.

I move, seconded by the MLA for River Heights, that under rule 38(1), the ordinary business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the need for urgent attention to the changes in the regulations related to the Crown lands leasing agreement as the changes may have a devastating impact on the livelihoods of hundreds of farmers so that they may not be able to operate predictably and sustainably.

Madam Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable member for St. Boniface, I should remind all members that under rule 38(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other recognized parties in the House are allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately.

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

Mr. Lamont: I raise this MUPI to bring urgent attention to the changes in regulations related to the Crown lands leasing agreement, as the changes may have a devastating impact on the livelihoods of hundreds of farmers so they may not be able to operate predictably and sustainably.

We've heard concerns from many people on these changes. Last week, in Ste. Rose du Lac, close to 400 people gathered to organize in opposition to the regulatory changes to the program. This is an issue that needs to be addressed soon.

The government's promise of a balanced and modernized approach to handling the program does not live up to that which the changes to the regulations deliver. The regulations announced September 27th risk driving hundreds of farmers out of business and driving farmers out of Manitoba. The farmers and communities who are affected need to know now

whether this government is going to act, to—and continue with the mistake they're making or whether they're willing to change course and fix the problem they've made.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Speaking to the requested matter of urgent public importance, there is no question that this an important issue, and I wouldn't dispute that it's important, Madam Speaker.

And certainly our Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) has answered questions and spoken to the issue and the reason and the rationale for the change, Madam Speaker. And when it comes to how this relates to flooding that is happening in many parts of our province and the impact that it's having on agriculture, our Minister of Agriculture has been fully engaged and responsive on that issue as well.

But the broader issue is not so much whether it is important but whether it rises to such urgency that the matters of the day should be set aside and whether or not there are other opportunities to raise these issues.

Of course, we have Estimates. We plan to have Estimates this afternoon and we've already committed to have Estimates for the rest of the week. There will be opportunities in the different Estimates, in particular when it comes to Agriculture, for the member to ask questions on this particular issue. But I also would note that in question period is an opportunity to ask questions on this issue, if it is of such importance to the member opposite.

Of course, I did hear the NDP, the Official Opposition, raise this in question period, and there was an eloquent answer from the Minister of Agriculture. But what surprises me is that the very member of the very party that brings forward this matter of urgent public importance didn't think it was of such importance to even raise it during question period, Madam Speaker.

So he defeats his own case by his actions, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): I do actually want to concur with my colleague, the member opposite, in respect of, that, of course, that this is a very important issue. And, Madam Speaker, that is why the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar) brought it up in question period, understanding the need to have a public discourse in this Chamber today on the matter.

I would suggest, Madam Speaker, that the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) had ample time in his three questions to bring it up as well, or even, if he was so inclined, to give one of his other members some time, up in question period, to also bring up the question. But he chose neither of those options.

So, Madam Speaker, as you know, we do have Estimates. We only have Estimates for four days this week. I know that the Liberal members are anxious to also have some time in Estimates. So I would suggest that they concentrate on Estimates, and that we look forward to your judgment on this.

Miigwech.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair on the motion proposed by the honourable member for St. Boniface for a matter of urgent public importance.

The 90-minute notice required prior to the start of proceeding—Routine Proceedings by rule 38(1) was provided, and I thank the honourable member for that.

Under our rules and practices, the subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention. There must also be no other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter.

I have listened very carefully to the arguments put forward. Although the subject of regulations and Crown lands leasing agreements and the impact on farmers are important issues for our society, I do not believe the public interest will suffer if the issue is not debated today.

I would also note that there are other opportunities where this issue can be raised, such as during oral questions, members statements, grievances or the consideration of the Agricultural Estimates. Therefore, with the greatest of respect, I rule that this motion is out of order as a matter of urgent public importance.

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I have an amendment to the Estimates sequences.

In accordance with section 2(b) of the Sessional Order passed by this House on September 30th, 2019,

we are advising that the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in room 254 will consider the Estimates of the Department of Justice instead of Executive Council for today, October 7th, 2019, and tomorrow, October 8th, 2019.

In the event that the Estimates of the Department of Justice concludes prior to the adjournment hour on either days, the Estimates of the Department of Sustainable Development will be considered next on these days only.

And this has been signed by myself and the Opposition House Leader.

Madam Speaker: It is been announced that in accordance with section 2(b) of the Sessional Order passed by this House on September 30th, 2019, we are being advised that the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in room 254 will consider the Estimates of the Department of Justice instead of Executive Council for today, October 7th, 2019, and tomorrow, October 8th, 2019.

In the event that the Estimates of the Department of Justice concludes prior to the adjournment hours on either days, the Estimates of the Department of Sustainable Development will be considered next on these days only.

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, would you please resolve into Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider Estimates this afternoon.

The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

JUSTICE

* (14:50)

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

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

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Welcome, committee members and good afternoon. It is an honour and privilege, as Minister of

Justice and Attorney General, to introduce the 2019- 20 budgetary Estimates for Manitoba Justice.

The department has been undergoing transformational changes that are intended to align decision-making processes with the government-wide transformation strategy and the criminal justice system modernization strategy.

The changes we've implemented will support improved service to Manitobans. A new series of robust performance and outcome 'messers'—measures will provide the required knowledge to make informed decisions and demonstrate to Manitobans that the changes we've made have proved effective.

Opportunities created by the department's commitment to continuous improvement have given us the ability to invest additional resources in areas that promote public safety, provide for effective and efficient operations and enhance overall value for money to Manitobans.

As was recently announced, we have created a Policing and Public Safety Strategy which will advance a number of priority initiatives in collaboration with police agencies and other stakeholders. In light of the significant challenges being faced by policing agencies across Manitoba, including high crime rates, Budget 2019 includes an additional \$2.3 million to target drug-related criminal activity, including meth- and gang-related crime prevention initiatives.

Investment initiatives for 2019-20 will include designing and building a collaborative provincial intelligence model; supporting collaborative policing projects and investigations to suppress and disrupt illicit drug-trafficking networks; an interdiction pilot project; enhancing support for community mobilization, or hubs, as they are known; and public safety strategy design, an initiative for Thompson.

Victim Services continues to assist approximately 20,000 victims each year and serves victims of serious crimes, victims of domestic violence and child victims. In support of Victim Services, Budget 2019 includes \$310,000 in additional resources for a family court support program and parallel supports for victims where offenders are involved in restorative justice.

The creation of a family court support program will provide direct service to assist victims of domestic violence who are currently involved in or preparing to enter the family court process. This

program will complement Manitoba's family law reform initiative and enable Victim Services to provide a full range of services to victims of domestic violence. The program will begin as a pilot project in Winnipeg and will be phased in over two fiscal years.

Additionally, as mentioned, resources are being invested to provide parallel supports for victims where offenders are involved in restorative justice programming. These enhanced services will allow for victims' full participation in Manitoba's restorative justice process.

Manitoba's criminal justice modernization strategy is committed to improving the lives of those affected by crime with more effective restorative justice alternatives. Restorative justice is an important approach to crime that focuses on holding the offender accountable while allowing all parties involved to address their needs in relation to the harm caused by the crime.

Budget 2019 also identifies \$500,000 for the purpose of a Justice social impact bond. This will be the first time that a social impact bond is undertaken within Justice. Outcome measures will focus on the areas of reducing recidivism, crime prevention and crime reduction.

Legal Aid Manitoba continues to experience a demand for legal services for asylum seekers crossing the border between Canada and the United States. Budget 2019 provides \$650,000 in one-time funding to Legal Aid Manitoba to continue to provide these legal services. Manitoba has taken steps to address the influx of asylum seekers by forming a refugee claimant interdepartmental working group to ensure closer and ongoing co-ordination and information sharing with respect to Manitoba's response to increasing numbers of refugee claimants.

We're continuing to make investments in technology that will streamline processes and drive out unnecessary costs. The department has received approval for 20 projects to date through the Idea Fund that propose solutions with real returns on investment. Projects range from paperless solutions, enhancing video conferencing, closed-circuit television enhancements and electronic online application and registration solutions.

In addition to the projects funded under the Idea Fund, Budget 2019 proposes increases to address other technology issues for Windows 10 remediation and court transcription services. Budget 2019

provides a one-time increase of \$1.187 million in funding to cover a variety of costs related to Windows 10 remediation.

*(15:00)

Microsoft has announced that it will discontinue support for its Windows 7 operating system as of January 2020, and will not release any security updates after this date. In order to ensure that computer and business applications continue to function and reduce risks of security threats, the department is working to remediate systems so that systems are Window 10-ready.

Budget 2019 also invests \$350,000 for an audio-to-text solution to produce unofficial transcripts quickly and efficiently. Currently, court transcripts are prepared by contract transcribers upon request, regardless of whether they are legally required or for informational purposes only

This results in unnecessary expense, inefficient use of contracted time and contributes towards transcript backlog and potential court delay. Transcripts not required for legal purposes are produced for information and discussion purposes to review evidence and submissions informally, and for assistance with drafting documentation.

The move to an audio-to-text solution for this service will allow contract transcribers to focus on legally-required transcripts. The department will procure and implement the hosting solution or service in the 2019-20 fiscal year.

In closing, my department will continue to implement initiatives that will address public safety and identify opportunities to close performance gaps and confront the complex challenges that are faced by the justice system. We are committed to a whole-of-government approach and are working across our department to deliver better results for Manitobans.

Mr. Chair, it has become a tradition that the minister responsible for Vital Statistics Agency report to this committee about the most popular baby names in Manitoba over the previous year. I am happy to report that Liam for boys and Olivia for girls are once again the most popular names in 2018.

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

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Miigwech. Let me begin by congratulating the minister on his recent election.

I want to just start by saying we look forward to today's discussions on Estimates for Justice. I think it's important that we have these opportunity to discuss some of the changes that we've seen under this minister's leadership, and more particularly, under the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) leadership, in respect of justice and how it's executed in the province of Manitoba.

What I find interesting is that the Minister for Justice repeatedly talked about the importance of restorative justice, and certainly as a—from an indigenous perspective, that is something that our communities know very well. I remind folks that actually restorative justice is an indigenous way of understanding justice, and our responsibilities and our relationships with one another. So it's unfortunate that since the Pallister government came into power, we've seen not a substantial amount of commitment to restorative justice.

And I—we, I know we can talk about the John Howard Society and some of the cuts that we've seen there, just to name a couple of the—a few. So, you know, I'm excited and looking forward to hearing from the minister some of the discussion on restorative justice, because it is certainly one way to keep folks out of—who come into conflict with the law—to keep them out of the criminal justice system.

And I would say, and I know that the minister, you know, must be and should be aware that, you know, we face an epidemic—not only across Canada, but an epidemic of high incarceration rates for indigenous peoples, particularly in the provinces. And certainly there needs to be measures put into place, a commitment put in place to decrease those numbers in a real, concrete and substantial way.

And I think that probably all of us around the table could—would agree that, you know, one of the most silly examples of that—silly, albeit egregious—was, you know, what we all found out last week in respect of an individual, a First Nations indigenous man, from outside the province who ended up having to spend a week in jail because he didn't have 35 cents for bail.

I think that's, you know, probably—and I'm not sure; I'm sure that there's probably many stories like that, maybe not to that level but there's certainly a lot of things in the justice system that then, you know, entrenches particularly indigenous peoples and those

that are economically marginalized within the system. And certainly that is a call, last week's example, it is a call to do a thorough review of where we're situated in respect of the over-incarceration of indigenous peoples. So I do look forward to chatting with the minister about, obviously restorative justice, the Jordan decision, all of these pieces.

Let me just end by saying I do want to just say, you know, on behalf of our caucus, miigwech to all of the Justice staff. I know that we have many, many Justice staff that are very committed to making changes and to want—and wanting to see a more equitable justice system on behalf of all Manitobans. So I do want to just acknowledge the work that they do. And I look forward to our conversation.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 4.1.(a) contained in resolution 4.1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us at the table and we ask that the minister introduce the staff in attendance.

Mr. Cullen: So joining me today, senior management from Justice. At my left, Dave Wright, deputy minister; Maria Campos is our ADM for Finance—I'm going to say our finance gal; Nick Cherlet, special assistant in my office; Scott Kolody, associate deputy minister; Suzanne Gervais and Gail Anderson, Greg Skelly and Crystal Gartside, great; and Mike Mahon.

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

Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

The critic for the official opposition.

Ms. Fontaine: A global discussion.

Mr. Chairperson: Global discussion? Is it agreed that we will proceed in a global discussion? *[Agreed]*

Thank you. It is agreed that questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

Before I open the floor for questions, I'd just like to, whoever will be speaking, I have a one-minute

reminder to let you know. I will wave it at you. And then when there's 5 seconds left to go in the 5 minutes, I'll click my button—no, not my heels—the speaker on and off that way, I don't want to cut you off in the middle of a sentence. So just to let you know at 5 seconds left, I will do that.

The floor is now open for questions.

* (15:10)

Ms. Fontaine: I do just want to acknowledge a couple of folks I've had the pleasure of working with. Scott Kolody in a variety of different functions, and he is an extraordinary human being, so you are a very, very lucky minister to have somebody like him. And I just want to acknowledge him.

But also, Suzanne Gervais has done pretty phenomenal work in respect of Victim Services, and we had a lot of opportunities to work together in respect of MMIWG when I was a special adviser.

And then I also want to acknowledge Crystal. Crystal is absolutely extraordinary. And I want to acknowledge—I don't know when it was, it was the Justice, Victim Services and practitioners summit that we organized here. Crystal coalesced all of this information from across the country on different services and best practice, and all of that in reports. She is absolutely phenomenal.

So I just want to take an opportunity to say miigwech to each of them for all their work.

Can the minister provide the most recent staff listing for Justice?

Mr. Cullen: Thank you for those comments, and I certainly want to welcome you back as well and your role as critic for Justice.

And I was remiss in my opening remarks by not complimenting staff, and certainly senior staff. You're right, we do have a tremendous senior staff here within the department, and certainly very happy to have them working for us. And I know they have the best interests of Manitobans at heart, and we're trying to provide better outcomes as we work through various processes and various programs within the department.

And beyond the senior staff that I have here too, I've had a chance to meet a number of staff across the department. We've got close to 4,000 staff within the department doing a host of great things around the province, and we appreciate some of the challenges that they face. But, again, I think they're all

interested in providing outcomes—positive outcomes for Manitobans. And it's certainly good to see a good, strong team working towards those goals, achieving those goals.

And we also—we're bringing forward change. And change isn't always as easy as you would expect. But, you know, our view is, it's change for the right reasons and change for positive outcomes. So we're working through that, and we've asked staff to adapt along that journey with us. And we're excited about some of the changes we've been able to make, and built in some of the accountability mechanisms around those changes as well.

So it does come with challenges, but we're pretty strong in terms of where we want to get to, and we're looking forward to achieving those goals.

But to your question there in terms of staff, maybe I just need some clarification in terms of which staff you're looking for. Would that just be staff within my office?

Ms. Fontaine: Well, it could be that, or it could be any of the staff listing that the department has available to review and undertake. And alongside that, I think that we would be looking at also an organizational listing or flow chart for Justice as well.

Mr. Cullen: Certainly, to the member's request, we couldn't provide a list of all staff, but I did mention that there is close to 4,000 staff within the department; so that will be certainly an undertaking. As far as the organizational chart of the department, the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review this year, page 7, clearly outlines the structure of the department.

So, as I mentioned, we have—Dave Wright is the deputy minister, and Maria Campos, is the assistant deputy minister of Administration and Finance. On the Crown Law side, Mike Mahon heads that department. And Legislative Counsel, of course, doing the important work that they're doing in terms of drafting legislation, we now have Glenn Joynt as the deputy minister in that role.

And, as you did mention, the associate deputy minister of Community Safety Division, which is a big piece of the department, Scott Kolody is in charge of that particular branch. And Suzanne Gervais is the assistant deputy minister in the Courts side.

And we have Gail Anderson, who is in charge of the Consumer Protection Division, at least 'til the end of the year. And this might be an opportune time to

thank Gail for all her work over the years within the department, certainly on the Consumer Protection side of things, and we'll wish her all the best in her future endeavours. And we look forward to having some kind of event to recognize her years of services and what I expect will be a rewarding retirement.

Ms. Fontaine: Could the minister speak or provide—speak to and provide the vacancy rate for Manitoba Justice? We know that 166 positions have been cut from the Department of Justice last year. So we're looking at the totality of the vacancy rate and those positions.

Mr. Cullen: So as of June 30th of this year, our vacancy rate was 11.5 per cent. So that's across the department. That is probably ballpark, pretty standard for the department over the last number of years.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay, miigwech for that.

And, as I indicated, the 166 positions that have been cut from the department from last year, which positions were cut? Why were they cut?

* (15:20)

Mr. Cullen: I'm not sure where the member got her numbers from. Page 12 of the Estimates book does show a, certainly, reduction in numbers, certainly not the 166 that she referred to, so I'll seek some clarification from there.

I will say, though, there was some reduction in staffing. I'll point to Milner Ridge correctional facility; we were able to close one of the units there because we had a lower volume of clients in that facility, so that was a ballpark about 20 positions there. Similarly, Agassiz Youth corrections facility in Portage, we had some realignment there with, again, reduced head count, allowed us to make some changes there. And, in turn, a couple of other re-orgs within the department, in the Courts branch.

And there was some realignment there; we were able to reduce some staff there as well, and—right—and then in terms of corrections, obviously corrections is our biggest component of labour. There is, I think, close to 2,000 people working in Corrections. We did some reorganization there and were able, through that reorganization, eliminate some of the management positions in the ballpark of about 20 positions there.

And I think in Crown Law too, as a result of some reorganizations, we reduced the complement there by five. So those are the ballpark figures that I can recognize off the top of a head due to fewer staffing at

our facilities, fewer inmates at our facilities and some reorganization within the department.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay, we were just going by the Civil Service Commission's annual report. So if you looked at that from 2018–2017-18 to 2018-19, it showed that there was a cut of 166 positions. And so, again, I know you noted a couple there but, you know, what were the positions that were cut? And, I guess, why were they cut? And I think, even more importantly, and I—obviously this won't come as any surprise to you in by way of a question, is, you know, what will the effect be in the department in respect of executing that service that those particular jobs did via Justice?

Mr. Cullen: Thank you for the clarification in terms of those numbers.

I can't say off the—specifically, but I think in my discussions with the department here, we—and this, of course, these numbers are going back a couple of years now, and we did have a lot of part-time people working in the department, especially on the Corrections side of it. So we did make a conscience effort, the department did, to turn those part-time people into more permanent, full time. So that might be reflective of the numbers you see with the—as being reported by the civil servants—Civil Service Commission.

So that's sort of my take off the top. You know, I did outline, sort of, this past year to this year, what we're looking at in changes. And certainly, you know, we're closer to the 40, 44 change in position. So we could go back and have a look at that particular report and see if that's the cause for that higher number.

Ms. Fontaine: And just before I get on to my next question here, so it does recognize—it says for—in 2017-2018, there was 4,245 in Justice, total number. And then in 2018-19, there's 4,079. So those were the numbers in—those are on pages 49 and 51, respectively. So just if we could have a little bit of information on that. I—because I'm not sure if how many part-time staff, right, if that actually makes sense and that would equate with those numbers.

So, again, I think I'm going to combine two questions here in respect of the staff numbers, but I think the latter part of that question was also asking about how that would impact on executing the various roles and responsibilities that the department has to do. And so, coupled with that, for instance, you know, how would that affect efficiencies within the court system?

* (15:30)

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the question. And I'll speak to, and obviously, in moving these part-time positions to full-time positions, we view that as more efficient and more effective. A lot of those, and as I said, probably about half of our staff are actually in the Corrections side of things. So we have seen over the last couple of years a reduction in the number of clients we're serving. So we've been able to actually reduce our complement in the correction side. So that's where you'll see the biggest change in terms of staffing levels.

In terms of the courts system, we're really trying to modernize the court system to make it more effective, and more responsive to Manitobans across the board. I will say, if you ever had a chance to visit the Law Courts, it is a paper-based system, and it's extremely manually intensive. And it's not user friendly to the people working in the system; it's not user friendly to the people that are trying to access the system as well.

And so we've had a review of that and we've had a look at it and see if there's a better way to do business within the court system. And, quite clearly, there is. And I would say in Manitoba we're in a catch-up process in terms of what other jurisdictions are doing.

So I mentioned the 20 Idea Funds. This was actually one of the Idea Funds that was approved through Treasury Board process. So there's going to be a very positive return on investment.

So, conceptually, where we're trying to get to is to get away from our paper-based system and actually have a computer-based system that everyone can be connected within Justice. So (a) it will streamline processes, and (b) it will also make the system much more efficient so that we can actually get cases processed in a more effective manner.

Right now with the paper-based system we don't have that connectivity across the department, across the court system whatsoever. So, once we get to the place where we're all connected, we can do business a lot more efficiently.

So we're just in, I would call it the first phase of that process where we've hired a consultant to come in, have discussions with people within the court system, and this was everyone across the court system that has their hands on that particular system, and get their input in terms of what that system will ultimately look like.

So, once we conceive what that particular system looks like, then we will go to the marketplace and see

if that particular product exists. We think it will because other jurisdictions have moved this way. So we're working through that process.

It is—the court system is a big monster, for sure, so it will take some time for us to get this information, get the product, and then bring that product in and make sure it's user friendly, and then, of course, the training of the staff across the various aspects of courts.

So we're excited about it. I think it'll just really enhance the Manitobans who are dealing with the court systems, in the court system, and also it'll make the system run that much more efficiently. So we're really excited about it. I think it's a classy example of me—the Idea Fund where we're taking money, we're looking at programs, we're looking at return on investment, making sure that this is a worthwhile investment. And this one is clearly a worthwhile investment, so it's going to provide a lot better outcomes for Manitobans.

Ms. Fontaine: So, as the minister notes, you're in that first phase of this, kind of, you know, looking at streamlining, and I note that you share that you—the department's hired a consultant. So I'm curious who that is, and also what the time frame is for that. And is there going to be a report, will that report be released publicly? And, yes, that for now.

Mr. Cullen: Again, as I say, this—the process behind the Idea Fund is we actually ask employees to come forward with ideas and how we can make systems better and outcomes better for Manitobans. And I've been so excited. I—we had over 20 in the Department of Justice of which I think—*[interjection]*—yes, so we've had 20 approved within Justice, and across government I think we're in about 55. So hats off to the folks in Justice who are bringing these ideas to the table.

So this particular one was approved. Again, it goes to Treasury Board. Treasury Board does the analysis, making sure that it's going to provide a positive outcome, a financial return for the investment and also, again, better outcomes for Manitobans. This one, clearly, was well up there in terms of positive rating.

So we went to the marketplace. We had a request for proposal out some time ago, a few months ago. Deloitte was the—had the positive outcome from that request. They started their work about a month ago in terms of the consultation within the court system. So that's obviously been pretty intensive. We have to get

judges involved and the lawyers, both the Crowns and prosecutors and certainly all the staff that are doing the manual work with the paper as it exists now. So they're gathering that information.

We're optimistic they will have that information together so that we can go to the marketplace, put out a request for proposal for what that particular product is going to look like. We're hoping to have that put out by December, hoping to have a product in place by this spring. Then from there it will take, certainly will take some time to get the new product in place. And the other component here, which is going to be very important, will be the training component. So we have to train all of the staff within the department how to use all this equipment as well.

So the intent is to have it, you know, not just in Winnipeg but across the province as well. So certainly it's a big undertaking. When we first talked about this, we looked at it; it could potentially be a two-to-three-year project before we have everything where we want it. But it's the right thing to do for the right reasons.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that.

So, I'm curious—well, a couple things, and I'm trying not to throw too many questions so that we don't forget some of them. I am really curious about the Idea Fund; I'll come back to that. But in respect of your last response, is there a particular dollar amount that Deloitte was offered to do this consultation? And do we have any idea, and I know that it's quite preliminary, but do we have any idea of what that new product, whatever that might look like, what that's going to end up costing to overhaul that component of the system?

* (15:40)

Mr. Cullen: So, in respect of the contract that we've secured with Deloitte. Again, it was a tendered—it went to the marketplace to see who was interested in providing this particular service to us.

Deloitte was the successful recipient to the tune of \$395,000. So, with that, they're with us on this journey. They will be with us 'til the end of this journey. And this really is, and I guess the proper phrase to use is an integrated case management system. Just it—I may be—certainly describes what we're trying to accomplish here better.

So Deloitte themselves are doing the consultation right now. Once they get that consultation down by December, they will have—be able to lay out for

service providers exactly the product that we need to—for Manitoba for, you know, the uniqueness of Manitoba.

So Deloitte have a project manager here, and also they have a change manager as well. So the change manager will clearly be involved to the end when we transition to the actual product once we purchase it, and getting people ready to use that particular product. So, hopefully, that kind of explains the journey we're on on this. But, certainly, Deloitte were the successful bidder on the tender.

And, in terms of what the product's going to cost going forward, that will be largely determined by what we ask them to provide. So we haven't got to that point yet. So we really, we don't want to put any numbers in the window either because this will be a tender process. We do know there are other jurisdictions using similar products in North America. So we know there—the technology exists. What the Manitoba version looks like, we're not sure yet. We're not sure what that cost will be.

But, from my perspective, the exercise is about determining what we need in Manitoba. And, once we determine what we need in Manitoba, then we'll go to the marketplace and find out what that solution is for Manitoba. So I don't have an answer for your question, but I think in the big picture this is going to be a really valuable investment for us in the long term.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that. So I want to come back to the Idea Fund in respect of, I think you said that there were 55 across—55 ideas across government. There were about 20 in Justice. And this was one that was—went to Treasury Board, did an analysis and moving forth.

Are you able to share what the other 19 ideas are?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I'd be happy to review some of the Idea Fund initiatives that we have within Justice. I will just clarify for the member that each one of the application submissions does go to Treasury Board for review, so not just Justice, but all of them go through there for the Treasury Board lens on it.

So across government, as of June 30th, we had 57 projects either completed or in progress. We have within Justice—I believe we have nine complete out of the 20. And then the rest are a work in progress.

I'll just give you some of the things we've sort of worked on. A big one for us was on the Corrections side. It was a scheduling software—to provide an opportunity for—to bring in software to make sure that

we had folks scheduled appropriately for Corrections. Again, dealing with a staff size of about 2,000, it was all manual previously, so we brought some software in to schedule employees there.

We've got some video conferencing we've purchased. We've gone to electronic birth registration over at Vital Statistics. Again, that was another project. Online submissions of select applications and certain documents—again, that was through Vital Statistics Agency there.

We did—we've got some equipment in terms of video conferencing so we can connect the various branches together and through the board rooms as well. We had a project in terms of collection project, collecting fines from various ticketing offences. And we did some document management upgrades over at Vital Statistics as well.

And some of the other ones—we purchased body scanners for Manitoba Corrections. I believe there was three of those that went into Corrections facilities to scan prisoners as they come through. Very well received by staff, for sure.

We've done some data management work in terms of the Automobile Injury Compensation Appeal Commission. So there's been some enhancements there.

Government identification card program—did some upgrades there. And over at the Human Rights Commission, some paperless board meetings and webinar equipment as well.

And over at Restorative Justice and Responsible Reintegration unit, we did some work over there as well. And Victim Services Branch, on paperless domestic violence files. So we're trying to move into the 21st century there.

* (15:50)

And Milner Ridge, I talked about before; we actually did some of the closed-circuit television upgrades through this particular Idea Fund. And also on the prosecution side we've enhanced some of the technology over there to help them work better.

And then the last one is the courts modernization, the Integrated Case Management System as the final one.

So that's a quick recap of what we've done in Justice.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that overview. And, I mean, I'm not sure if they're ever going to read this,

but congratulations to all of the staff, Justice staff, that submitted those. I think that that's very valuable.

Moving along, Minister, can the minister provide how many people are in adult custody per institution today?

Mr. Cullen: So I think the member asked for the adult numbers as of today. Today, in terms of adult numbers, we have 2,139 total. That includes 183 housed at the women's correctional facility.

Ms. Fontaine: So just to go back again, I was hoping that you'd be able to break that down per institution, please.

Mr. Cullen: So, adult population: Brandon correctional facility, 294; the Dauphin correctional facility, 65; Headingly Correctional, 744; Milner Ridge, 417; The Pas correctional facility, 149; The Winnipeg women's centre, 183; and then the Winnipeg Remand Centre, 287; for a total of two—2,139.

Ms. Fontaine: I'm not sure if the minister would have this readily available, but would the minister know what the numbers were last year on this day for each of those institutions?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I appreciate the question. I do have some quarterly results. That's something that we track on a quarterly basis, so I can give you the totals going back over the last little while. If you specifically want a year ago today, we can bring that tomorrow; I think we can track that down for you.

It brings to me—to mind a discussion about our criminal justice modernization strategy, something that was brought out by the previous minister. And, again, the intent of the strategy is to make—provide better outcomes for Manitobans, so there's certainly a lot of things within that particular strategy that we're trying to accomplish. And part of that strategy in that document—hope you take some time to read it—is the accountability piece of it.

So, when we make a commitment to improve a system, we want to make sure that we're actually making positive steps to achieve the outcomes that we want to set out—that we do set out in that strategy. So part of this plan is the accountability piece. Now we made a commitment to make the information public on a quarterly basis, so there's a number of things that we are monitoring and we do put on the website quarterly, and one of them is the adult custody population. So I just, in fact, this was just updated just

recently, so you can check the latest quarter's—just in the last couple of weeks, I believe.

So, if we go back to—so the first quarter of '19-20—the first quarter there, the total adult population was 2,148. So that's the first *[inaudible]* I'm going to work my way back so—

An Honourable Member: The year 1920?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, this would be which—which month's? Fiscal, so the first quarter. Oh, sorry, '19—No, no, no.

An Honourable Member: Nineteen-slash-20.

Mr. Cullen: That's right, '19 to '20, yes. I don't want to go back that far. I guess we could—we could look at 1920 and see what the numbers were.

So the first—the fiscal quarter, then, of '19-20, which would be April to June of this year, the average count was 2,148. So then we go back to the fiscal year 2018-2019, so the fourth quarter, so that would be that January-April, 2,088. We go back another quarter so the third quarter of 2018-19, population—average population for that period was 2,117. The second quarter of 2018-19, 2,078. That's about a year ago. So that would put us about a year ago; average count for that quarter was 2,078.

* (16:00)

So that help will give you a ballpark in terms of the population for that period. I think we can get you—and further, for the member's information, if we go back to October 2018, the total adults in corrections was 2,128, so that's a year ago. Average over the month of October, I'll give you a ballpark. So 2,128; 267 were female. So hopefully that gives the—some of the information that you're looking for.

Ms. Fontaine: So—and that's why I'd prefaced my question not knowing if you would have that, so I'm glad that we have the 2019.

If possible, if I could, the 2018 numbers that would—or today, tomorrow, would be great. And so in the similar vein, I'm going to ask for what today's numbers are in respect of youth. Youth, yes, in—per institution.

Mr. Cullen: So on the youth side, at Agassiz facility in Portage—67, these are today's numbers. Brandon correctional facility, there's two. None in Dauphin. Seventy-six at the Manitoba youth facility. And The Pas, there is two people there. So that total is 147 as of today.

If I do have—again this would be average for the month of October 2018, a total of 100—sorry, 160.

Ms. Fontaine: So sorry, I didn't quite hear what you said about MYC, the numbers at MYC and The Pas. I apologize for that. And then similarly, in respect of adult on this day last year, what would the numbers be for the youth, if possible. But if you wouldn't mind repeating MYC and The Pas. Sorry about that.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, MYC is 76, and The Pas is two.

And then we will endeavour to get you last year's figures.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech, I appreciate that. In respect of segregation today, what are the numbers for both adult institutions and youth institutions. How many adults and how many youth are segregated today?

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Cullen: Apologize, we don't have the numbers for today. It's not something that we have at our disposal today. But we will certainly endeavour to get those numbers for you.

I will say we've made changes in terms of segregation, certainly as a result, on the youth side, as a result of the children's advocate, to some of her work as well. I know the department had been making strides previous to that, but we certainly took her recommendation under advisement and we're certainly making changes in terms of the independent observation of youth and their facilities. And I think our staff are very cognizant of how they deal with people in those situations.

So I think positive strides have been made, certainly on the youth side. Obviously, we're looking at what other jurisdictions are doing as well in terms of segregation policies. We'll certainly—I know there's a big debate out there in terms of segregation and what that looks like across the country and at the federal level, so we're actually monitoring that as well.

And, you know, it's an evolution, for sure, but it's something that, you know, our staff take very seriously in how they deal with the safety of inmates and certainly the safety of corrections officers as well. So, obviously, the concept of segregation is really just—it's one tool there that they have at their disposal.

So we will endeavour to get to you those numbers in the next day or two.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay, miigwech for that.

So also, to that end, then, I'll just advise that if I could get the segregation numbers for today and then

also for today a year ago, tomorrow, if that makes sense.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the question. We'll certainly endeavour to get what information we can. I don't think it's something that we were tracking on a daily basis, but we can probably give you sort of the weekly average type of a thing, and, again, going back a year we would have to do the same analysis on it. We could probably give you an indication of the trends in numbers as well. That might be helpful for you or future discussions.

So we'll certainly endeavour to get what we can, but, again, not all of that information is detailed and tracked on a daily basis.

* (16:10)

Ms. Fontaine: Well, miigwech, and I appreciate the staff looking into that. I get it that perhaps those aren't necessarily always daily documented or kept track off. Certainly, though, I would suggest or submit that it's, you know, important to look at those numbers and, you know, as we—and the minister, I will agree with you, in respect of the concept of segregation. But it is in evolution right now, for lack of a better word, I would say.

But I think that there is a general consensus across the country, across North America, you know, we've seen it in Europe. The use of segregation and whether or not there's better ways to do things. So, you know, maybe moving forward in respect to that, you know, again, I appreciate whatever numbers that the department can provide. That would be great.

But I think it is an important discussion to look at what's going on in Manitoba in respect to segregation. And in particular, the folks who end up in segregation. To that end—so I appreciate that again, to everybody at the table who can provide me any of those numbers and the ones that we spoke of previously.

To that end, I am wondering if the department has—and let's just concentrate on, again, today, you know, if we see 183 in women's, 295 in Brandon, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Is there a breakdown of how many of those folks who find themselves incarcerated or in conflict with the law, how many are indigenous?

And even beyond that, because indigenous, as I would hope that most folks around the table would know, is a—can be interpreted in a variety of different

ways. But if there was—if it was even further broken down by First Nation, Metis, Inuit, status, non-status.

I know that when I used to be the director of justice for Southern Chiefs' Organization many, many, many years ago, those were discussions that we were having at the chiefs' table. Like, are those stats kept so that we know who is in and out? I mean, I know that there's a general, you know, like, we'll say, well, you know, 80 per cent or 67 per cent are indigenous. But I don't know if the department does that now. And, you know, what is available right now in respect of the breakdown of the indigenous component of all of these folks who find themselves incarcerated?

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate that question.

So, when individuals are in one of our facilities, it is up to them to declare. So, once they make that declaration, then we would track it. We don't have those numbers at our fingertips now, but we can get you those numbers and respective breakdowns for today's population if you like.

And to your previous question, about a year ago we actually now have that information. So if you want to get your chart out from today's numbers, I'll take you back and run through a year ago today.

An Honourable Member: For adult?

Mr. Cullen: So first for adult. In Brandon correctional facility, 292. Dauphin, 65. Headingley, 730; Milner Ridge, 406; The Pas, 144; The Women's Correctional, 233; and at the Winnipeg Remand, 276. That gives you a total of 2,146.

And if you have the youth there as well, at Agassiz one year ago was 74; Brandon, one; none at Dauphin; at the Manitoba Youth Facility, 93; and in The Pas, there was four. And that's a total of 172. So that's October 7th, 2018.

Ms. Fontaine: I appreciate the staff getting that. That's very, very helpful. I appreciate that.

Before we go on a little bit down the way here, I'm wondering if it's possible to get a copy of the Deloitte RFP in respect of the systems—what did you call it? Case—Integrated Case Management System.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, we will get that document together that was—I guess it was put online through probably the MERX system, I would imagine. We'll provide that document for you.

Ms. Fontaine: So, I apologize; I should probably know this. I don't. What is the capacity of Dauphin?

And so, I know that today we're saying that there's 65. I'd like to juxtapose that to what the actual capacity is.

And then, to, you know, to that end, is the minister or the Premier (Mr. Pallister)—is this government planning on building a new correctional facility in Dauphin?

Mr. Cullen: So, in respect of Dauphin, the rated bed capacity in Dauphin is 61.

In terms of the Dauphin facility, I don't know if the member's had an opportunity to tour that particular facility. *[interjection]* Yes, it is an old facility. It clearly needs some improvements. So we're obviously having a look at that particular facility to see what we can do.

Obviously, there's safety issues there, both from an inmate perspective and obviously my officers who are working there, their perspective, as well. We do know there is an independent review currently ongoing as a result of an incident at that facility. We're waiting for that report to come and *[inaudible]* incident that occurred there. That may shed some light on what could be done at that particular facility. So we're looking forward to that.

Certainly, we know there is issues there with that facility and the Office of the Fire Commissioner has been there to have a look at that as well. So we're certainly cognizant of the issues around that facility.

We're also very cognizant of the numbers that we went through, in terms of people in incarceration right now, seeing how we can best manage those populations, as well. That's something that's always top of mind when it comes to the safety of inmates and certainly the safety of our correctional staff.

* (16:20)

So there's been no decision taken in terms of building a new facility in Dauphin. I do know the Province does own some property in—just outside of Dauphin; I think that was maybe the intent at one point in time. But we certainly haven't made any decisions moving forward in terms of building a new facility in Dauphin or, quite frankly, anywhere else for that matter.

Again, to—for our perspective, it's how do we manage the numbers within facilities that everybody is safe, and we'll probably get into that whole discussion about what other opportunities exist in dealing with people. You know, I think our view is incarceration is the last opportunity. I mean, we look at other opportunities to see how we can get things

back on the right path. And you know, for a certain few, yes, incarceration may be the way to go, but for those that have other, we think, other opportunities, other avenues, to look to keep people out of jail. You know, we're certainly in favour of looking at that as well. And those processes, which I think we'll have a discussion about, we're working towards that. I know there's a national movement to work toward that, to keep people out of custody, and we're certainly interested in making sure that those opportunities exist for people.

So, we keep all of that in mind when we talk about the potential of building more facilities. What really is the best outcomes for those people that are engaged in the justice system? And in—my view is incarceration is not always the best solution. So that's why we're having those discussions around other opportunities.

Ms. Fontaine: No, I haven't had the opportunity to tour Dauphin yet. I'm actually speaking out in Dauphin soon, at a woman's thing. So I actually was going to reach out to see if it was possible, I'm not sure.

I do remember, though, many, many years ago—gosh, going on eighteen years ago—I, at the—I happened to have several opportunities to go to the old Portage woman's correctional facility, and I remember I happened to be pregnant with my youngest son. And I sat with women in circle.

And I can't remember what I was doing, because of—it was research—or, I can't remember what it was, actually, to be honest with you. But that was hell. That jail—and I just remember, you know, I was pregnant and here were—and I think it triggered a lot of the women because they were away from their babies, right? A lot of folks don't know that if you're a northern woman who finds yourself in conflict with the law and, you know, is sentenced and incarcerated, often you're away from your children. And I'll always, always, always remember that.

And that jail was so old, and the women talked about how, like, there were rats in the wall and all kinds of things. So I've never forgotten that, and I've had the opportunity and, you know, to visit, a lot of the institutions, a lot of the correctional institutions. And I have to say that the woman's jail was the most disheartening and depressing. It really was just the worst of the worst, so.

At any rate, all of that to say that—I mean I'm not assuming Dauphin is like that, but I just remember that was, you know—when facilities are kind of, they're

old, it's not necessarily, I mean, at the best of the worst times, correctional facilities are not the most conducive to healing and dealing with trauma. Certainly those that are beyond their age or—I would say, would exacerbate that, so.

I thank you and I thank all the staff for all of this information. I think that we'll move on to some other stuff.

We found, as you know, there's Compensation for Victims of Crime program, which provides compensations to victims who suffer personal injury, hardships or expenses as a result of certain crimes, and so I'm wondering if the minister can share—that it appears that when comparing volume 2 of Public Accounts year over year for the Department of Justice, that paid out an amount, which has been reduced dramatically this past fiscal year. So the average payment from, let's say 2006 to 2016, which is prior to the minister's government, was about \$2.13 million paid to victims. But last year in 2018/2019, the amount was only \$470,899. And so—I can read out all the numbers, but I suspect I'll just leave them out but we're—I am curious what the huge reduction in payments to victims is.

Mr. Chairperson: There's been a request to take a two-minute break.

Is that in agreement with everybody? *[Agreed]*

The committee recessed at 4:27 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:38 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: The Committee of Supply will now resume for the Department of Justice Estimates.

Is the honourable—the honourable Minister of Justice.

Mr. Cullen: Okay, first, before I forget, I'll go back to our previous conversation about Dauphin correctional facility. If the member is going to be in Dauphin, we can certainly arrange to provide you a tour if you like. So just give us the heads-up on that, and certainly—I don't know if you've been to the new women's facility, too. It's certainly a step ahead of the old facility and obviously there—and there's more work going to be done at that facility as well to enhance some programming for women's there. So we're excited about that and we'll keep you appraised of that as well.

So for this particular question regarding victims' funding, we'll certainly go back and have a look at

previous funding and what was involved there, but we do know that there was a change to legislation back in 2011, and what that legislation did was put restrictions around who gets compensated as a result of victims of crime.

* (16:40)

So certainly that I think has a bearing on the different numbers that we're seeing. So I know there's been a reduction since 2011 ongoing because of that change in legislation.

And again, that goes back to prescribed convictions that would make victims ineligible for payments. Certainly, we're looking at that particular legislation, and we think we can make some positive changes through policy even to make sure that more victims are getting paid. So we're looking at some positive policy changes to help some victims in terms of payment, as well.

So the other factor in this thing is what we believe from the outset, we previously used to pay individuals to travel, especially from northern communities to come for counselling, so that was extremely expensive and certainly added up.

So more recently—and I can't give you the exact date, but we've made a change here where we're actually taking the counselling to the victims. So the victims aren't bearing the cost of travel, as we as the government and Justice are picking up those costs for counselling, we're actually going the communities to provide that counselling.

So I think that would be reflective on some of the numbers that we've seen over the last—I think you quoted 2006. So certainly there has been some changes.

I would just say over the last few years, it looks like our budgeted amounts have been fairly consistent, I think we've been in that—\$3.5 million is what we've pegged for budget. Our actual estimates are maybe a little below that, but our actual expenditures for '17-18 and '18-19 were consistent. I mean, we're 2.3 and 2.6 in those two years. So it seems somewhat consistent year over year.

Ms. Fontaine: So I do have numbers here, and again it's in Public Accounts in respect of compensation for victims of crime. So if we go back, let's just go back 2017-2018; the numbers here are \$1,673,483. And so then you juxtapose that against 2018-2019, and the number is \$470,899.

So, if we were just to concentrate on that, what is the huge discrepancy there. And I know that the minister is saying that there's been changes in respect of paying victims to—or, I wouldn't even paying, I would say supporting victims to travel from the North to the South to receive counselling. So is that, am I correct in saying that, or is it—are we attributing that \$1.2 million decrease in respect of travel costs?

And then—I'll put that there, and then I've got additional questions in respect of, then, this mechanism of counselling in communities to victims.

Mr. Cullen: Clearly there is a discrepancy in Public Accounts and our numbers here, so we're going to have to have a look at that. There's got to be some kind of an accounting issue that we're not aware of right now. So we'll go back, we'll have a look at Public Accounts and try to reconcile those numbers because they—for some reason they don't jive.

So there's clearly more to what we're seeing, just black and white, so we'll get, we'll have a look at that and get back to you on that.

Ms. Fontaine: So, when we say that there's a discrepancy in accounting, like, between what I've just provided and—is it, like, a discrepancy on Department of Justice's end or is it Public Accounts? Like, I—how would that happen?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I don't want to point fingers at accountants but clearly there's accounting principles at play here and that's what we want to find out, what the Public Accounts record, what that actually means and then try and reconcile it with, you know, the numbers that you provided with the numbers that we have in our books. So, I don't want to even guess what that might look like but we will certainly—we recognize there's a difference in numbers there. We'll try to reconcile why.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay. Miigwech, I appreciate that.

So I want to go back to the government not providing travel for northern victims of crime to travel to the south. So, which, you know, doesn't necessarily—I mean, in some respects I would suppose that that would make sense. However, we know that the North has very isolated communities, so fly-in communities, but also a lot of communities. And we know that there are victims of crime I would submit probably from each and every one of the communities in the North. I don't think that that's too far from the truth.

So, when we talk about the infrastructure to access counselling services in the south, we could argue that, you know, the infrastructure is there and the supports are there; however, we'll put that aside. I would actually argue that there's not enough supports there either.

But, let's just put that aside for the time being and say that, you know, the south has the infrastructure to provide that counselling services for victims of crime. But, when you look at the North, particularly First Nation communities, that is—and I know that everybody in the room—I know that Suzanne is going to know this first-hand in respect of that one of the fundamental concerns from chief in council, from those that are on the front lines of dealing with trauma, and those that are helping families kind of—individuals navigate their own personal trauma trying to access counselling services, that infrastructure's not there.

So, when you now share that the government is no longer paying for travel, what does that mean? And when you say that you're bringing counsellors to the North, the North is huge; it's vast—as well as, you know, potentially language barriers. Had the opportunity many, many years ago to travel up to Pauingassi with United Nations, a rapporteur, and barely anybody spoke English. It was the most beautiful thing to see; the whole community was Ojibwe.

It—so, how is this new—and I don't know when this happened, but how does that take into account all of those various factors in accessing counselling services?

* (16:50)

Mr. Cullen: Just try and clarify a few things here. Ultimately, we'd like to see counselling provided in these remote communities. And certainly we're doing that where we can.

We've been working with the Non-Insured Health Benefits program and the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program. So the intent is, working with these programs, the victims can access counselling in their home community. So they can go to their local health service provider and ask for support, and hopefully that support would be provided in their home community.

But, in circumstances where that doesn't happen, or can't happen for some reason, we still do cover travel expenses. So we will cover expenses to travel for individuals—I look back here in 2018-19, there was

travel expenses of \$166,000; 2017-18, \$286,000 travel expenses.

So, again, we're trying to make that these victims do have access to those services, ideally in their home communities. If that can't be facilitated, then there is—obviously there is travel costs that are covered to get these people to hopefully find the services that they need.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay, so I kind of just wanted to unpack this a little bit further. So in the province of Manitoba, if you are a victim of crime and you are looking to get counselling, it is the responsibility of Victim Services to provide access to that counselling. Correct?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, and again, when they're eligible under the parameters around those specific programs. Yes.

Ms. Fontaine: So—but what I heard, though—so that's my understanding, right, and I understand, like Crystal was saying, like the eligibility under the criteria. I get that piece. So that's what I understood. I think that's what most people would understand, or at least anticipate or think about Victim Services; accessing that—those counselling services.

But, in your answer, you had mentioned a variety of different things potentially in the community. You know, like, you can go to your health service provider; so to me, unless I'm completely missing it, it seems like—and I'm just going to say for lack of a better way to say it—is the Province passing the buck for northern victims of crime to first access those services that, you know, are offered by the federal government—which, let me just say and put it out there, and I suspect not—most people are not going to argue with me, is that those—again—those services that the federal government should, and must, be providing are so lacking.

I mean, why—you know, if you look at when there's suicide epidemics in different First Nation communities across the country, one of the first responses that the federal government will do is they'll go and send, you know, emergency counselling up to the community. But that's actually after the fact because there's actually no counselling there. So it always comes after the fact.

So my concern is that, if you're—if the government, if the provincial government is saying, hey, access this and that, go to your health service provider and access those things first, are we—are you passing the buck? And how do we ensure that those

individuals that need to access those counselling are actually accessing that?

And, again, I refer back to my previous—or my first question/comment, is that the North does not have the infrastructure. It simply does not.

Mr. Cullen: Let me say, we take this issue very seriously. We clearly want to make sure that we're doing whatever we can to assist victims. And quite often I think, usually, we are probably the first—they would approach us first. Then we will work to see how we can best serve that individual and if we can have somebody in the community that's being funded by one of the federal programs and the individual is getting the service that they require. You know, that's fine. It's really about outcomes for that individual.

If the individual doesn't find the resources in their home community or they, for instance, would prefer to go outside of their community for those services, they can certainly reach out to us, and as long as the programming fits the parameters, you know, we'll be involved with that individual as well.

So I'll just say that there seems to be a number of options out there and, at the end of the day, we try to have the best interests of the victims at heart.

Ms. Fontaine: So, and I—you—everybody's going to have to be patient with me as I'm trying to kind of work this out in my head here. And I—I'm trying to figure out that if, like all systems, often there are gaps and people fall through those gaps, right?

* (17:00)

So we have a context right now where, if need be, travel is not being provided for northern victims of crime, right? How has the department been tracking, then, if that—the consequence of that has been that individuals are not accessing services? Stay with me. Do you see what I'm saying?

Like, if we're no longer paying for that and we're kind of saying, well, you know, hopefully we can access these services that are, in theory, offered by the federal government—and I will state it again, that is very, very lacking—if they don't access that or if the communities don't have those services, are we tracking, then, folks, victims of crime, people who are, I'm assuming, you know, trying to deal with trauma? Are we tracking how many, in respect of how many less the government is now servicing or offering counselling services to?

Mr. Cullen: When we're talking about this topic we talk about theory, and in theory this is the way it

should work. And I certainly acknowledge your comments about capacity. You know, that's something that—I look forward to your comments, even off-line, in terms of capacity and building capacity for counselling services, whether it's the federal government or us. I appreciate your thoughts on that.

So, in theory, you know, people will approach us for services, including counselling, and as long as they fit the parameters, then we will provide that counselling. It may not be our staff; it may be, as you say, the federal government staff providing that counselling, but at the end of the day, if they're not satisfied with the counselling they've got, or if they would sooner get counselling outside of their home community, we can arrange that too.

We've set aside funding for travel. I think I indicated that over the last two years \$166,000 in travel, and on—back '17-18, was \$286,000 in travel. So they still have the ability to come south for counselling services if they desire.

You know, clearly, we track the individual cases, but if there's individuals that don't submit an application to us, then we don't know about those cases, so it's hard for us to estimate what issues people may be having. So our only real mechanism to track these individuals is if they approach us, so that's what we do.

Ms. Fontaine: When did the travel, and I—and keeping in mind I recognize you've told me that, you know, 2018-19 there was 166 for travel. I get that. So there's some dollars that's put aside, apparently, for travel.

But when did that stop? That it's now the policy, right, I would assume, for a lack of a better word, that folks—northern folks, northern victims of crime folks have to seek counselling services in the North rather than come into the south. Keeping in mind that, as you—as the minister just said, that if they can't find it, or they want it, there are those cases. But when did that actually stop?

Mr. Cullen: So back, I guess, since 2017-2018, we saw an opportunity to work with the federal government to provide some of these services. And it really provides the individuals the option, if they want to seek services in their home communities, you know, we provide them that option to work with the federal government. If they decide that, I don't—not comfortable with those services or I want to seek services outside of my home community, we can still

pay for and arrange travel for them to come and seek counselling.

So there was no real direction or policy direction to decrease the amount of travel expenses. It just seemed like an opportunity to provide northerners with an option to deal with—get these services in their home community. And that's why it just made sense to work with the federal government in this regard. And, because a lot of individuals would like their—have their services in their home community and avoid travelling, so this is—this really just provides them an option. So there was really no policy direction in terms of reducing travel expenses or travel costs because they still have that option if they so choose.

Ms. Fontaine: So, in 2017-2018, it was kind of just a move towards offering victims of crime an opportunity to get services in their communities if they want. Okay, I get that.

So is there an actual partnership with the federal government to say, hey, if I get raped in Manitoba and I'm from whatever community, and I'm—I don't, you know, is there an agreement with the federal government that we have, you know, Nahanni who has gotten raped and wants to stay in the North—you guys will provide service to her even though the crime took place in Manitoba? And really, Victim Services should be that first avenue because the crime took place in Manitoba.

* (17:10)

So is there a legitimate partnership there, an agreement? And again, I have to say, and I will—and I would dare anybody to say that the federal government is the best avenue, the best agent, the best caretaker at getting counselling services in First Nation communities from coast to coast to coast. They are not. Therein lies the problem.

So you can see where I'm struggling. If we know that the federal government—and quite honestly, I don't care what federal government it is, I don't care if it's the Conservatives or if—I don't care if it's the Liberals. The fact is that the 633 First Nations across the country—and let's not even talk about Inuit communities—do not have access to counselling services. They simply do not. So my concern is that, if Nahanni gets raped, and is in the North, my thing is to try and go to somebody in the community that I can access, but there's nobody there.

Look, I'm just—I just don't understand. I'm very, very worried, and I will say that I didn't realize this was happening. So I'm very, very worried that victims

of crime are falling through the cracks. And so, you know, again, all of that to say, is there a legitimate partnership, and to reiterate that the federal government is not the champion of offering a robust infrastructure for counselling for First Nation citizens.

Mr. Cullen: So, again, we—victims of crime will reach out to us as a provincial government, to Victim Services. Victim Services will assign that individual a caseworker. So there is that ongoing rapport with the individual through that caseworker. So if the individual does want to seek services at the community level, if it's available, they can go ahead and proceed. The caseworker—they still have contact with the caseworker.

So if something doesn't go effectively with that particular counselling, they can come to our caseworker and say, I need additional help. I need something. The caseworker will arrange travel, pay the travel expenses to bring that individual to another community to have those services provided.

So, from Victim Services' perspective, we don't lose sight of that victim once we're engaged with that victim. So that's very important.

The—and the other thing I think we should bear in mind is, and it goes back to our capacity discussion, not every community has the capacity to deal with this. You know, in some areas the federal government does have some capacity to help with some of those services. And we could get into a whole discussion about the federal government and their capacity and where they're headed in child care, for instance, as well. That's another topic. But, from our perspective is, once the individual engages with us, we're there to see it through the end. So that's really our role in this thing.

So there is no real official signed agreement with the federal government in terms of providing services. We just work with the individuals knowing the capacity within their respective communities to see if those services can be provided by the federal government within that community. And again, if they can't, then we will make arrangements to seek other counselling or assistance.

Ms. Fontaine: So, I appreciate all of that. And I guess, you know, and as I was trying to kind of work it out in my—unpacked it in my head about, you know, how do we know that people aren't? And I get, again, I get that they are assigned someone that they work with. So I get all of that. And actually, I mean, we could even discuss that a little bit further, whether or not

there's enough folks to do that work, but, whatever, but, I—so I get all that. But what, how do we know—my concern is, and I'll just put it out here, it's not a question, again, it's a comment in respect of how do we know for sure, definitively, that the folks who are victims of crime that want and, I would suggest, need counselling get it? And how do we know definitively that they don't fall through the cracks?

Because what I will say is this: is, you know, a lot of communities, a lot of folks, and not only in the North, just people in general, but I would suggest if you're in a more isolated community and, you know, sometimes navigating through systems are incredibly difficult. I know when I'm calling—like right now I'm dealing with MTS on something. I won't bore everybody about what I'm dealing with. But I'm confused, and that's just an Internet bill, right. So, and I'm ready to just not—just put it aside and not deal with it. That's literally trying to figure out an Internet bill, right?

So when we think of individuals who are traumatized or whatever, or angry, or frustrated, or depressed, or suicidal, or whatever it may be, the systems as they exist are often very, very intimidating and often very—they can be foreign in the sense of the way the system works or the language that's used when victims of crime come into contact with folks that work at the—within the system. So we don't know—and I would imagine, or I would submit, that we don't know definitively whether or not people are falling through the cracks. And that's where my concern lies there. So I will leave that there.

I am also curious, then, in respect of—and I know that the minister said that there's not a policy per say to decrease travel, but certainly—and I'm sure the minister would agree that, you know, and, you know, that there's been path towards decreasing costs within government. So I am curious in respect of this, you know, no longer paying for, in certain circumstances, paying for northern travel, what, you know, prior to that, what were those costs and what of those—what do those costs look like now? Now, again, I know that you've set dollars aside. But, you know, when everybody was coming to the city, what were those costs? Juxtapose what they are now. *[interjection]*

* (17:20)

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Justice.

Mr. Cullen: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

To the member's point, I mean, we don't know what we don't know, right? And that's a challenge. I mean, whether we're talking about Victim Services or we're talking about a Manitoba Public Insurance claim, you know, I think we all expect the case managers are doing what they should. And we hope things don't fall through the cracks, but we know in a system as big as that, things can happen. You know, we're certainly—I take advice from our case managers in terms of how we can provide a better system. I think it might be worthwhile to have a briefing about how the system works yourself, and sit down and talk about concerns and see if there is some opportunity to improve things.

In terms of—I think you're asking a pretty broad question in terms about funding here. Obviously, that would take some homework for us to go back and see how things have changed and evolved over the years. You know, at the end of the day we're still trying to provide services for those individuals that are victims of crime.

And maybe, when it comes to the accounting side of it, well, maybe some specific questions in writing to the department might be the best solution for that.

Ms. Fontaine: So it, okay, we will get you those questions. Again I know it was kind of—I am curious in respect of then, you know, this, you know, this move to, you know, no longer pay for, except in some cases, I get it, travel services. But is there also a different approach when we're dealing with adult victims of crime versus when we're dealing with children victims of crime, and what would that look like?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, when it comes to a discussion about child victims of crime, obviously that's a special area for sure and requires specialized services and it requires qualified counsellors for sure. So that—I think that the case managers will work with the individuals on that regard.

But there is some specialized services such as Snowflake, where we can get individuals into that facility and have the youth, you know, make statements and get that type of counselling that they need from those individuals that are qualified for dealing with children, so I would say—speaking on behalf of the case managers here but I'm sure when they get involved in a situation where there's a youth involved in this, I am sure they would take every action that they can to make sure that we do have the qualified and specialized counsellors dealing with those individuals, so.

Ms. Fontaine: And I probably wasn't clear with my question. I'm fully aware that there's two different, very specialized—for counselling services for children. What I meant is, in respect of the travel piece from the North, so had that travel piece impacted or, in respect of children, right? That's what I'm specific—because if the government is no—is again, except in certain circumstances, no longer providing travel from the North, what happens in respect of northern children who are victims of crime?

Mr. Cullen: Right. And this program is really to provide options for members of the community if they want to seek counselling in their community.

Yes, the same thing could be said if we had qualified and specialized individuals in that community. They could provide those services to youth as well.

If the family or the youth members or the case managers decided it's better to have that kid travel to a facility like Snowflake, absolutely. There's money there to cover those costs, so, you know, we're—again I'm expecting we're taking the best interests of the individual or the youth at heart and would provide those services that they need. Travel costs would never be a problem in terms of getting that individual to counselling.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the department have a sense of, or actual numbers, of how many counsellors are operating in the North to be able to offer counselling services to victims of crime? So do we have the number of counsellors, or supports or whatever it might be, and where they operate from, which communities are they operating from, or are they travelling or, like, what is the composition of counsellors for the North?

Mr. Cullen: Well, that's certainly a broad question, for sure. I'll certainly entertain that. You know, I will say, obviously, we have our own number of counsellors around the province. The federal government has their own counsellors and then there's independent as well.

So, you know, to track down those numbers could be—certainly be a challenge, and also these counsellors move around from community to community as well, providing their services, so we'll certainly try to get you in context how many counsellors are engaged in this. I'm not sure if we can provide a whole bunch of detail, but we'll certainly, in broad terms, we will—will undertake to get you that information.

*(17:30)

Ms. Fontaine: Yes, I appreciate that and I get that that would be probably a little bit of an exercise to get that. But it does go to, then, what is the infrastructure or the composition of folks who are victims of crime, both adults and children, who want to access counselling services and whether or not there is, (a) if there's enough, (b) can you access them. So I think it is an important exercise, personally.

And then I will have one last question and then I'm going to leave it to my colleague, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

But I'm curious: have the parameters of the Victim Services program changed? Because, again I—and, again, I know we said we'd go back to the Public Accounts piece. And so I'm just wondering if any of the criteria or the parameters of the program have changed.

Mr. Cullen: I would say we haven't really changed the program per se, outside of—actually we're looking at some policy changes to actually make it easier for victims of crime to access counselling and, potentially, funding. So we're actually looking at that.

But, when it comes to victims around family law and restorative justice, we've actually increased staff. We've actually put three more staff in that component. So we've got actually more staff that are able to deal with folks that find themselves as victims of crime. So, certainly we have enhanced the budget from that perspective, so I would say any changes we've been made have been positive changes.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Just seeking to start with some information on an instance where you have a child abducted—a child abduction from Manitoba across a couple of provincial boundaries into a third province—two-year-old child, say. Who, then, jurisdictionally, is responsible for—this is a child found in a remote location in the hands of a third party, not a parent or a relative. Who decides on whether there's going to be an investigation? Who decides on whether there's going to be charges? And who decides on whether there's going to be a prosecution? Because you've got a trans-provincial issue here. It's a Manitoba child.

Mr. Cullen: Just want to seek some clarification on your situation. So in this case, in—the individual, the child, was abducted by a family member or a third party?

An Honourable Member: Well, was found in the presence of a—

Mr. Chairperson: The member for River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: Was found with a third party, who was covering up the fact that the child was there, and it was—the child was found in the remote location.

Mr. Cullen: I really hate getting into these hypothetical type situations, you know. We certainly offer the member our briefing and talk about particular situations. But I'm advised that wherever the offense occurred, whatever jurisdiction that was in—say it was—the offense occurred in Manitoba—then the reporting would be to the police in that jurisdiction.

Then again, further to that, if it was the offense occurred in Manitoba, then it would be up to the Manitoba prosecutions branch to do the prosecution. So I'm guessing in global terms, then, it's where the offense occurred.

Mr. Gerrard: That—I'm presuming that you're saying where the abduction began, not what it—where it ended, is that correct, and would it make any difference if it was a child who was in the care of Child and Family Services versus a child that was not?

* (17:40)

Mr. Cullen: Again, I'm hesitant to go down this road. I—you know, the member may want to come to the department and seek some advice because it's kind of, be a lot of what-ifs on this particular situation.

I guess the bottom line is, though, wherever the occurrence happened, wherever the crime happened, that is the jurisdiction that would be responsible. Clearly, if it spills into other jurisdictions the police forces would be working co-operatively. But I would, again, would be go back to the jurisdiction where the crime occurred.

Mr. Gerrard: I have in front of me the violent Crime Severity Index for Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC, Ontario, Canada. What is striking is that during the tenure of your government there has been a dramatic increase in the violent Crime Severity Index in Manitoba, which has gone up from 138.6, in 2015, to 169.8 currently—well, or 2018. So that's a 31-point increment in the violent Crime Severity Index here in Manitoba. There's no parallel with this anywhere else in Canada.

And I know Saskatchewan, for example, was similar to Manitoba, you know, in 2015, but the numbers in Saskatchewan are virtually identical in 2018 to what they were in 2015.

So my question is, why has Manitoba alone, of all the provinces, seen a dramatic rise in the violent crime rate in the last several years?

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the member raising the issue.

We certainly recognize that violent crime is on the increase. I think Manitobans certainly 'recognithe'—recognize that as well. That's—and we as a government recognize that.

You know, that's why we've been consulting with police forces across the province, consulting with stakeholders around the province, including municipalities, other governments, local governments. And as a result of that—those discussions, we've put together a policing and public safety strategy. We just rolled this out not too long ago and I applaud the good work that was done within the department putting together these strategic goals. And we're certainly excited about it.

We know there's challenges out there, we know there's societal challenges that we've seen—cultural and other issues as well. Well, we've put together a strategy and we've got eight points in this strategy that we're working towards. We've—as part of that strategy, we've made announcements on programs that we put in place and you're going to hear more announcements about programs we're going to put in place that I'll dovetail back to the strategy we have in place.

There's no silver bullet to the solution around violent crime and that's why we're working at violent crime all across government. We recognize there's issues with illicit drugs. Clearly, meth is a challenge. Not to say we're going to point all of the increase in crime and violent crime on crystal meth—there's other things at play here. But we think with this strategy in place, moving forward, as long as we stick to the strategy and engage our stakeholders and look at a new approach to dealing with crime, I think we're going to provide some pretty good outcomes.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, there's clearly something happening in Manitoba which is different from any other province.

And you bring up meth, but my understanding that a variety of other provinces are dealing with meth as we are dealing with meth. Maybe we have just much more of it than other provinces or maybe we're not managing it, or preventing it, or something, as well as other provinces.

But, clearly, we are an outlier, and the question is what is different in Manitoba in the last few years than in other provinces which have not seen this change. You know, in fact, you know, it's not because we started lower. In fact, we started above most other provinces, and we've still seen this remarkable increase. And compared with the rest of Canada or compared with Ontario, our violent crime severity index is more than twice as high compared with British Columbia. And people have talked about Vancouver as being a high-crime area, and yet, our violent crime severity index is more than twice as high as British Columbia.

So what kind of investigation is the minister undertaking beyond just consulting? Clearly, this is such a big difference that there should be some factors that can be discovered. What kind of an investigation is the minister doing to try to discover the differences—beyond just, you know, consulting?

Mr. Cullen: I will forward a—this—our policing and public strategy—public safety strategy—to the member for his perusal, and he can take a look at our strategic goals and also the accountability piece of it.

And one of the key goals here is to improve policing effectiveness through better intelligence and collaboration. So, this in my view is key to how we deal with crime. We have to understand where crime is occurring, why crime is occurring, and then we can deal with it.

* (17:50)

So we're focused on this strategic goal, our team here. We've established a Strategic Innovation Unit within the Department of Justice to help facilitate this collaborative and this intelligence-led model, and I think it will provide us some very positive outcomes.

You know that criminal activity transcends municipal boundaries. So we have to be cognizant, and we have to be dealing with various police forces across the province, and, in some cases, outside of the province as well. So this is the approach we've taken, is how do we, with the number of agencies across the province, how do we work better together in sharing information? And we're on the—not path to establish a—I would call it like a province-wide organization, if you will, that will have a database for that information. And once we have that database of information, then we can make effective policing decisions based on that information that we have.

You know, there is certain variations of that database out there now, but I don't think it's effective

in terms of what we need here in Manitoba. So that's why we're trying to build a Manitoba solution here that will engage all of the police forces, hopefully the local governments as well, in that process. So once we build that capacity here, I think we'll be a lot more effective in terms of making the policy decisions and the policing decisions that we need to combat the violent crimes that you talk about. So we're excited about that key strategic goal moving forward.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister had mentioned meth, right? So I would ask the minister: Is there enough difference in the incidence of meth addiction in Manitoba compared with other provinces that it could account for part of this, or more than part of this?

Mr. Cullen: Certainly, other provinces are facing their own challenges, whether it be meth, fentanyl, opioids, and everybody's at a different place. We may have had an earlier start in meth in terms—versus say, Saskatchewan and Alberta, but we know that Saskatchewan and Alberta are facing their challenges with meth, for sure.

I would submit to you, when it comes to the high rates of violent crimes, we still have probably alcohol as still being the major contributor, and I don't think we can ever get around that. I know when we talk about downtown public safety, clearly meth gets the spotlight. But you talk to people involved downtown, and alcohol and substance abuse are still probably the No. 1 offender. So I don't think we can lose sight of that, as well.

And that really leads to our whole discussion about addictions and mental health and how we deal with it. Today we just announced—I call it the next phase of mental health and addictions in Manitoba. We've committed money as government for mental health and addictions. We just made the initial announcements on this phase going forward. You're going to hear more announcements about specific programs to deal with addictions and mental health issues over the next few months.

There is no silver bullet for solving the mental health, addictions and crime that we have. That's why we've laid out this strategy, an eight-point strategy which is an overarching strategy, and then we're going to have programming—programs fall underneath that strategy which will take a bite out of crime, one step at a time. And I wish I had an easy solution to this, but it's going to take a collaborative effort, a concerted effort by everyone to fight the situation we've got ourselves into.

And, certainly, part of this understanding it is getting that intelligence model and trying to understand what the root causes of some of this violent crime is. So we're undertaking that, we're engaged in that. It's not an easy process. It's a challenging process. Nobody's done it before here, but we're committed to taking it on and see if we can provide better outcomes for Manitobans.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister talks about meth and alcohol. There surely should be some fairly straightforward statistics that could be gathered in terms of the proportion of violent crimes that were associated with the use of alcohol, and the proportion of violent crimes associated with the use of meth.

Does the minister have those statistics?

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 6 p.m., committee rise.

FINANCE AND CROWN SERVICES

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Crown Services. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Thanks again to the minister for the good conversation last week, and I'd like to again extend a thank you all the support team that he has beside him. Their presence here is greatly appreciated. And hello to all my colleagues around the table.

I'd like to start by just talking about some of the FTE reductions that we've seen in Manitoba Hydro over the last number of years. Last week, I had the opportunity to ask the question about total FTE reductions we've seen in Hydro over the past couple years.

And I'd like to start just by asking, again, whether or not this minister can provide clarity on the total number of FTEs we've seen reduced since the fiscal year of 2016-17.

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): Welcome back to everybody, and my—member from St. James, welcome. And good to see you again. And I trust you had a drier weekend in sunny St. James than

we did in rainy Interlake, but it was all a lot of fun anyways. Good to be with family, and hope you had the time.

Also like to extend a thank you to the team to my left here, and sitting in the back as well. Certainly, we all have some responsibility, and we take it very seriously, and without good teamwork and support of a team we certainly couldn't be having these very informed and very good discussions regarding the betterment of all Manitobans.

The member had asked regarding what the number was for 2016-2017 to current 2019-20. The government did put a mandate of reduction of 900 positions at Manitoba Hydro, and to date that has been surpassed. It's now 1,028, and the other—the difference with the extra 128 employees, mostly done through voluntary retirement.

Mr. Sala: I'm grateful for the clear response from the minister. I appreciate that.

The question I have for the minister is, what's his understanding of how those cuts have impacted services to Manitobans?

* (15:00)

Mr. Wharton: I thank the member again for the question.

And, certainly, I'll refer back to the days in business where, with customer service and safety 'paramounting' in front and centre in front of any business, small, medium or large. Certainly, that is a focus—has been a focus of ours during—mine during my business career, and I know that Manitoba Hydro takes the safety and customer service factor of that large industry as well, Crown corporation, as a No. 1 priority. And certainly we are pleased that they continue to go down that mandate.

Bottom line is, while they're doing that they're supplying good customer service, great customer service to Manitobans right across this province while focusing on ensuring that the—that they're sustainable for the long haul and generations to come.

Mr. Sala: I thank the minister for the response. We know that Mr. Pallister's April, 2019 mandate letters asked for further reductions in management and regular employee levels at Manitoba Hydro. Can the minister confirm that Manitoba Hydro—

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry. Order. We're not allowed to use the names of individuals in these committees. You

must refer to members of this House by their constituency or their portfolio.

Mr. Sala: I apologize for that and I appreciate the clarification. So just to restate the question: we know that the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) April, 2019 mandate letters asked for further reductions in management and regular employee levels at Manitoba Hydro.

Can the minister confirm that Manitoba Hydro has been asked to reduce management positions and regular employee positions in this upcoming fiscal?

*(15:10)

Mr. Wharton: I thank the member from St. James for that question.

And I know the member has mentioned that he has read the mandate letter, and I just will go over one paragraph here for the members and, of course, the entire committee around the table, just to be clear exactly. I think sometimes it's unfortunate that interpretation outweighs facts, so I'll read this into the record, part of the mandate letter. That is public, by the way.

We also expect the board to carefully examine overall staffing efficiencies. Centrally, we have reduced overall management by 15 per cent, conducted a spans-and-layer review of management structures and reduced overall head-count by 8 per cent. We expect you to work towards the same, or more.

So, essentially, that's kind of working in collaboration; teamwork, to say, look, good job, let's keep going, all-hands-on-deck approach, and that way Manitobans can benefit for the long run.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the response, and I take that to mean that we are seeking to—this government is seeking to pursue further FTE reductions within Hydro.

And I'd like to read a quote here that's from Manitoba Hydro's own Public Affairs Officer, Bruce Owen. And he's quoted in a 2019 story saying, we believe that further staff reductions would significantly increase the risk of public and employee safety, of system reliability and, as well, our ability to provide reasonable levels of service to our customers.

So I know the minister had earlier referred to the importance of safety and good quality service in delivering Manitoba Hydro services. So I'm hoping he can summarize how they plan on making further cuts to Manitoba Hydro employee levels without

impacting public and employee safety, system reliability and their ability to provide reasonable levels of service to Manitoba Hydro customers.

Mr. Wharton: Certainly would like to ensure that the record is clear during this process, and we will continue to endeavour to do that.

With my response to the member from St. James with respect to further cuts, as he alludes to, between cuts or efficiencies—I guess cuts is the word of the day for the NDP, but it has been for a long time.

The mandate letter is essentially a letter—this letter coming out that I read into the record, not less than about 10 minutes ago, was again, simply a reminder of where we're at and where we need to be, as far as an 8 per cent head count and a 50 per cent reduction in management. And I would say, shortly after 2016, if memory serves me correct, after we were elected and the NDP were defeated, rather soundly, we moved forward with a 15 per cent reduction request to Manitoba Hydro.

And our job is to ensure that those goals are being met. It's no different than a CEO or a president or a—of a regular small business or, as I mentioned before, wanting to ensure that the corporation remains viable for the long haul, of course, and ensures that it's delivering on its mandate of quality customer service and safety as they go forward. And, again, I can assure the member that the eyes will never be—not be focused on the facts of safety and good-quality service provided to Manitobans right across this great province.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the response of the minister. And just to clarify, the spirit of the mandate letter that has been reviewed is ultimately focused, from what can be determined just from what he's read aloud, to see further reductions in the total number of FTEs within Manitoba Hydro. Yet we have Manitoba Hydro's own public affairs officer in 2019 stating really clearly that any further staff reductions would increase the risk of public and employee safety.

So just like to ask the minister again, how can we ensure that we continue to preserve public and employee safety while mandating this Crown corp to continue reducing FTEs?

*(15:20)

Mr. Wharton: Again and, as I mentioned over the last couple days, it's—I take a little bit more time to ensure that I can inform the member from St. James and his colleagues, and my colleagues around the

table, on factual information, and we endeavour to do that. And, again, I thank the team to my left for that, for their insight and knowledge.

The member refers to a comment by Bruce Owen with respect to concerns about safety going forward. And I can tell the member that Ms. Grewal, of course, the CEO of the corporation, has endeavoured to look from within, as we all do in our own businesses, for efficiencies.

I know 25 years ago when I was in my business, we were at a wall—we hit a wall in our business. We couldn't figure out what was really happening because we just couldn't get to that next level without just beating ourselves up, trying to get there—trying to get there. We were at a wall. And I know that we hired a consultant to come in. And it was a big step for a small business to hire a consultant to come in because, look, when you're cash flow strapped in a small business, you know, it's a difficult time, and certainly you, kind of, you roll the dice and hope that this works out.

And I can tell the member that this is a good news story. We took the opportunity to meet with the consultant after spending several weeks working through our business and finding efficiencies from within that, quite frankly, we probably had them right in front of us, but we just could not see them. And I think that happens, not only in small and medium businesses, it happens in large corporations like Crown organizations. I mean, the answers are typically there, but we need to potentially look for them through a different lens.

And, you know, the good news story for Globe Moving & Storage at the time was we found the solutions with—in partnership with the consulting firm, and we were able to continue on and see some success.

With that being said, though, also revisiting the plan every five years or three years, depending on the growth of the corporation and the company, to ensure that if we ended up taking two steps forward, that we didn't take three steps backwards.

So that was a really great experience in my business career, and I can tell you that Ms. Grewal is likely moving down that same road to find efficiencies from within. My hiring PwC to review, you know, the operation and look for additional efficiencies, so that they can continue—Hydro can continue to provide the best quality service and safety for Manitobans as they continue to grow.

And this is the crown jewel of Manitobans that we own—Manitoba Hydro. And certainly we want to see it there for the long haul. And I commend Ms. Grewal for her initiative and leadership to move forward with PwC to look at—take a deeper dive into the corporation.

Again, speaking from experience, it certainly has worked and I've spoken to a number of my colleagues in business and they've gone down that road as well. And I can assure the member from St. James that it is a very rewarding experience when you, all of a sudden, you realize that, boy, the answers were staring me right in the face and I didn't even know it.

Mr. Sala: I thank the minister for the response and I appreciate him reaffirming his party's affection for business consultants and work that they do. I understand that it can provide value at times, and I appreciate his thoughts on that matter.

Relating to the use of consultants, I'd like to just pivot now to some of the reviews that are currently being conducted regarding Manitoba Hydro. I'm hoping the minister can list the reviews of Hydro's operations that are currently under way.

Mr. Wharton: I think we made adequate eye contact to continue on, so I thank you.

The member wanted a list of reviews that are currently underway, and I'm pleased to be able to speak to them now. Again, the first one is one that I'm sure he'll recall was the—basically it's a review of bipole in Keeyask. Well, I will spend a little bit of time on that.

We all know, and I'm sure the member is very aware of his party's obvious change in scope to run a bipole line 500-plus kilometres down the west side of Manitoba essentially to run it to right—to the west end of the province down to the southeast and then back to the east—or southwest and then back to the east part of Manitoba.

Well, we all know what that cost Manitobans in excess of \$1 billion more to Manitoba ratepayers of Manitoba Hydro. So there's obvious—for obvious reasons, there's an economic review going on on bipole and Keeyask and I think it's an important one.

And I'm sure the new members would appreciate the fact that they would want to know more about how we got to this stage and how we're going to get out of it, quite frankly. And I think we're on the right track in working with our colleagues and, again, making

sure that nothing like this ever happens again in Manitoba.

I mean, I talked about my grandkids. Well, my grandkids will be paying for that boondoggle for many years to come. So that's No. 1.

*(15:30)

Number 2, a review just referenced that I talked about in my earlier comments, in my preamble, about D-C-W, and that was initiated by Ms. Grewal as well. And for the benefit of the member and my colleagues around the table, I'll just read a quote out from Ms. Grewal into the record so that we're all clear of where Ms. Grewal's going.

And I quote: I promised when I started here in February that I would make no changes for the first six months of my tenure in order to allow me adequate time to examine how currently—current operation. Now, eight months in I wanted to share with you that we have engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers, PwC, to conduct a review of Manitoba Hydro's operating model. I initiated this review to address some of the challenges we are facing today.

In addition, the long-term strategic planning process has already highlighted potentially disruptive forces that could reshape the energy utility industry. The timing is right for a review of how to operate—how we operate, how we are organized and how we make decisions to ensure they are in the best interests of our customers.

The first phase of this work over the next eight weeks will see PwC examine the effectiveness and efficiency of various elements of the corporation, including our structures, processes, governance, metrics and culture, working in parallel with our long-term strategic planning process.

Again, as I mentioned in my earlier answer, I commend Ms. Grewal for her vision and on her, obviously, her complete handle on the operations of our jewel Crown corporation of Manitoba Hydro, and this would be the second initiative that the member spoke to and I'll give him the third one now.

Well, not a review however, of course, operating hydro is—Manitoba Hydro's engaged in Deloitte to assess the preparation of a 20-year plan as we go forward with sustainability of our Crown corporation.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the response from the minister.

And, just for the record I think relative to the boondoggle that was referenced, I'd like to remind the

minister that as we discussed last week, it's important to be mindful of the fact that we did have the Public Utilities Board, who themselves, as a non-partisan board, recommended the advancement of the Keeyask project as well as the Bipole III project.

And that recommendation to advance was made on the understanding that we would see the debt-to-equity ratio fall to levels that we've seen it fall to at this current point in time. And it was made on the basis on that we understood that that debt-to-equity ratio would be back to the target, which is 25/75 by about 2030, 2032.

So, just to be clear, I think, you know, relative to some of the alarmist-type comments we've heard from his party around that decision, I think it's important just to be mindful of the fact that this, again this independent board did recommend that those projects proceed on the basis that we would see a lowering level of the debt-to-equity ratio with the knowledge that that would come back over time with balanced increases to the cost of Hydro and increases to the number of contracts that Hydro has out on the market.

So, going back to the reviews that were mentioned, I appreciate clarification that we've got these three reviews currently in play. I just want to ask the minister what he can tell me about the costs relative to the economic review that was previously led by Mr. Gordon Campbell.

Mr. Wharton: I certainly will give the member an answer to his question regarding Gordon Campbell and his involvement as far as monetarily. But, before I do that, I just want to make sure that we are clear on the record regarding Bipole and the PUB.

Approval of Bipole by the PUB was based on a 2026 in-service date and a \$500-million project that now turned into a \$5-billion project. So to say that Manitoba Hydro was within its budget would say that probably a little bit off by \$4.5 billion.

*(15:40)

And further to that, the PUB, again, reluctantly approved Keeyask as Hydro had no viable alternatives meeting electrical demand which resulted in a need for alternatives.

But this takes us back again to where we were talking at our last discussion around demand-side management and the need to actually build a hydroelectric dam in the North to supply power on a go-forward basis without a clear focus on demand-side management that was recommended by

the PUB back in 2014. It was difficult definitely to really say whether the need would be there or not when you're essentially running demand-side management as well within the Crown corporation through the former Power Smart program.

So I guess for help to all the members around the table, again, this is an area that really is important, and I know Ms. Grewal referred to it in her comments as well and in engaging PwC for an overall review and certainly on the right track and, again, I commend her for that. However, we don't necessarily need to jump to doing catastrophic. Sometimes in cases—expenditures that could harm generations of Manitobans until we ensure that we dot our i's and cross our t's.

And I know the member from St. James shares obviously my thoughts on the fact that we need to be good stewards of Manitoba taxpayers because there is only one taxpayer in Manitoba and going forward there, you know, there will be other generations of taxpayers coming up again to—hopefully we can move Manitoba in the right track and Manitoba Hydro to move forward that we don't have to burden our children and grandchildren for generations to come with the decision like was made during the NDP error with respect to Bipole III and Keeyask.

Mr. Sala: I'll just repeat the question very succinctly. What's the total cost pertaining to the review by—that was led by Mr. Gordon Campbell?

Mr. Wharton: Thank the member for that and I apologize I didn't get that to him in my opening comment there, but \$607,060. Six zero seven zero six zero.

Mr. Sala: Just to go back to some of the comments around Bipole III.

The 2011 estimate for the cost of Bipole III was \$3.3 billion, so that's somewhat at odds with what the minister had just shared about the original costs in relation to his point about how many cost overruns we saw on that project. And I think one of the important things that is often ignored when we talk about Bipole III is that at this point we don't have any sense about what the cost overruns may have been to have started to run a bipole down a side of a lake when it may not have gotten very far with multiple indigenous communities that may have been very unwilling to support the project.

So the costs relating to running it down to that side are at this point unknown, and I just want to ensure that we're not overinflating the cost overruns which there were some relating to Bipole III but just

want to be clear that the gap between the original estimate and the total cost as it's currently been estimated, which I think is at \$4.7 billion, is not to the degree that the minister has identified it as.

Relating to this—the question about the economic review—which I thank the minister for the total cost—just to be clear, are—is that number \$607,000, that's the total money spent to date or is that estimated to be—is that to be the total estimated cost of the review overall?

Mr. Wharton: That money that we put on the record was money spent to date. The overall budget for Mr. Campbell is \$2.5 million.

Mr. Sala: Who is currently conducting this review?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, Bipole III is worth continuing to talk about to ensure that we get the record straight. And I—when I ran for office in 2011, Bipole III was a very big concern for Manitobans at that time, and the projections were far over a half a billion dollars and continued to grow with the NDP's involvement in the whole process.

And the member talks about consultations down the east side, in particular with First Nations and not wanting to go down that road. Well, I don't know what the member has with the—has a problem with consultations; I mean, that's all part of the process. Transparency, you know, sitting down, getting folks around the table, and ensuring that everybody's concerns are heard are—is an important part of consultations.

And I would expect that the member would respect the fact that certainly the NDP at the time, the NDP government, should've endeavoured to have those consultations and allowed First Nations communities down the east side of Lake Winnipeg the ability to come forward and talk about their concerns and ensure that they're part of the process and not just simply, you know, say, oh, well, we won't bother having that; we'll just run it 500 kilometres further, down the west side, across farmland and private property.

So I really take offence to the member's comment about them not consulting. I think that's wrong, and I think he should reconsider that, especially when the NDP was blowing a road down the east side of Lake Winnipeg, the East Side Road Authority, and knocking down trees left and right. They talk a game about sustainability environmentally, and yet they're banging trees down to run a road up the east side without any consultation or consideration to the

partners that, quite frankly, call home the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

So, you know, I hope that clears up the record for the member, and certainly we can move on from there, but I'd certainly endeavour to have further discussions about the, as I said to you, the billion-dollar boondoggle of the NDP back during their era in office.

The commission that the member speaks to under Premier Campbell was paused on February 28, 2019. Premier Campbell subsequently resigned as the commissioner on the—on July 26, 2019, and the government's intention is to continue and complete the review through the commission and will be appointing a new commissioner in due course.

So I hope the member takes that information, and again I do my best to endeavour to give him factual information for the record.

Mr. Sala: Thank the minister for the response.

Has the commission of inquiry produced an interim report?

* (15:50)

Mr. Wharton: Mr. Chair, what I would like to do, and certainly this is information that's important to the member, and I'm sure my colleagues around the table—and I think we'll start with just a recap of, in case the member hasn't had the opportunity—and I know it's been a busy week and a half, so I just want to make sure that we take the opportunity to ensure that everybody's informed. And what I would like to do is I'm going to read into the record the mandate, first of all, and then we'll move from there.

And the mandate is, and I quote:

The review was established to examine the planning, decision-making, procurement and project management process that led to the development of the two major Manitoba Hydro projects.

The commission is expected to make forward-thinking recommendations on how to strengthen these processes in the future as necessary. We want to be able to make clear, informed energy policy that objectively assesses when and how to best meet our electricity needs—electric needs, pardon me—and when to determine—when the determination is made to ensure the best project procurement and management practices are employed to keep costs and completion dates in line.

Our government is to better protect Manitobans—our goal, pardon me—is to better protect Manitobans

by not running the risk of repeating the same mistakes that have been experienced in the past decisions around these projects.

Considerable work has been completed in terms of collecting and reviewing pertinent reports and documents. Numerous interviews have been completed and—with key individuals that provided important insights into the two projects.

Records of interviews and documents and reports have continued to manage in safe, secure fashion to ensure privacy.

And I'll read the next one in for you.

And, again, just to preamble what this follow-up is for the member, as well, is, again, the following is what has been completed prior to the pause. And I'll read this into the record as well.

Commissioned procedural process developed; confidentiality guidelines and—for information and participating individuals developed; law firm in Vancouver hired to support data management and cross-country scan of government energy policies, electricity resources and planning processes and best practices and regulatory oversight; a list of key individuals to be interviewed developed with 70 per cent of interviews completed; document management process established with third-party company; 90 per cent of relevant Public Utility Board (PUB) documents secured; 70 per cent of relevant Hydro documents secured; parameters for government authority seeking documents established with Clerk's office commencing document search; site visit of Keeyask completed; initial meeting with Keeyask partnership First Nation communities complete—good news, again; consulting with our First Nations communities; report themes were largely developed but not yet finalized and findings and recommendations were being considered as we go forward.

Mr. Sala: I thank the minister for that very thorough update on the status of that. I'd like to ask the minister how is this report materially any different from the BCG report which produced approximately a year and a half to two years ago?

* (16:00)

Mr. Wharton: Again, endeavouring to ensure that the member gets accurate and upfront information. I believe I can now move forward with a response to your question. I thank the member for the question.

Boston Consulting Group, BCG, report looked strictly at Hydro's internal project budgeting, so—and

the project costing estimate approach. So a little bit different. And I'm going to explain that to the member in a minute, but certainly BCG was hired in the summer 2016 by the board to look at the internal project budgeting and project cost estimating approach. So an important endeavour obviously.

The review of Bipole III and Keeyask, of course, we talked about early on as well. By the commission, it looks much more broadly at the project approval and regulatory approval process essentially that resulted in both projects being approved. The focus is to understand how these projects were originally advanced before, obviously, truly required, and how best to ensure that mistakes like these are not repeated.

So the bottom line is there's two reviews. Obviously, the BCG report looked at the internal project budgeting process and, again, moving forward with the understanding that, of course, these projects being approved in the future we don't make mistakes like that were made in the past by the former government.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the response from the minister and, of course, as we've discussed, we know that his party does appreciate the work of private business consultants and have had no issues with using those services extensively, and especially here in the case of Hydro we're seeing multiple reviews which are currently under way.

I think one important question we'd like to ask is: Has the minister placed any limit on the amount of public funds that can be spent on outside consultants by Crown corporations?

Mr. Wharton: The answer to the member from St. James's question I have, and essentially there is no specific limit for Hydro. Of course, like our other Crown corporations, there's no specific limit. But like our other Crown corporations, they do need to present their annual business plans to, and budgets to, Treasury Board for review and comment, again, lending to full transparency and obviously involvement throughout a whole-of-government approach and, again, final approval by the Minister of Crown Services. And Hydro is also required to submit the annual rate applications through PUB and disclose all their assets.

* (16:10)

So, again, a thorough, transparent process for all our Crown corporations is obviously prudent and important to Manitoba taxpayers—Manitoba

ratepayers in this case, and certainly we welcome that process to the fold.

Mr. Chairperson: There's been a request for a short recess.

Is it the will of the committee to break for about 10 minutes? *[Agreed]*

Okay, then the time by my watch is 11 minutes past 4. Let's be back here around 4:21 or so.

The committee recessed at 4:11 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:25 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: Welcome back, everybody, and we'll resume the Estimates for Crown Services.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Sala: I'd like to ask the minister who's—that we referenced earlier a 20-year strategic plan that was being developed.

I just wanted to know, is this plan being developed in—or, is it being supported by an external consultant?

Mr. Wharton: Yes.

* (16:30)

Mr. Sala: And what can the minister tell us in terms of the scope of the engagement with this particular consultant?

Mr. Wharton: The question—the answer to your question, the member from St. James, is, again, this is going to be a board-driven process. Certainly, government is aware, and will be aware, of the ongoing process as we go forward. And I would suspect that the proper avenue for this would be likely to refer the member to the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations when they review this type of process during that review.

Mr. Sala: Thank the minister for the response.

Can I take that to mean that when the 20-year plan, the strategic plan, is developed, that the minister's office will not be seeking to review that prior to its finalization?

Mr. Wharton: Again, I'm honoured to be able to provide an answer to the member from St. James and everybody around the table that, of course, as I mentioned earlier in one of my responses, government is aware. And, again, the minister will be aware, as well, of the plan and have the opportunity to review,

of course. I would say that certainly it would be wise for the team to work together. And at the end of the day, Manitoba Hydro board will ultimately approve their plan because it is their plan.

Certainly, government is aware of that, and so will the minister.

Mr. Sala: Appreciate the response from the minister.

And, you know, I think from the public's perspective, the optics are concerning because, you know, when you speak with people on the street and people that are learning about the number of reviews that are currently in play; we've got an economic review, valued at a total estimated cost of \$2.5 million. We did a Boston Consulting review that was estimated at a total of \$4.8 million for that engagement. We've got this PwC review which is operational, which is again, I think, from an external perspective, concerning to members of the public who are worried about a government that does have a history of seeking to privatize public assets, like they did with MTS many years ago.

With this many reviews in play, and this many engagements with private consultants who are doing quite well as a result of this government's affection for private business consultants, I'd like to have the minister confirm that no portion of Hydro is to be privatized at any point over the course this government's next mandate.

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, I just—I'm getting a little bit confused with where the member is going as far consultants.

* (16:40)

On one hand, he supports—he says his government—or, his party supports consulting firms—third-party reviews. On the other hand, he's saying that we're associating too much with consultants.

So I don't—maybe down the road, the member could—can enlighten us on whether he does like consultants or he doesn't. So we can have that discussion, though, because certainly we have plenty of time to talk about that. And I'd be interested to know.

Certainly, you know, annual debt costs at Manitoba Hydro—and the member will be very aware of this, I'm sure—you know, is about \$770 million a year to service debt right now at Manitoba Hydro. And certainly, you know, in business there's—you know, sometimes you have to make investments to ensure that you're on the right track. And I think if a

corporation of \$2.2 billion wants to invest, you know, whether it be a couple million or something into ensuring that they're—we're all being good stewards of Manitoba ratepayers, Manitoba Hydro—and Manitoba Hydro endeavours to do that, I certainly would encourage it. Absolutely.

You know, I—again, I mentioned to the member before that we continuously looked at outside support and outside-the-box—pardon me—thinking, when it came to business. And—because let's face it, when you get into a routine, you—sometimes you lose focus on what you're actually doing and what your mandate is. And, you know, we know that Manitoba Hydro, of course, is concerned and wants to make sure that we provide affordable electricity, but also ensure safety of its—not only its staff, but its clients and customers. And certainly we commend them for that—for not losing focus of that, for sure.

But, you know, again, I'd be curious to know—and I'm know—I know the member will probably share it with me, on whether he feels that consultants is a good investment going forward.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the thoughts from the minister, and just for what it's worth, although it's probably not of too much interest at the table, my personal perspective is that absolutely business consultants can produce value in a number of contexts. I think the key question, though, is the purpose for which they were hired.

So, having worked in the field of business, I've seen business consultants—a variety of different organizations do great work. But, again, they key question is why are—why have they been hired, what's the goals that they're seeking to serve?

And so, of course, those goals are identified by the organization responsible for hiring them—in this case, Manitoba Hydro and this government. And so, again, I appreciate the minister sort of wanting some greater clarity on my perspective on the use of consultants and the value that they can bring. I think what we need to appreciate is that from the perspective of the Manitoban public, we've got a government that's been very happy to use business consultants very extensively.

I appreciate that we are talking about—as he's referenced many times—Manitoba's crown jewel and we do need to ensure that we're making very well-informed decisions, but what we do see is the extensive use of business consultants without, I think, a great level of clarity for the public as to what the

overall motivations are, of engaging so many different consultancies for so many different purposes in the similar and a very short period of time.

So that does, for many people and many Manitobans that I know and that I've spoken with personally—and, including people who do work with the Crown corporation, Manitoba Hydro—strike concern into their hearts. People are made to feel anxious by the number of consulting engagements that are currently at play.

And, again, I'll repeat the question and I'm just hoping that we can get a very succinct answer from the minister. Will he commit that Hydro will remain in total a publicly owned and operated utility?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, I appreciate the member from St. James clearing the record on his support for third-party consultants.

And I know the member comes from the banking industry. And it's a great industry—my wife worked in the banking industry for almost 10 years, and she certainly took away a lot of knowledge working in the bank industry—banking industry that helped us continue to grow our company. As a matter of fact, she went on to be our comptroller for a number of years until we got to a level that she needed some assistance on it. And, by gosh, she wasn't afraid to ask for it, either, because she knew that she was probably getting into an area that required some outside resources to help out and make decisions that were best for not only our staff but for the company at large. So certainly a wise move on her part, and certainly we commend Manitoba Hydro for looking outside the box, too, as well, and ensuring that they continue to.

I could tell the member we did talk earlier about the three reviews that are currently underway and, or under—being undertaken at this time. And those three reviews are not looking at any form of privatization.

Mr. Sala: Has the minister then committed that Hydro will remain, in total, a publicly owned and operated utility?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly welcome the opportunity to speak more to the question from the member from St. James in respect to privatization.

You know, publicly, as we know, this is our Crown jewel; I've mentioned it many times, and I would ask the member to perhaps maybe do a little bit of research on what would have to happen in order for anything like that to happen.

* (16:50)

This—we're well protected in legislation that this cannot happen. A referendum would have to be called, and every sitting member of the Legislature, regardless of political stripe, would have to vote in favour of privatizing Manitoba Hydro. And I can tell the members around the table right now that our government would not even consider that, and certainly as long as we're in government, a re-elected PC government has no plans to privatize Manitoba Hydro, and we'll work to make sure it remains sustainable and publicly owned. That was a statement we made during the campaign, and that's a statement that we stand behind today.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the response from the minister, and I appreciate him outlining the process that we would need to follow in order to move to privatize an entire Crown corp like that. And I just draw attention to the specific question that was asked, and the reason that it was characterized as the whole of Hydro is because the CEO that now leads Manitoba Hydro, Jay Grewal, previously worked with BC Hydro during a time when they moved to privatize certain portions of their business, specifically the service and administration functions within BC Hydro.

We know that that type of privatization of one section of the business or one particular business area, could be achieved without the process that was outlined by the minister, and so the concern isn't necessarily just how would this happen wholesale, but I think Manitobans are equally concerned about the portioning off of different sections of the business. So this concern, I think, is justified given that, again, the executive currently responsible for that Crown jewel did work with BC Hydro during a time when they sought to privatize portions of their business. I would add that that privatization effort in BC ultimately failed and that portion that had been privatized ended up being reintegrated with the publicly owned Crown utility.

And so the concern is, are we going to go down that path again? And so I'll just ask, specific to, you know, the line of questioning here that I'm going down, which is, do we have—should we have, or should Manitobans have any concern about the privatization of any portion or any line of business within Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Wharton: In response to the member from St. James' question about, I guess, his perceived concerns about the hiring of Ms. Grewal, coming in and taking part in a privatization of Manitoba Hydro, I can share with the member and the board that—and I'll read just

from her comments here on the record and read them into the record. Grewal said she played no role in the decision making which occurred well before her arrival at BC Hydro. Her role was to carry out decisions that had already been made by the BC-PC-BC government and the utility's board of directors. And her quote here, and I'll quote unquote: I was not hired or brought here to privatize Manitoba Hydro. She said: That was never part of any discussion with the board or with the current government.

And also for the record too, I'll also read in another comment by Ms. Grewal too, as well. And asked if there were any portions of the utility that had been identified as candidates for privatization, she said: I would say to you that all the work that we are doing as we're looking at the organization is based on the principal assumption that we remain an integrated utility.

So I hope that helps put the member's concerns and track of questioning and line of questioning to rest, and he understands now that there's no reason to be concerned about him saying that the PC government would privatize Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Sala: Appreciate the information from the minister. I'm going to move on here to another area of questioning. Many of us in the room are aware the climate crisis is creating an unprecedented need for Legislature to act in response, and I'd like to ask the minister to provide some commentary on the role of Manitoba Hydro in responding to the climate crisis.

So maybe if we could start by having the minister explain the ways Manitoba Hydro is planning to diversify the way it produces energy given its—our sensitivity to low-water years and drought here in Manitoba.

* (17:00)

Mr. Wharton: And, again, I thank the member from St. James for the question, and we've had a couple days to talk about how important, of course, the environment is to him and I both, and we share a number of areas there of concern. And certainly we've moved forward, and I would refer back to our government's climate and green plan that we released and how aggressive this plan is to ensure that we continue to move forward with a key focus and a lens on the environment.

And, again, a big focus is the 95 per cent of power generated is clean, green power for Manitoba Hydro, of course, and renewable power, which is a great asset to have, as you know, probably one of the best assets

in Canada with respect to clean, green renewable energy.

And, with respect to natural gas, it also is a clean burner as well. I would say that natural gas, my understanding is reliable back-up for situations like the member described in low water years. And, certainly, if we look out our window today we don't have low water, but we live in an area of the world that has a tendency to have drought years and then heavy wet years—wet cycles.

So, definitely, we need to plan for those as we go forward, and I know Manitoba Hydro will work hard to do that. And further to that the—one of the reasons why—what they're doing in their 20-year plan, of course, is to tackle things like the ever-changing global energy market. Obviously, there's a lot of options out there right now, and we think that green, clean energy out of Manitoba is something that is important to our neighbours to the east and the west, to the south and to the north, and certainly we look forward to continuing to build on that.

And I know that Manitoba Hydro, over their 20-year plan, will ensure that they've got clear sight going forward on the ever-emerging global energy market to ensure they are well positioned to move forward in a sustainable manner.

Mr. Sala: I'll ask the minister again: Does his government believe that Manitoba Hydro should be seeking to diversify the way it produces energy beyond hydroelectricity?

Mr. Wharton: And I appreciate the comments from the member from St. James, and, again, it kind of lends into a culture that the NDP are famous for, and that's essentially thinking that government could—makes decisions it's better off than folks that like Manitoba Hydro and their board and their CEO and team down there can make with the information provided to them. And, certainly, you know, in the 20-year plan, I would suspect that Manitoba Hydro's team will be looking at exactly that. I don't believe it's an area that government has expertise in, and I don't think government should be weighing in to the level of Bipole III, for instance, with the NDP and the former government.

So, in answer to his question, I have the utmost confidence in the abilities of the Manitoba Hydro team to move forward in their 20-year plan to ensure that, look, that we have the lights on for our grandkids.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the words from the minister, and it's good to know that he has such a high level of

confidence in the employees of Manitoba Hydro, which could be in question given the number of private consulting engagements that we've seen be initiated the last few years, which, in fact, speaks to a lack of trust and the—and confidence in the ability of employees of that Crown corporation. So it's good to know that we've got total confidence in their capacity to help us plan and prepare for the challenges ahead.

I think the climate crisis is likely, as many—as we know, to spawn even evermore increasingly volatile weather events; we're at risk of having more extensive droughts or, vice versa, more wet years. We at this point will just continue to see more and more volatility.

So appreciating what he said that his government is looking to Manitoba Hydro to be making the determination about the degree to which they're diversifying their production of energy, it would seem important that government is itself taking on some of those concerns.

So hoping the minister can maybe explain a bit about his take on the role of solar power in meeting Manitoba's overall energy needs.

* (17:10)

Mr. Wharton: Again, I just want to make sure that we're clear on the record, and certainly my confidence in Manitoba Hydro employees is no different than my confidence in Liquor & Lotteries employees, or Municipal Relations employees, or any employees that come to work every day and try to make a better Manitoba. So certainly I would hope the member understands that.

And then again, we talked a little bit about consultants and how they can play an integral role in working with our friends, and neighbours, and family members at Manitoba Hydro. And certainly anything that we feel that would add to, you know, an overall better outcome, I think has added value. And I hope the member will appreciate that.

With respect to added value, as I mentioned earlier in one of my comments in respect to solar power, of course we would suspect that over 20 year—over the next 20 years as Manitoba Hydro builds out their programming going forward that, you know, they will look at other sources of clean, green energy like solar power, and how they can integrate it into the mix going forward so that we go have clean, green alternatives to Manitobans and potentially abroad.

Mr. Sala: Appreciate the minister's response, especially hearing his support for the importance of clean, green alternatives to hydroelectricity here in Manitoba.

I'm hoping you can explain a bit about the role of Manitoba Hydro's solar power program.

Mr. Wharton: Again I'll reiterate, ensuring that I can provide the member and everybody around the table a accurate and clear and transparent information in this great process of—democratic process of Estimates, and I certainly speak for myself but I'm enjoying the process.

In respect to the member from St. James' question, what I'll do is I'll just give him a little bit of a timeline here. The program was again a pilot project to test consumer markets' appetite to install solar capacity. And again, obviously, that process has played out and the program provided essentially an incentive to consumers through purchase power agreements that guaranteed a per-kilowatt-hour payment.

And since the program was established, of course, as the member knows, we're sitting with Keeyask and Wuskwatim set to come online, and certainly in Manitoba and still be significant power surplus position. And now what the surplus, as the member knows, I'm sure, now only pay for spot rates at 3.5 cents a kilowatt hour.

So solar generation, as we talked about, may be important, a source of energy, clean green energy, but at the moment, certainly not economically viable with the—with Wuskwatim and Keeyask moving along. So I think the member can appreciate that.

You know, however, Hydro, of course, will be and continue to be in their 20-year plan, looking at alternatives. And certainly I won't speak for the 20-year plan, but certainly I'm sure that's an area that they'll give due consideration to as they go forward. I mean, the bottom line is that, as I said, and I'll say it again, we want to ensure that we have ample resources for generations to come. And, you know, some of the undertakings that are—have been going on in the last three or four years are positive, moving forward. And, certainly, we're looking forward to good things to come for Manitobans as we go forward through this process.

* (17:20)

Mr. Sala: I thank the minister for the information.

I'm hoping the minister can just be more specific about the changes that led to the alterations to the rate structure for remunerating small-scale solar energy production in January 2018.

Mr. Wharton: Wow, quickest answer ever I bet, eh? I bet you the member's pleased about that. Yes, thank you.

Well, you know, we're learning as we go, right? So, again, for the benefit of the member's question, you know, this was a pilot project. And, you know, pilot projects essentially do have an end date. And, certainly, as I mentioned earlier, with the two Keeyask and—coming online, we're going to recognize some additional resources. And it's—you know, it's unfortunate that we're not going to be able to really recognize a return on that investment right away because it's 3.5 cents a kilowatt hour on spot power rates.

So, certainly, again, as I mentioned, you know, down the road in the 20-year plan through Manitoba Hydro, I'm sure consideration will be given on that. But, again, this was a pilot project. It's run its course and I'm sure that the fine folks at Manitoba Hydro will continue to move forward in an economical and appropriate fashion.

Mr. Sala: One of the key reasons we undertake pilot projects is to, of course, get a better understanding on the feasibility of launching a larger scale program or to undertake a full-scale implementation of this type of program in any environment. This is why we undertake pilot projects.

I'm curious. Since the pilot project has wrapped up, is there a report or some sort of analysis that was conducted that led to the stoppage of that particular program?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly appreciate the question from the member from St. James.

And, you know, the solar program that currently was in effect requires purchase power agreement essentially at almost four times what Hydro can sell the extra power for. Obviously is simply—it speaks for technology that's certainly ahead of its time, for sure, in Manitoba where we have a surplus of power and we're having to sell it on the spot market for a lot less than we're buying it for. I mean, I would say that that probably is not a good, viable way of moving forward with respect to solar power.

But, again, having said that, the pilot project—and I know the member had a concern about pilot projects

and they having value. Absolutely, it did exactly what was intended and—to do—was—allowed us to learn more about solar at scale in Manitoba is not yet economically viable by Manitoba Hydro. And, again, we'll be continuing to look at solar as other options.

* (17:30)

But I mentioned to the member before, I mean, you know, the bottom line is this is something that they can revisit in their 20-year plan if they choose. That'll be decision up to them. And, you know, with more focus on—back in 2014 when the recommendation came out from PUB to focus on demand-side management and move to—away from the Power Smart program and into Efficiency Manitoba, I believe that that would have been a great discussion to have at that time to ensure that, you know, decisions are being made for the betterment of ratepayers at Manitoba Hydro, where you're not essentially having to go out and buy a quart of milk and have to sell it for four times what you paid for it. So, you know, I think that the focus on their 20-year plan and again, with the great work that Efficiency Manitoba will be doing as they go forward on decide—design-side management side of things that we can move forward in a fashion that will protect Manitoba ratepayers and families for generations to come.

Mr. Sala: I thank the minister for the response, and I do think that there is—it is critical that we are seeking to incentivize Manitobans who are interested in diversifying the way that they access energy or in some cases are incentivized to pursue solar. We need to ensure that we're not creating disincentives and especially at a time when solar panels and the costs of their installation are at an all-time low.

I appreciate his point about the realities of spot pricing and how ultimately we're getting much lower rates when we're using the spot pricing market. However, I don't think that's a full—that provides a full accounting of some of the benefits of looking at how we can diversify and expand the use of solar power here in Manitoba. I do think that's a much more complicated discussion which we won't have here, but we're going to leave that there.

I'm going to pivot over to MBL here and ask a question of the minister regarding the mandate letter that was provided. It outlined a plan to allow restaurants to deliver alcohol directly to customers. And so curious if the minister is planning to expand the ability of local stores to privately sell alcohol directly to customers.

Mr. Wharton: Just a further clarification on your question. Are you asking about distribution or the actual retail selling of liquor products?

Mr. Sala: The retail selling.

Mr. Wharton: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I'm glad we got that settled; that's good news.

You know, essentially in the mandate letter, which I have here in front of me for the member from St. James, you know, simply review engagement with the private sector to identify opportunities for increased participation in the liquor retail and distribution sectors.

Again, this would be an exercise in ensuring, you know, we look at red tape and some duplication, much like when we were elected in 2016, to ensure that we can help enhance the customer satisfaction, the consumer experience as we go forward. And, you know, certainly in the mandate letter this provides an opportunity to further enhance how customers can obviously have an experience with respect to increased liquor retail distribution across all sectors of Manitoba.

Mr. Sala: So does the minister envision expanding the use of private liquor, wine and beer sales in Manitoba?

* (17:40)

Mr. Wharton: Just to make sure we get clear on the record here, currently 46 per cent of all liquor in Manitoba is sold by the private sector. And, certainly, in the mandate letter, I talked about ensuring that, you know, we can enhance the experience for consumers and customers and alike. And certainly we look forward to further discussions.

But 46 per cent currently is sold—I want to make sure the member has that information and look forward to giving him any other information with respect to the involvement of private sector.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the response of the minister. And I'm going to defer the remainder of this time today in committee to my colleague, Mr. Lamont.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I just wanted to start—I've asked a couple of times before what Efficiency Manitoba's business model is, but I'll ask more straight—try to ask a more straightforward question.

It's not in clear—entirely clear to me—it seems to me to be an agency that's—or, a corporation that's supposed to help people with energy efficiency, but it's not clear to me what its revenue is.

Can you explain how Efficiency Manitoba—what will be its source of revenues?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, I'd like to welcome the member from St. B—or, St. Boniface to the table. And I appreciate the question from the member.

And I can share with the member, of course, I—the member's probably read the news release about Efficiency Manitoba and their three-year plan, so I won't—I'm sure you've read that part. But, in respect to your question, Manitoba Hydro does pay Efficiency Manitoba for their service.

And I—the bottom line is that how it works is, well, look, if Hydro can save money, then it's beneficial for Manitoba Hydro to ensure that they're a fulsome partner with the Efficiency Manitoba as they go forward.

Again, the goal is to save money for Manitobans, but also to save energy as well as we go forward in ensuring that greenhouse gases and emissions are kept to a minimum.

Mr. Lamont: I thank the minister for his answer.

I had a question about—in some way it's actually sort of a bigger-picture relationship between—about the relationship between the government and the Crowns. I know I was asking the Premier (Mr. Pallister) at Executive Council the other day, there used to be a—the—essentially a civilian organization that provided some oversight. It's been replaced. And the Premier argued—he made an interesting argument, I found. Essentially, that one of the challenges facing any government is that there are—cannot—ultimately, there's political accountability in terms of what happens at Crown corporations, and that he—that—you know, there be spending decisions made by Crown corporations—pardon me, some of the things that you were talking about, right? Having to have reviews and hire people to look into the kind of decisions that were made, spending decisions that were made, that ultimately, you know, will have an impact on government finances, or have an impact politically on the government.

But I think they—I just wanted to try to separate two strands here. One is the issue of political accountability, and of course, we're all politically accountable in the sense that we all, you know, we'll

all have to run for re-election and we're accountable to the people who elect us. But it also seems to me that there's a question of direct legal liability in terms of the board members.

So that's part of what I'm trying to understand, because as I understand—like, there have been media reports about it, about the government's relationship to Crowns, which they sort of need to be arm's length, but at the same you have to be transparent about how you direct those Crowns.

So the question is that in a situation where you have a member of government maybe going around the board or directing a member of management—or directing management—and that if management at a Crown corporation makes decisions based on political advice outside of the board, in terms of legal liability—and this may be beyond the scope of this—who is actually liable?

Is it the case that the board members of the Crown would be liable for decisions made by management, even if government was the person—if government or the Minister was directly making those, sort of, directing those decisions?

* (17:50)

Mr. Wharton: I don't know if the member was here earlier, but, as I mentioned to the member from St. James, I try to ensure that I am able to provide the member with accurate information, transparent. And, of course, we endeavour to do that.

And I'm going to read to you now my understanding of your question, and hopefully this will clear issues up for you.

The old legislative framework, The Crown Corporations Public Review and Accountability Act, was enacted in 1989 to provide a framework for oversight of Manitoba commercial Crown corporations. The legislation was antiquated, lacked clarity and did not adequately reflect the new mandate of the Minister of Crown Services or the government.

The Crown corporations governance act—or, pardon me, Crown Corporations Governance and Accountability Act, replaced the previous act and established a governance model based on a defined accountability system and clear accountability relationships, established board accountability requirements, introduced ministerial mandate letters to Crowns, dissolved the Crown Corporations Council and implemented a secretariat model that resides

within government, provides for policy directives to be issued by the minister and the department.

The act sets out four corporations that are subject to the act: Manitoba Hydro; Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries; Manitoba Public Insurance; and the Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation. The act allows—also allows the ability to add other Crown corporations or agencies through regulation. And the new legislation is part of the government's commitment to strengthen the oversight, of course, of Crown corporations while respecting the responsibility of their boards and management to government and, of course, to—and management. The legislation also furthers transparency and accountability, which are important commitments to making Manitoba the most improved province.

So you've heard that before, and this leads to that whole discussion about accountability and ensuring that we are the most improved province going forward. I hope that clarifies for the member.

Mr. Lamont: I'll just—I know everybody's—I think maybe everyone's eager to go watch the federal debate. I just want to—so I'll try to be brief.

So I know that in Executive Council, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) talked about some of the changes that he was favouring in terms of further cost reductions in Hydro. They were based on a certain formula of a relationship between front-line workers to middle management. He said he didn't want to cut front-line; he wanted to focus on middle management.

I just—I did want to express some concern about that in a couple of ways. One is that, from what I understand, is that in speaking with people at Hydro, that they did not—they've already gone through one major round of cuts and they did not want to run the cut deeper, in part because they saw how it affected service in New Brunswick where there were storms and people were left without power for a long period of time, and the infrastructure there was described as being fragile.

The other is that, I mean, I've also heard that there can be major—that there are delays even for customers who are looking to get hooked up for Hydro because of their backlogs because of a lack of—sorry, a lack of people to do the job. So I just wanted to reflect, you know, express the-our concerns about directing cuts to Hydro based on a formula, that there have been examples in the past. And I know it's easy to—that there's often a position that people are defending their

budget lines. But sometimes that when people say that they are being cut to the bone, they really are.

The other is that, following on the comments of the member for St. James (Mr. Sala), I do hope that the government will consider changing the incentive structure for solar power. I do believe that there are some ways of doing it that would be extremely positive without necessarily affecting Hydro's bottom line. There are some positive ways of approaching it.

But given the hour, perhaps I'll just send the minister an e-mail. But thank you very much for your time.

Mr. Chairperson: Is it the will of the committee to call it 6 o'clock? *[Agreed]*

Time being 6 o'clock, committee rise.

FAMILIES

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of Committee of Supply is now consider the Estimates of the Department of Families.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Families): I just want to welcome my new opposition critic, the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams), to her new role as an MLA and to her new critic role as well in the Manitoba Legislature.

I also want to welcome my opposition critic for Families, the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin), back to her role as well.

Mr. Chair, I am pleased today in my opening statement to present highlights of the 2019-20 Department of Families budget. I'd like to go over some of the important investments our government is making in many areas of the Department of Families through Budget 2019-20.

In Early Learning and Child Care, quality, affordable and accessible child-care spaces continue to be highly demanded across Manitoba. As the Minister of Families, I am committed to addressing this issue by increasing child-care spaces through investment in private sector spaces and the development of school, home and community-based spaces.

Budget 2019-20 provides almost \$3 million in new funding to support the creation of 1,600 new child-care spaces, including funding for the new capital construction and operating grants. Combined with earlier progress in our first term, that brings the total of new spaces supported by our government to more than 3,200 spaces.

To ensure accessibility for families, almost 500 of these spaces are school-based in new school builds. This fall up to almost 150 of these new school spaces will be opening.

Budget 2018-19 also included more than \$2 million in funding for the Child Care Centre Development Tax Credit. This new refundable tax credit we will continue to support, is designed to encourage private businesses to create new child-care spaces for their employees and the surrounding community.

In 2019-20, our government will take the next step in our commitment to provide equity in funding for family child-care providers. The third instalment of operating grant increases will result in total funding increases to date of 52 per cent for infant spaces, 51 per cent for preschool spaces, and 11 per cent for school-age spaces. These operating grant increases may encourage individuals to become licensed and expand the net new number of licensed home-based spaces.

We strongly believe that these initiatives, under the new early learning and child-care strategy and the Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, will result in the best possible outcomes for Manitoba children and families.

Under that agreement, we have established and will be convening a new minister's consultation table on early learning and child care, which will ensure we are engaging the Manitoba Child Care Association, early childhood educators and parents as we move child care forward. And Child and Family Services, our government is committed to child-welfare transformation that meets the needs of children and families.

We know that we inherited a system that doesn't meet the needs of families or communities, and we remain committed to improving that system. Our reforms include—including legislative changes, reflect many of the recommendations of the Legislative Review Committee, the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, indigenous partners and the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action.

The transformation is focused on four pillars: community-based prevention, lifelong connections through 'renification' and permanence, funding for results and legislative reform. The transformation plan will support healthy communities, strong families and keep children and youth safe.

A new block funding initiative known as single-envelope funding was announced in February 2019, as part of the transformation. This initiative is meant to shift the incentive away from volume-driven funding and taking kids into care.

Instead, it will provide Child and Family Services authorities and agencies with more flexibility to focus on prevention, early intervention, the involvement of families and other positive supports. The single-envelope funding approach will also help reduce administrative burdens and improve autonomy and accountability.

Also announced in February 2019, Child and Family Services agencies are now able to retain the Children's Special Allowance, amounting to approximately \$33 million annually. Our government will continue to move forward with child-welfare reform, including reaching out to the federal government to better understand its vision for indigenous child welfare across Canada. We will work in collaboration with First Nations and Metis communities, community partners, and Child and Family Services authorities and agencies.

Through the reform process, we will continue to focus on fostering community-driven solutions that support families and children and achieve better outcomes for Manitoba children. We are seeing increases in reunifications and reductions in apprehensions and birth alerts.

For the first time in 15 years, last year, and again this year, we are seeing fewer kids in care and fewer days spent in care. We know there's more to do, and our government is committed to continued progress in this area.

In housing, in 2019, the Manitoba government will provide for a robust suite of programs and services that ensure low and moderate income Manitobans have access to safe and affordable housing. Budget 2019-20 provides the Manitoba

Housing and Renewal Corporation with an increase of \$1.7 million.

Our government is providing almost \$118 million in the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation in 2019-2020. Funding for housing includes \$13.1 million to match funds the federal government has made available under the National Housing Strategy.

In June 2019, the Manitoba government signed a bilateral agreement with the Government of Canada. This funding will help us with the implementation of a new provincial housing framework. Our government believes that home ownership is a critical investment in a family's well-being and financial future.

Budget 2019-20 increases support for affordable home ownership, making \$2 million available to provide assistance that puts first-time buyers into homes that they can afford.

Increased funds will provide for the cost to operate approximately almost 35,000 subsidized units across Manitoba. The Manitoba government will continue to invest in the repair and improvement of social and affordable housing.

In addition, we have budgeted over \$100 million in capital funding to ensure low-income Manitobans live in safe, quality housing and that Manitoba Housing's deferred maintenance, inherited from the previous government, continued to be—continues to be addressed.

Supports for persons with disabilities, I am pleased to advise that Budget 2019-20 provides an additional \$13.6 million for the Community Living disABILITY Services program. We are committed to ensuring that Community Living disABILITY Services program is sustainable now and into the future and that funding is maximized to support as many program participants as possible.

To achieve this objective, we are continuing the program's implementation of an assessment-informed approach and to planning and services that ensures decisions about service provision and funding are fair, equitable and transparent.

As minister with the responsibility for The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, I am pleased to report on our progress in making Manitoba more inclusive for all of its citizens, including one in four Manitobans with disabilities. Since November 2018, Manitoba businesses and non-profit organizations with at least one employee must meet accessible

customer service requirements under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act.

* (15:00)

In 2019, 20 new accessibility requirements for employment will help remove barriers to recruitment, hiring and advancement of employees affected by disabilities. As a government, we remain committed to the full implementation of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act and will continue with the development of the remaining accessibility standards in 2019-20. And as part of our government's first 100 days commitments, we will be consulting persons with disabilities on the development of a new disabilities pension program.

Poverty reduction: On March 4th of this year, I was pleased to release Pathways to a Better Future: Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy. This is our whole-of-government plan to prevent and reduce poverty. Manitoba's poverty-reduction strategy is guided by a clear vision, targets and timelines. Our first strategy includes a target that we have already exceeded, according to Statistics Canada data.

The next challenge will be maintaining that reduction and continually striving to address poverty factors to exceed that target. I'm also pleased to report that Manitoba has succeeded in reducing child poverty in Manitoba by 42 per cent and is no longer the child poverty capital of Canada.

We recognize there is more work to do, and we are committed to working with community partners and stakeholders to help further reduce poverty.

Help for low-income Manitobans: Life got more expensive under the previous government. Our government is making life more affordable for all families, and we are also focused on helping elevate low-income Manitobans by helping them gain greater financial independence.

For 2018-19, the EIA caseload grew at 1.5 per cent, continuing the positive trend of slowing growth that began in 2017-18. We are emphasizing supports for independence for people receiving EIA in two ways: assistant-assistance accessing other income sources and supporting employment preparation and planning.

I'm pleased to share that our strategy is working. In 2018-19, a new supports-for-independence unit helped approximately 50 people every month to

access resources they're eligible to receive, increasing their income as a result.

Jobs on Market, a rapid re-employment service model, continues to be a cornerstone that supports for independent-for independence approach. Since February 2017, over 5,700 people have been served, and over 1,700 of this people have been assisted to move to independence from the EIA program.

The Jobs on Market model is now being expanded. Jobs on 9th will begin operations in Brandon this fall. Our government continues to invest in benefits to help people low-with low incomes meet their basic needs and live with dignity.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Budget 2019-20 demonstrates our government's commitment to high-quality services. Thank you for the opportunity to provide opening remarks, and I look forward to questions-

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister's time is up.

We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comment?

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): It's an honour to be here today. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with the Minister of Families (Mrs. Stefanson), and I look forward to a productive few hours as I learn a little bit more about the department and this important work.

I'll be spending my time talking about important issues, social-and social supports that we have in the government, including housing, child care and supports for those with disabilities. I intend to speak with the minister about issues of poverty and to encourage the minister to take much more forceful steps in addressing poverty and the underlying causes of poverty.

I have a few concerns, including we need people to do important work in the government. I am concerned that the Pallister government's reduction in personnel has gone too far. I am concerned with the Pallister's government made-changes made to programs like Rent Assist and the ability-and the reduced eligibility to that program. I will seek assurances that no other programs will be cut.

But for today I'm going to spend a good deal of time talking about child care. I feel passionately about this issue. We also realize that there is more

investment that is needed to address this growing demand for child care, and we know good-quality child care is essential for both growth and development for children and the mobility of women and a strong workforce, because we cannot talk about a good economy without good-quality child care.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic for the—of the official opposition for those remarks.

Under the Manitoba practice, debate for the minister's salary be the last item considered in the department of Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration for item 9.1.(a) contained in resolution 9.1. As this time I invite the ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber, and we ask the members to introduce their staff as they proceed.

So I'll get the minister to introduce her staff as they're taking their seats.

Mrs. Stefanson: I have with me today John Leggat, who is the deputy minister in the Department of Families; we have Brian Brown, who is assistant deputy minister who's responsible for Administration and Finance division; we have Michelle Stephen-Wiens, who's here with us today, who's the director of Early Learning and Child Care; and we have my special assistant, Braeden Jones.

Mr. Chairperson: I'll get the honourable member for Thompson (Ms. Adams) to introduce her staff.

Ms. Adams: Chris Sanderson, senior policy analyst.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Does the committee wish to proceed with the Estimates of this department in a—chronologically or on a global discussion?

An Honourable Member: Global.

Mr. Chairperson: Global, okay—and agreed by everyone? *[Agreed]*

So we'll go with a global discussion—okay, thank you—and it's agreed that we're going to go with a global manner, and the resolutions to be passed once questions are concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Adams: There are reductions in the following pages on—lines on page 14 and 15 of the budget Estimates—oh, agency accountable for support unit, one; Winnipeg services in community service

development, one; Manitoba development centres, 7.2; Winnipeg Child and Family Services, 7.2; Employment and Income, Rent Assist, three; corporate support and corporate services, two; strategic initiatives and program supports, two; Early Learning and Child Care, three.

Can the minister go through these 26 positions and explain why these positions have been eliminated, and can she confirm if they were eliminated through attrition?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question.

And, in fact, we are going through a—some changes in the Department of Families, some reorganization, and this is a result of that, these FTEs. And no one—this was done through attrition and no one lost their job as a result of this.

Ms. Adams: What were the three positions in Early Learning and Child Care that were cut?

* (15:10)

Mrs. Stefanson: There was a financial analyst, a senior administrative secretary and a capital co-ordinator.

Ms. Adams: The three positions that were cut from employment and income and Rent Assist?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes.

All of these positions are—it's important to note, I think, that they have been vacant positions for quite some time, and so these are what the rules that—there's an investigative assistant and two policy analysts with respect to this, but I think it's important to say that certainly there hasn't been any, you know, changes in program delivery or anything that's been reduced as a result of this.

These are positions that have been vacant for quite some time.

Ms. Adams: The 7.2 positions with Winnipeg Child and Family Services, what positions there have been cut and their titles?

Mrs. Stefanson: Just to put some context to this, the after-hours call centre under CFS has been moved and consolidated over to MHRC where they're taking calls on EIA, CFS housing and other areas. So that's been consolidated the function over under MHRC.

So there were one, two—four positions in—well, actually, four after-hours social worker positions. Some were part-time positions as well. There was a

Child and Family Services worker. Again, this was a vacant position for some time.

There's a switchboard operator which also was part of that function under the after-hours call centre that's been moved over—the function of which has been moved over to Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation. There was an intake social worker which was not an occupied position and a community social services supervisor. Again, some of these are part-time positions so that's important to note that.

Ms. Adams: So are the new addition—are there additional jobs, then, in MHRC than now?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, this is a consolidation of the function of after-hours—of the after-hours call centre over in MHRC. So they are taking calls rather than having duplicate centres across the board. There was a consolidation of those and so they take on the functionality of taking on EIA calls, housing.

It's a way—it's a co-ordinated approach to the after-hours call centre so that, you know, they're all being co-ordinated through that centre rather than having duplicate centres across different areas of the department.

Ms. Adams: So were the jobs that were cut moved to MHRC as additional jobs or were the jobs cut in general?

* (15:20)

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, as part of the consolidation, MHRC has an after-hours call centre that's been established for a number of years, and so we wanted to look at ways to consolidate the function of these after-hours centres.

Rather than having a number of them across the department, we consolidated them into MHRC, where they're taking calls on employment and income assistance, where they're taking housing calls, where they're taking CFS calls.

So these particular positions are—these particular vacant positions, again, they've been vacant for some time—are no longer.

Ms. Adams: So the positions have been cut, and you were given an opportunity—there was an opportunity to correct the record, but the jobs have been cut.

Can the minister provide me with an overall vacancy rate of her department as well as a vacancy rate for each of the five divisions in the Department of Families?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question, and we don't have a breakdown of the individual areas of the department, but there's a total of 14.07 per cent vacancy.

But I think it's also important to talk a little bit about what the role of government is, and certainly the role of government is delivering services in the most efficient and effective way to—for Manitobans. And we're finding ways.

I mean, the member opposite will know that after 17 years of NDP mismanagement, we know that there's a better way to deliver services to Manitobans.

We're focused, as a party, more on outcomes for those service deliveries. We want to ensure that Manitobans who need to access EIA services, that need to access housing and so on, that we're delivering services to Manitobans in a better way where we're getting more positive outcomes as a result of that.

So we're more focused on outcomes than positions, per se, and if we can deliver better outcomes for Manitobans, we know that Manitobans—that's what Manitobans want and that's what Manitobans expect from their government. So I think it's important to mention that at this stage, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Adams: As a new MLA, I've been speaking with Manitobans, and it's been very clear with them that I'm hearing that they are quite concerned by the cuts that have been taking place, which is why I am asking these questions. I was wondering if the minister could provide me with the breakdowns of each division, the vacancy rate in each of the five divisions for tomorrow.

Mrs. Stefanson: We can endeavour to get that information to the member.

Ms. Adams: Can the minister tell me what change, if any, have been made to the following programs eligibility criteria for the—for Budget 2019 and 2020: Manitoba Child Benefit; the Children's Opti-Care Program; 55+; Rent Assist; the school tax assist for tenants 55-plus; child-care subsidy; disability and health supports; Employment and Income Assistance; and health assistance.

Mrs. Stefanson: The member opposite, if she could go through that list again we're endeavouring to try and write down as quickly as we can what she's asking for here, or if she'd like to do them individually as well.

Ms. Adams: If it—would two at a time be okay?

Mrs. Stefanson: Sure.

Ms. Adams: Manitoba child-care benefit, Children's Opti-care program.

Mrs. Stefanson: Just for clarification, you were asking for the eligibility criteria?

Ms. Adams: Yes.

* (15:30)

Mrs. Stefanson: So for the Manitoba Child Benefit the eligibility is for a resident of—the eligibility—sorry—for a Manitoba Child Benefit is a resident of Manitoba, have dependent children under the age of 18 who are in your care, in receipt of Canada child benefits for dependent children, family income is below a specific level and is based on the previous year's income, cannot be in receipt of Employment and Income Assistance unless you're only receiving the health benefits portion of EIA. The Manitoba Child Benefit is paid through direct deposit.

So that's the eligibility criteria for the Manitoba Child Benefit.

And with respect to the second program, the Children's Opti-care program, it helps—the eligibility for that—to get benefits through this program you must be a resident of Manitoba, have children under the age of 18 who live with you, get the Manitoba Child Benefit for the child who needs the glasses.

You may not get benefits through this program if you have coverage for glasses under any other health insurance program, example: Rewarding Work Health Plan, First Nations insured health benefits, Manitoba Blue Cross, and you make a claim more than 14 months after the glasses were paid for.

Ms. Adams: I apologize to the minister if my question was not clear. I'm inquiring on whether or not there was a change to the criteria and a change to the benefit for the program.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes—no, the criteria hasn't changed.

Ms. Adams: Has the benefit level changed?

Mrs. Stefanson: Sorry, could you repeat that? The benefit model, did you say?

Ms. Adams: Has the benefit changed? Like, the benefit level, are they getting less money, more money?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes—no, there are no changes.

Ms. Adams: Mr. Chairman, 55 Plus, Rent Assist, are there any changes coming to these programs as a

result of the upcoming budget? I apologize, this budget.

Mrs. Stefanson: Why—no. I mean, I think that was the answer to the previous, sort of, two questions as well. So, yes.

Ms. Adams: School tax assistance for tenants, 55 Plus and portable homes housing benefit.

* (15:40)

Mrs. Stefanson: No, there's no changes to the benefits.

Ms. Adams: The child-care subsidy and the disability and health supports.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes—no, there's been no changes.

Ms. Adams: I'm going to do the last three, if that's okay: tenant-specific rent supplement program; Employment and Income Assistance; and health assistance.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: There have been no changes to the tenant-specific rent supplement or health services, but there have been some positive changes to EIA.

Ms. Adams: I apologize. I didn't hear what the answer to employment EIA.

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, some positive changes in EIA.

Ms. Adams: And what are the positive changes?

Mrs. Stefanson: So a couple of things here. There—with respect to—the member opposite will know that utility rates are tied to the Public Utilities Board. So, if the Public Utilities Board decides to increase utility rates to the extent that they have, we're still helping Manitobans keep up with the rising utility costs. So we have made some changes there.

With respect to the Winnipeg Transit rates and cemetery fees, this, of course, is set by the City of—by the City, the municipality, and we have increased the benefit there to help cover some of those costs as well.

The member opposite will recall when she—or her previous government had something under EIA called the job seekers allowance. It—part of the criteria there wasn't actually having to seek a job actively, and so it wasn't really—the program title wasn't reflective of what the program was offering.

So what we do is we ensure that that \$25 allowance is still offered to those who are actively

seeking employment. We want to encourage more people to get back to work and so we believe we're working on—in various ways.

* (16:00)

We're working closely with Manitoba Education and Training to develop programming to ensure that we're assisting those who—Manitobans who want to seek employment, and so there are a number of initiatives there as well.

Mr. Andrew Smith, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Ms. Adams: According to the minister's last two annual reports, the incidences of alleged abuse or neglect in the community disability services spiked by nearly 50 per cent, going from 232 incidences in 2016-2017, to 341 incidences in 2017 and 2018, and finally to 356 incidences in 2018 and 2019.

A report of such incidents was—referred to police have also increased over this year and the number of subsequent cases have doubled and the number of people charged under the Criminal Code have tripled.

Can the minister clear up why this—why there's been such a large increase in the reports—in reported incidences and why that we have seen such a large increase in investigation and even criminal charges?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question, and of course any incident of abuse is horrific. We don't want to see this within our system. Unfortunately, this does happen and I know that Manitoba advocates have asked for an increase in reporting of these incidents, and that has taken place.

But I think it's also important to note that the number of people being served under the Community Living disABILITY Services Program has increased significantly. So, of course, those Manitobans—if we're serving more Manitobans, then this is likely an increase in some of the reporting of incidences. So I would say those would be the two reasons for that.

Ms. Adams: Why was there a tripling of people charged under the Criminal Code?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question.

Of course, I have mentioned in my previous answer that, you know, Manitoba advocates have been asking for an increase in reporting of incidences. We've been encouraging people to come forward to report abuse of situations that they're in, and so by encouraging more people to come forward it's a good thing that these are being reported.

And, of course, I think—subsequent to that, I think it's a good thing. It's very difficult for some of these people to come forward with these allegations of abuse.

And I think subsequent to that, you know, the police are doing their jobs. Law enforcement is doing their jobs and they're looking—in their investigative approach to this, they're looking at an increase in charges that are being laid.

It's very important that people who are being abusive and abusing these people in society, that there should be consequences for their actions. And so we encourage Manitobans who are dealing in abusive situations to come forward and, you know, the police take on their role. And so we would see that would be an increase in the number of charges being laid against these individuals.

Ms. Adams: How is the minister and her department encouraging people to come forward with that—with their stories of abuse?

* (16:10)

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mrs. Stefanson: The member opposite will know that under the vulnerable—the persons act, it provides for orientation and training related to the duty to report these incidents, and at the community service worker level, our department offers more training in the area of communication, in the area of education, and in the area of enforcement.

It's, of course, these community service workers, who also conduct these investigations as well, and I just want to take this opportunity to commend them for the work that they do.

Ms. Adams: I'd—seeing as the number of people charged has almost quadrupled, I'd like to know if the minister plans on increasing wages and training for people that are caring for people with disabilities, seeing as this is a very troubling trend and we want to ensure that people have the best access to care.

Mrs. Stefanson: The member opposite will recall that under the previous NDP government that wages were fairly stagnant in the area of community living and disabilities under their watch, and we have started to make some improvements in those areas when it comes to wages. When members opposite—and during their time didn't provide those increases in wages.

So we're starting to make some headway, but we recognize, of course, that there's still more

improvements that need to be made, and we'll continue to work with stakeholders in the community. We'll continue to work with workers and ensure that we are creating a sustainable workforce for those vulnerable persons in the community. And so we'll continue that work.

* (16:20)

Of course, after 17 years of fairly stagnant wages, you know, we recognize that there's more work to be done but, you know, after doing nothing for that period of time, it's going to take some more time to bring us to where we need to be.

Ms. Adams: I do not recall the last 17 years, as I am a new MLA, and I would like to know what the minister has implemented for training regarding people with—vulnerable people and—working with elders and seniors, and disabilities.

Mrs. Stefanson: So I thank the member for the question, and there's actually strong engagement with Abilities, which is the service providers, and between the strong engagement with Abilities—between Abilities and the Department of Families as well. And there's a focus on a quality assurance initiative that is being worked on, with a focus on improving personal outcomes for these individuals with lived experience.

And so, throughout that, we're working closely with these service providers, we're consulting with families, we're consulting with individuals, we're consulting with these service providers so we can ensure that we're getting it—we're getting this right, that we're getting the best possible service that we can for these individuals who need it, these vulnerable individuals in our communities.

Ms. Adams: What are the changes?

Orientation isn't new, the law to vulnerable persons hasn't changed.

What has your department done to protect our vulnerable population?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Thompson—*[interjection]*—can you repeat that?

We missed it on the Hansard.

Ms. Adams: Can the minister please be specific?

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

Mrs. Stefanson: Could the member repeat the question, please?

Ms. Adams: What are the changes?

Orientation isn't new. The lot of honourable persons hasn't changed.

What has your department done to protect our vulnerable population, and can the minister please be specific to what the changes have been?

Mrs. Stefanson: Think it's important to say that we're always, as a department, looking to find better ways to provide better services to these vulnerable Manitobans living with disabilities, and, certainly, there's been a higher level of engagement with abilities, our service providers.

I did mention in my previous answer about the quality assurance initiative which is under way and we anticipate—and that's between the departments as well as our service providers—again, in consultation with people with lived experience, with the families, with service providers, with communities.

We'll continue that consultation process, and I think out of this—this quality assurance initiative, which is quite something I think that we've embarked on—we anticipate that there may be some recommendations out of that process as to how we can make improvements.

Member opposite was saying that, you know, there hasn't been any changes to the act. Well, I don't know. The member opposite—I know she says that she's only been a member here for a short while and she wasn't part of her NDP government.

Well, we can't erase history. We can't erase what took place back when the NDP was in power in Manitoba. They had the ability to make changes back then and they chose not to. So the member opposite can't erase history.

* (16:30)

Where they failed these Manitobans, we're delivering on this. And we're working with our service providers, we're working with the families, we're working with people with lived experience to ensure that we get the best possible outcomes for these individuals because they deserve it.

Ms. Adams: I'm still very troubled by the number of cases that have been reported and people charged under the Criminal Code. I'm not satisfied with the answers that I'm getting from the minister regarding what her department has taken on addressing these and making—and protecting our vulnerable population. I'm going to move on from this but I will come back to this at a later date.

The number of children receiving subsidized child-care has declined by nearly 1,700 since 2015 and 2016. I believe in part—part of the explanation is that the federal child tax benefit is increased, pushing many incomes above the eligible threshold.

Did the minister consider raising the threshold for the ability—eligibility and will she?

Mrs. Stefanson: I just want to point out that the member opposite is quite wrong in her preamble that—where she suggested that the Canada Child Benefit is considered as income. It is not considered as part of income when considering eligibility for child-care subsidies.

In fact, we do know that there has been, under the previous government—and I know the member opposite doesn't like to talk about that because she wasn't here at the time, but she cannot erase history. Again, it's part of her government, a party that—a political party that she ran for.

And I think it's important to point out that under their watch, the previous NDP government, the child-care wait list more than doubled. So we recognize that there's a serious challenge when it comes to child-care spaces in the province of Manitoba. But with 17 years of really not moving in the right direction—quickly enough in that direction and providing those child-care spaces for those families that need it.

We've had to—we've made some progress so far. We've had to make some significant changes and we've made some progress. We have committed to more than 3,200 new child-care spaces since coming into office, which we think is significant progress.

But, of course, we recognize that there's more work that needs to be done and that's why we have introduced the Child Care Centre Development Tax Credit. We don't put an ideological bent on creating child-care spaces in Manitoba.

We want to partner with whoever we can to ensure that we can provide those spaces to families that need it, and that's why we want to partner with the private sector to create these spaces so that we can offer that—those spaces for Manitoba families.

So that's, sort of, one area that we've moved in—in I think what is the right direction. We also, obviously, have a bilateral agreement with the federal government where we've been working closely with them to ensure that we're looking at further daycare spaces.

The member opposite will know that we announced 20 new schools for Manitoba and—for

Manitobans, and part of that will be a significant number of child-care spaces there as well, within those schools once they're built. And I think part of that initiative we're recognizing, I think, about a hundred and—almost 150 new spaces this year alone. So we think that that's significant.

But we recognize, again, Mr. Chair, that there is still more work that needs to be done and we will continue to work with the Manitoba Child Care Association. We'll continue to work with families and we'll continue to work with communities to ensure that we can provide that affordable daycare—child care for Manitobans who need it.

Ms. Adams: Why was there a 1,700 decline in child-care subsidy?

* (16:40)

Mrs. Stefanson: And, you know, I thank the member for the question. I think it's important to note that, you know, she's quite right. We are making life more affordable for Manitobans; things like our decision to decrease the PST, reduce the PST that members opposite increased and made it less affordable for Manitobans.

And, of course, you know we want to ensure—and there's other benefits that we have increased for Manitobans, whether it has to do with housing, Rent Assist, EIA supports. It's important to note that we are making life more affordable for Manitobans. We want to ensure that the child-care subsidy is there for Manitobans who really need it when they need it.

And so we're never going to apologize for making life more affordable for Manitobans, but it is important to note as well—and I know the member opposite, again, doesn't want to go back to the previous NDP government, but it's important to know that this funding model was put in place for child care in Manitoba well over a decade ago.

And the members opposite had a choice at the time. They could have changed the model. They could have updated it. They could have, you know, made those changes that the member opposite is maybe talking about today, but they chose not to.

And, certainly, we have already announced that we will be conducting a funding model review where some of these will be take—will—some of these initiatives will be considered. And so, you know, we wait for the outcome of that review.

We're going to work closely with the Manitoba Child Care Association. I have set up a new

consultation table on early learning and child care which includes input from the Manitoba Child Care Association. It includes input from parents, and the review of the funding model will help us move towards a more equitable, sustainable and child-care model in Manitoba, and that's, I think, what Manitobans need, want, and deserve in a child-care model.

Ms. Adams: Has the eligibility for a subsidy changed?

Mrs. Stefanson: That's the point that I'm making, is that—and that's why we've introduced this—the funding model review. Because, again, we go back to the previous government who set up the model well over a decade ago. They never reviewed the model. They never made the necessary updates to that model.

We recognize that there's a challenge that we're faced with in Manitoba with respect to child care for Manitobans who need it, and that's why we have introduced this funding model review, to ensure that we are able to work towards a more equitable—again, a more sustainable child-care model in Manitoba.

Ms. Adams: What does—what unit does licensing order and suspension and refusals for daycare?

* (16:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: It's called the compliance-based licensing unit, which is part of the ELCC branch.

Ms. Adams: Is there a specific group of people assigned to this? And what are their line—what is the line item in the budget, and how many are there in the budget?

Mrs. Stefanson: There are 29 staff, three supervisors, all with early childhood educator IIIs. They do all of the licensing and monitoring of child-care centres in homes as part of their duties, and this is referred to on page 101 of the Estimates book.

Ms. Adams: How many of those positions are unfilled?

Mrs. Stefanson: There're currently five vacant positions.

Ms. Adams: How many full-time equivalent positions were assigned to the compliance unit in 2018 and 2019?

Mrs. Stefanson: The number is unchanged from '18-19.

Ms. Adams: According to the minister's annual report, in 2017 and 2018 there were no licensing

orders, suspensions or licence refusals for every type of daycare centre in the province, including nonprofit centres, homes and for-profit daycares.

This year in 2018-2019 there were only three, all a result of self-reported incidences and a lower amount has been recorded in many years. For home daycares, since the Pallister government took office there has not been a single licensing order and there has not been a single licensing suspension or licence refusal.

My concern is that there is a concerted effort in years past to ensure better compliance from daycare centres. Licensing orders show this: seven in 2014; eight in 2015, but the number has fallen off. In 2016 and 2017 there was four. In 2017 and 2018 there was zero. In the past year there were only three, all of which were a result of self reporting.

How does the minister explain this?

* (17:00)

Mrs. Stefanson: Our department staff works very closely with the child-care facilities in a compliance-based licensing model. And so when, for example, if one child-care facility is falling behind, we work very closely with them before we have to get to this stage where these would be reported.

We want to work very closely between the child-care agencies and the department to ensure there is full compliance there, and I would say that this is a good-news story for the tremendous work that is being done by the early learning and child care staff in the department who work very closely with these child-care agencies to ensure compliance.

Ms. Adams: Why was there only zero in 2018 and 2019 and the three—the previous year were only three due to self-reporting?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, Mr. Chair, I think this is a good-news story for the incredible work that the Early Learning and Child Care staff are doing within the department to work very closely with those child-care facilities to ensure compliance.

And so, you know, certainly there was probably some recognition that under the previous government, those numbers weren't so good and that some action needed to be taken, and so I commend the department for taking that necessary action to get us to where we are today.

And so, you know, we'll continue that hard work. I know the staff will continue the hard work and

continue to work in a co-operative way with the child-care facilities to ensure compliance.

Ms. Adams: I do struggle with that there were zero, and three which were self-reporting. For example, minister, if I sent food inspection agents to every restaurant in the city, there would be some orders of compliance.

So how often are daycares inspected with the compliance unit?

Mrs. Stefanson: So, I thank the member for the question. Of course, licences are renewed on an annual basis. But certainly that by no means says that the department isn't working very closely with these child-care facilities throughout the year to ensure that they remain compliant.

And so, you know, we—so that the department staff does a very good job on a regular basis touching base with these child-care facilities to ensure that they maintain that compliance. And to the extent that some fall into, you know, maybe are struggling with some areas, the department staff works very close with them to ensure that they rectify those situations.

And so, again, I just want to commend the staff for the incredible work that they do working very closely with these child-care facilities to ensure that they maintain compliance.

Ms. Adams: The Pallister government has put an emphasis on home daycare and during the election they said they were planning on providing more supports for private, for-profit daycares.

Given the low number of compliance, will the minister put appropriate resources into licensing before she extends new resources into private daycares, or is she just going to roll the dice?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I thank the member for the question.

And of course, you know, we believe—we don't take an ideological approach, unlike members opposite, when it comes to providing child care for Manitobans who need, want and deserve it. And that's why we have taken steps to partner with the private sector.

That's why we've taken steps to increase the number of in-home daycares. We think that's a positive thing. Providing more daycare spaces for Manitoba families is what our job is in the department, and certainly that's what we'll continue to do.

I think it's important, from a compliance standpoint, that these in-home daycares will also fall under that model. As the department is becoming—which we have seen through the numbers, that it's become much more efficient in the way that they are delivering those services for Manitobans and working very closely with those daycare facilities to ensure compliance.

* (17:10)

You know, they're able to free up their—more of their time to focus on some of those facilities that maybe are falling a little bit behind from a compliance standpoint, so we can work with them to ensure that they maintain their licence throughout the year.

So, again, that's incredible work that's being done. I commend the staff who—for the work that they do in the department to ensure that compliance.

And, again, these in-home daycares providing more daycare spaces in Manitoba is a good thing. So we'll always stand in favour of more child-care spaces in Manitoba.

I hope the member opposite isn't suggesting that we shouldn't have in-home daycares, that we shouldn't be providing more daycare spaces in Manitoba. I hope that's not what she's suggesting.

Ms. Adams: So what I hear the minister saying is that there are less licensing orders now because the staff are working closer with daycares.

So would that mean that there are—that there is a move away from issuing licensing orders when they are warranted?

Mrs. Stefanson: No.

Ms. Adams: There has been literally no protective licence-enforcement in the last two years, and there was no licensing orders in 2017 and 2018, and there were no proactive enforcements in 2018 and 2019 either. Those orders come from daycare reporting itself.

Why is the effective—why is effective not enforcement?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, Mr. Chair, I think it's important that the member opposite understands that those working in early learning and child care within the Department of Families are doing a tremendous job and ensuring compliance with those child-care facilities. And, you know, they're—they work in a more efficient and effective way to ensure compliance, and that's reflected in the numbers.

I know the member opposite doesn't like the numbers, maybe because the numbers are actually good. We're providing good services and working with our child-care facilities to ensure that they do maintain that compliance. That is a good thing for Manitoba.

I don't think, you know, that we never—we would never jeopardize the safety or anything of children in those child-care facilities. I hope that that's not what the member opposite is suggesting; that people in the Department of Families would somehow jeopardize the safety and security of those children in those child-care facilities.

I know these people who work in the Department of Families and in early learning and child care. They do tremendous work on behalf of Manitobans, and I think they should be commended for the work that they do.

Ms. Adams: In the summer of 2017, there was a well-documented confrontation between government and the—and community regarding the wait-list for inclusion support. Parents were being told that funding was committed and they would have to wait until next year. It is very critical coverage.

It appears that the minister has backed down. Has the Pallister government made any changes to the inclusion support program?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question.

Of course, our government is committed to increasing accessibility to early learning and child care, including options for children with disabilities and/or emotional and behavioural needs.

I think it's important at this point to recognize the fact that there is—there are no people on a wait-list in Manitoba looking for these services. And so I think that's an important part of this, to ensure that the program is accessible for Manitobans who need it.

So, as part of Manitoba's action plan under the Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, the department is piloting a new, dual-stream service and funding approach which is focused on co-ordinating services to better meet the additional support needs of children with disabilities.

So I think we've taken important steps here, and we recognize that we want to ensure that these services are provided to those Manitobans who need it.

Ms. Adams: The department's guide to inclusion support program, dated September 2013, says if a child is transferred to another facility, the funding will transfer to the new facility; the child does not have to start over with a new application to the program. Is this still the case?

* (17:20)

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's important to say that we take a child-centred approach to this issue. We want to ensure that the necessary level of funding is adequate to support the child's needs. And so we know the different child-care facilities have different resources, and so we recognize that.

Some—for example, if one child-care facility doesn't offer, you know, some of the same supports that that child has in one facility, and they're moving and relocating to another facility, the funding may actually go up as a result of that to ensure that those supports are offered to that individual child.

And so we believe in a child-centred approach to ensure that the necessary funding flows with that child in the movement between facilities.

Ms. Adams: How many applications for inclusion support has the department received?

Mrs. Stefanson: So there were 1,429 applicants last year and every child who applied was accommodated.

Ms. Adams: Can I ask for a five-minute break?

Mr. Chairperson: Is there agreement for a five-minute break? Is it the will to the House to have a five-minute break? *[Agreed]*

The committee recessed at 5:27 p.m.

The committee resumed at 5:33 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, we'll resume and the next question will be—yes, from the member from the—MLA for Thompson.

Ms. Adams: How many applications were received in 2017 and 2018?

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry, what—repeat the question again.

Ms. Adams: How many applications were received in 2017 and 2018 in regards to the inclusion support program?

Mrs. Stefanson: So in '17-18, there were 1,471 active cases; and in '18-19, there were, as I mentioned earlier, 1,429.

Ms. Adams: What is the processing time for the applications?

Mrs. Stefanson: So again, we take a child-centred approach to this, and the processing time is dependent on the needs of the child and the capacity of the child-care centre. So the processing time will vary from child to child.

Ms. Adams: What is the average processing time?

* (17:40)

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, it ranges from two days to six weeks. Sometimes the assessment takes—can take a little longer because it's based, again, on this child-centred approach. It's based on the child's needs, so sometimes the assessment of that child for the—what is needed for them can take a little bit longer.

Ms. Adams: Would the minister take it as an undertaking to provide me with the average processing times for the applications over the last three years?

Mrs. Stefanson: So I thank the member for the question. She'll recall that this program existed under the previous NDP government and there was no statistical data that was kept back in that time. We recognized a year ago or so that there was a need to start tracking this data, and so I would not be able to undertake what the member has requested.

Ms. Adams: Has there been any changes to the referral process in the last two years?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think I mentioned to the member earlier, as part of Manitoba's action plan under the Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, we—the department, is piloting a new dual-stream service and funding approach focused on co-ordinating services to better meet the additional support needs of those persons—of those children with disabilities.

So, as part of that—there's a new eligibility application as part of that, and those are the changes that have been made. We think it's a positive thing for those who are living with—for those children who are applying through the process.

Ms. Adams: Would the minister be able to give me a copy of the old application and the current application?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, we can't provide the previous application because, in fact, there was never an application under the previous governments. But we can certainly provide the new application, which we

believe is part of the transparency of the new process that we're piloting here.

Ms. Adams: Over this time period, the number of children served by Children's disABILITY Services has only grown. We know the demand for services for children with disabilities is increasing. Yet, during this time, inclusion support in daycares has dropped—the lowest number of children enrolled in inclusion support in the last 10 years.

Why?

* (17:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: So I thank the member for the question. I think it's a good one.

We're building the capacity of the sector through training initiatives under the bilateral agreement. And, as a result, children who would previously need different resources can be accommodated within the centres' existing capacity—so, for example, training initiatives like the applied behavioural analysis program, the Circle of Security approach. So those are two examples of training initiatives that have helped in these areas.

Ms. Adams: Prior to the application for the inclusion support worker, what was the process for applying for the program?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question.

So, again, under the previous NDP government, there was this approach where people had to call in or email in their request for this program, and we recognized that there was a need to bring transparency to the process, that we need to have the appropriate application as part of that. And so that's why we established this application.

Ms. Adams: In a FIPPA dated May 3rd, 2017, an analyst in the minister's department said that there were 1,604 children served by the inclusion support program at that time and anticipated the number will continue to increase, yet it did not. It dropped to the numbers we—to numbers—the lowest numbers we've seen.

Why is that?

Mrs. Stefanson: Just going back to a previous question that the member had asked about: if she could get a copy of the inclusion support program application form. I've just been informed that the form is actually available on the new resident portal for forms and policies within—on the website. So you can just access it there if that's okay.

Ms. Adams: I'd like to thank the minister for that information.

Mrs. Stefanson: And, just in answer to the member's question, the numbers she's referring to actually pre-date the pilot's—the new dual-stream approach that the department has taken and so that would have resulted in a reduction in those numbers.

Ms. Adams: The new supports received from the federal government is 100 per cent federal dollars. There is no reason why the Province could not maintain and grow the inclusion support program while pursuing additional programming. Why has the number of children in the supported—in the inclusion support program dropped?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question. In fact we can't force people to apply to the program. So—and—but it should be noted that all of those individuals who apply through this program are given

the level of support that they need based on their needs.

Ms. Adams: I thought we were going to be done. Okay, I'll go on.

Two years ago in 2016 and—*[interjection]* Two years ago, 2016 and 2017, tuition support grants supported 60 full-time students and 249 staff replacement grants. How many—

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 6 p.m., the committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Speaker: The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

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