

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 5, 2023

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

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

Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 232—The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act (Administrative Penalties for Personal Care Homes)

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I move, seconded by the MLA for Wolseley, that Bill 232, The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act (Administrative Penalties for Personal Care Homes), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

MLA Asagwara: I am pleased to introduce Bill 232, The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act (Administrative Penalties for Personal Care Homes).

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted failures in Manitoba's personal-care homes which resulted in the government commissioning the Stevenson report. Unfortunately, we continue to hear stories of

maltreatment, chronic understaffing and poor conditions for personal-care-home residents.

Currently, operators faces little to no consequences when they fail to provide adequate care. Bill 232 would change that. Bill 232 would allow inspectors to issue on-the-spot fines of up to \$5,000 to personal-care-home operators if they find they're breaking the rules or failing to uphold specific standards of care.

I look forward to the unanimous support for Bill 232 in this House.

Thank you.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I wish to table written responses to question No. 9 that appeared in our Order Paper, posed by the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and fall within the Department of Health.

Madam Speaker: Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Domestic Violence

Hon. Kevin E. Klein (Minister of Environment and Climate): Domestic violence is a widespread issue that affects individuals, families and communities around the globe. It is a type of abuse that is often in a relationship where one partner tries to control and dominate the other. It can be physical, emotional, verbal, sexual or financial.

Unfortunately, domestic violence does not make the news too often. We don't talk about it, although it is one of the highest calls for service for police services across our country and right here in Manitoba. Victims are often too afraid, ashamed to speak out, which often could lead to a fatal ending.

In 2020, 160 women and girls were killed by violence in Canada. In 2021, 173 women and girls were killed by violence in Canada. In 2022, 184 women and girls were killed by violence. That's an average of nine women and girls killed each week in our country; 51 per cent of

women and more than 1 million children are affected yearly by domestic violence, regardless of their financial status, ethnicity or education.

Madam Speaker, I chose to speak today to recognize my mom. My mom, Joanne, who had just graduated becoming a nurse, would be celebrating her birthday today, but sadly she was murdered by her spouse, and we all became a victim of domestic violence.

Domestic violence affects not only the victims but it also affects their children and families. For example, children of all ages who witness domestic violence in their home are more likely to suffer from behavioural or emotional problems, such as anxiety, PTSD and depression. And I'm no longer embarrassed—I was for many years—to say that I deal with my own on a regular basis.

We must stop domestic violence, and we can by raising awareness, providing support and resources to victims, and holding abusers fully and financially accountable—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow the member to complete his statement? *[Agreed]*

MLA Klein: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and to my colleagues. We must end domestic violence, and we can by raising awareness, providing support and resources to victims, and as I said previously, holding abusers fully and financially accountable.

Creating safe spaces where victims with their children can seek help without fear of judgment or retaliation is critical. In addition, educating the public about domestic violence and its effects on the community is essential; most importantly, to teach others how to recognize the signs of domestic violence and how to let victims know they're not alone.

I stand here today, decades after, and I love my mom more than I ever have, and I think of her daily. And if me speaking about our tragedy ends—or, helps one woman or child get out of their situation, I know my mom would be proud.

Colleagues, please help me break the silence. It's time to speak out and take action to end domestic violence for good in our country.

Addiction Treatment Services

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): People experiencing addictions need our support. They are deserving of a compassionate and evidence-rooted approach to health care.

Instead, the PC government is failing these Manitobans and their families. They have refused to support supervised consumption sites, a measure that we know would save lives. They have failed to be transparent on overdose deaths in our province by refusing to release the numbers in a timely manner. And now, instead of implementing measures that will save lives and help Manitobans experiencing addictions, this government has introduced bill three-33, which does nothing but create more barriers for people receiving life-saving care.

* (13:40)

The PC government has made it clear that they don't care about working with people and organizations who are already doing the important work of harm reduction in communities. These people, who have stepped up to provide life-saving, front-line care where the PC government has failed to, and yet this government didn't even bother to consult with them on Bill 33.

The Manitoba Harm Reduction Network said they were blindsided by the bill and that it will increase harm rather than decrease it. Sunshine House's mobile overdose prevention site has seen over 4,500 visits in the last four months alone. They said that they were side-swiped by the announcement of Bill 33, were not consulted on it and that this government has been unresponsive to the fact that record numbers of Manitobans are dying of overdoses.

Harm reduction groups in our province are in agreement that Bill 33 closes the door to supervised consumption sites and puts up barriers to addictions care. The government should do the right thing and admit that Bill 33 was the wrong approach and rescind it.

To those Manitobans who are struggling with addictions right now: you deserve a government who doesn't perpetuate stigma and deny you life-saving care if you don't conform to their ideology.

On our NDP team, on this side of the House, we see you, we hear you, we support you and we want you to know that you are not alone.

Green Shirt Day

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Madam Speaker, Friday, April 7th is Green Shirt Day—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Helwer:—a day to bring attention to organ and tissue donation for transplants. It is also a day to honour Logan Boulet and the Logan Boulet Effect.

Logan Boulet was one of the Humboldt Broncos killed in the tragic 'bosh' crash on April 6th, five years ago—five years ago, Madam Speaker. The summer before, Logan had decided to sign up to be an organ and tissue donor.

Madam Speaker, we've all seen evidence of the Logan Boulet Effect. The number of people signing up to be an organ and tissue donor skyrocketed after they learned of Logan's selfless act. I believe Canadians were all looking for some positive impact from the tragic crash. We found it in Logan's impact on organ and tissue donation; it certainly had an impact in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, as I said, April 7th is Green Shirt Day. It's a day dedicated to promoting organ donation awareness while honouring the Logan Boulet Effect. I'm wearing my green shirt. I encourage all of my colleagues and all Manitobans to consider organ and tissue donation.

Please go to signupforlife.ca and become a donor. You need your health card—the health-card number, and please remember to discuss your wishes with your family and your loved ones, as they will be asked what you intended.

The Boulet family continues to honour Logan's memory and bring attention to the critical importance of signing up to be an organ and tissue donor. Last year, his parents, Bernadine and Tony, were honoured in Winnipeg and were given the key to the city in addition to speaking at a Jets game about Logan's decision.

This year, the Winnipeg sign and the Esplanade Riel will be lit green in honour of organ and tissue donation. Logan's decision changed the lives of six people and influenced many more. We all have the ability to follow Logan's example.

Please become part of the Logan Boulet Effect at signupforlife.ca.

Linda Mary Beardy

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Linda Mary Beardy, age 33, a mother to four beautiful children, a daughter, a cousin, a friend.

From everything that I've seen and read over the last 24 hours, Linda would give you the clothes off her back and would fiercely protect those in her sacred circle.

Yesterday we learned the devastating news of Linda's death and of the discovery of her body in a landfill. There is no greater illustration of how little Indigenous women are thought of than this, and of December's news of the murders of Rebecca Contois, Morgan Harris, Mercedes Myran and Buffalo Woman who were met with similar circumstances.

And while there are many who would 'pervasively' shift blame directly onto the victims, make no mistake the epidemic of MMIWG2S is predicated upon colonial Canada. The project that is colonial Canada was, and continues to be, waged on the bodies of Indigenous women and girls.

And so, no sooner had the news come out yesterday than did the same old racist, anti-Indigenous rhetoric from shameless trolls start. Indigenous women suffer so much, and instead of compassion and mobilization, all we get is more hate. I don't use that word lightly. Indigenous women are hated. So much so that we are vilified even in death.

We need action that demonstrates Indigenous women are valued and protected. So, how are we protecting societal and economic and health and education and housing and family and spiritual protections for Indigenous women? This requires political will and sustained and deep financial commitment.

For now, the genocide of Indigenous women continues. And as we mourn, we, as Indigenous women, continue to support one another.

And so, to all of my beautiful sisters and relatives, you are sacred, you are powerful, you are courageous, you are generous, you are brave, you are fierce, you are divine, you are protectors, you are fighters, you are fearless, you are matriarchs and you are absolutely loved.

Miigwech.

Culture and Sport Projects for Midland

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): The \$50-million Arts, Culture, and Sport in Community Fund, ACSC, projects were announced on March 17th. Midland constituency received over \$597,000 for six projects in this announcement.

The south central library in Miami received \$12,000 for library renovations. Golden Prairie arts received \$12,000 for upper-level renovations to the former CN Rail station in Carman. Ski Birch near Roseisle received \$60,000 for two projects to enhance the cross-country ski experience of participants. The Boyne Regional Library in Carman will receive \$25,000 to develop Discover and Go passes for their expanding membership.

Under the \$475,000 large capital program grant the Carman Dufferin Arena ice plant, installed in 1972, will be replaced with an energy-efficient, modern ice plant.

There were several more projects submitted needing some modifications, and these will be resubmitted for the April 17th deadline for another round of funding.

The ACSC funding program received over \$200 million in applications, proving the need is there. These projects enhance the arts, culture and sport opportunities in our communities, making them more attractive to work, play and live.

Our government realizes how vital these projects are for our communities and this is why the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage is working hard to approve another \$50 million in grants this spring.

Thank you to all those organizations who volunteer their time and energy to enhance the quality of life in their respective communities.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us today from The Pas, Manitoba, Mayor Andre Murphy, Councillor Carrie Atkinson, Councillor Trent Allen, Chief Administrative Officer Jennifer Early and Saman Mirza-Agha, who are the guests of the honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Concordia Hospital OR Timeline for Completion

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Premier makes announcements about health care but doesn't follow through.

In April of 2002, the Premier said a new operating room at the Concordia Hospital would be up and running by December of last year. And the Premier's Health Minister said the operating room is expected to be in place by the end of the year, referring to the end of 2022 also. I'll table the government's own press release where these remarks were stated.

Of course—we shouldn't be surprised—the deadline was missed. Then the Premier decided to revisit, say that the OR would be ready at the end of March, which was, of course, last week.

Can the Premier tell the House if the new orthopedic operating room is in place at the Concordia Hospital?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I believe the Leader of the Opposition mentioned something about 2002. I don't believe I was the Premier in 2002. Perhaps he's referring to something else, Madam Speaker.

* (13:50)

But what I will say is the Leader of the Opposition continues to put false information on the record in this Chamber. He knows full well that we are investing almost \$8 billion; historic help for our health-care system, Madam Speaker. That's \$668 million more than last year, a 9.2 per cent increase to our health-care system just over last year.

We recognize there's more work to do, and we're committed to getting that done.

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

Mr. Kinew: I just want to point out for you, Madam Speaker, that when I tabled a government press release, the Premier said I was putting false information on the record.

Now, the reason why that statement is true is because there was an announcement that the OR would be in place at the end of 2022. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: That deadline was missed, of course. The Health Minister and the Premier broke their word in that instance.

The Premier went on to say it would be ready at the end of March. That was last week. I'll cut to the chase: There is no operating room ready at the Concordia Hospital, Madam Speaker. It's just another example of an announcement and of a promise broken by this Premier, just like Brian Pallister.

Why did the Premier not tell Manitobans that there would be no new operating room at the Concordia Hospital this March?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition should note that this is something that his party was not in favour of.

Let's remind the Leader of the Opposition that when this is up and running, Madam Speaker, more than a thousand surgical procedures will take place, and I will remind the Leader of the Opposition that each and every one of the members opposite voted against it—voted against that.

We will take no lessons from the members opposite.

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

Mr. Kinew: No one believes this government when it comes to health care. The reason why nobody believes this government when it comes to health care is because, just like Brian Pallister, they make announcements and then there is no follow-through, no action.

Already multiple deadlines missed when it comes to the operating room at Concordia Hospital, and the impact on patients is this: there are many thousands of Manitobans waiting to get those surgeries, and they continue to wait on those waiting lists because of the inaction and the mismanagement of this PC government.

Will the Premier tell the House why her government has broken its promise on the new operating room at the Concordia Hospital?

Mrs. Stefanson: I'll remind the Leader of the Opposition that we invested over \$110 million last year, and in this budget this year, \$130 million towards surgical and diagnostic task force procedures, Madam Speaker. And I will remind the Leader of the Opposition that he and every one of his colleagues on that side of the House voted against it.

Now, we know that Manitobans want their surgical procedures sooner, Madam Speaker, and closer

to home. That's why our surgical and diagnostic task force has been ensuring that we are contracting out those—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —services so that Manitobans can get those services as quickly as they can. That's why we have contracted out some of those services, Madam Speaker, so that those Manitobans don't have to wait in pain. They can go get their hip and knee surgery now.

And I will remind the Leader of the Opposition once again—and all Manitobans—what did they do, Madam Speaker? They voted against it.

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

Allied Health Workers Bargaining Contract Impact on EMS Wait Times in Rural Manitoba

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): You know, Madam Speaker, the question was about when the Concordia operating room is going to get built and this Premier has missed two deadlines already, and now apparently there's not even a timeline for the OR to be open.

I'll switch now to a question about rural health care, because we're the only team in this Chamber that stands up for rural health care in Manitoba.

These Tory MLAs need to get outside the Perimeter, where they'll find that in Riverton, Manitobans are waiting over an hour for an ambulance. That's what FIPPA documents show, that I'll table now. In Grandview, people are waiting 45 minutes or longer for EMS to arrive. It's 50 minutes in Melita. This is very concerning.

Will the Premier tell the House why EMS wait times are so bad across rural Manitoba? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition again continues to put false information on the record.

And for him to pretend to stand up for people in rural communities when—let me remind those folks, those great folks right across rural Manitoba: What did the NDP do when they were in government at that time to communities right across rural Manitoba? They closed—and you'll recall this—they closed more than 16, almost 20 rural emergency rooms right across Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, we will take no lessons from the members opposite.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, Madam Speaker, I would encourage the Premier to reconsider her position and to start paying attention to this issue. Anyone who spends time in rural Manitoba will know that EMS waits are a very serious topic and a hot topic of discussion.

Now, the documents that we showed put it into vivid detail the amount of time that people are waiting for ambulances to arrive in rural Manitoba. I asked for the Premier to explain the cause of this. We know the cause. Allied health-care professionals have been without a contract, including these paramedics, have been without a contract for five years under both Brian Pallister and under this Premier.

That's a five-year wage freeze. No wonder we're having trouble with staffing in rural health-care centres.

Why is the Premier refusing to treat EMS workers fairly?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition bringing up a question regarding ambulances. It gives me an opportunity to remind Manitobans that under the NDP, the—you know, people who had to get ambulatory services were having to pay 100 per cent more than they are right now. The—double the cost to get an ambulance to those folks.

Madam Speaker, we cut those ambulance fees in half to make ambulances more accessible for all Manitobans.

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

Mr. Kinew: Everyone in rural Manitoba knows that EMS wait times are a major issue, and yet so many rural MLAs have been conspicuously silent on this issue. They're not raising the concerns of people in their communities, communities like Melita and Grandview, communities like Erickson, where we see these wait times stretch on and on and on.

We know that the issue has a political cause. This Premier refuses to enter into a contract with the allied health-care professionals, including the EMS workers in these very regions. They freeze the wages and now

people in rural Manitoba wait longer and longer and longer.

It's one thing for the Premier to disrespect these EMS workers, but why is she ignoring the priority of rural Manitobans?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I want to thank all of those EMS workers who do incredible work right across this province of ours. And if the Leader of the Opposition—we certainly have a tremendous amount of respect for those employees, so much respect that we want to let the collective bargaining process move forward in the appropriate manner.

Now, the Leader of the Opposition seems to be suggesting that he wants to interfere in that process. Well, I would say that would be disrespectful to those individuals who are working very hard in our EMS services, Madam Speaker.

We will allow that collective bargaining process to take place. It's the right thing to do, Madam Speaker.

Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirited People Request for Action Plan to Address Violence Against

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Yesterday, we learned the devastating news that the body of an Indigenous woman and mother, Linda Mary Beardy, was found in the Brady Landfill. On behalf of our team, our sincerest condolences to the family of Ms. Beardy and to the community of Lake St. Martin.

* (14:00)

Linda is loved and is cherished, and yet she was disposed of in a landfill. It's clear that more needs to be done to protect Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited.

Can the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) explain to the House and to MMIWG families and to Indigenous women and girls what actions she's taking to protect us from violence?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I would echo the condolences that were offered by the Official Opposition House Leader. I know our Premier expressed those condolences yesterday in the House. I did outside of the House, and I know that many other members did, as well.

Every one of these tragedies reminds us that there is more that needs to be done. Every one of these tragedies reminds us that there is a grieving family, friends, that are left behind that mourn the loss of an individual, both in the fact that they were lost, but also

in the way that they were lost. And the way that they were found, Madam Speaker.

So, I'm happy to speak about some initiatives that are happening, but I do want to express on behalf of all members that we share in the condolences that were expressed by the Official Opposition House Leader.

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

MLA Fontaine: Yesterday, Ms. Beardy's body was found in the Brady Landfill. She was a mother, and she was cherished by her children and her family and her community. Her life was sacred.

And I'm furious, and every single person in this Chamber and every single person in Manitoba should be furious at the continual epidemic levels of violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited. And so, it is clear that there's not enough being done to protect us.

And so, again, I ask the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) to tell us what actions she's going to take to protect Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, the member will know that in my role as the Attorney General, I can't speak about any specific ongoing investigation in this particular case.

In general, I can say that this government, led by this Premier, will support a number of initiatives, including one recently announced that included an integrated missing persons unit, one that didn't exist before, working together with the Winnipeg Police Service and the RCMP.

Because those who go missing—the thousands who are reported missing every year—the vast majority of them are women, the vast majority of them are young women and the vast majority of those are young, Indigenous women. And we need to ensure that there is an integrated effort to be able to proactively try to find those individuals before harm is brought to them.

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

MLA Fontaine: I want to make it explicitly clear that Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited are not at fault for the violence that's perpetrated against our bodies, despite individual people that would like to put that blame onto us, that we somehow put ourselves at risk.

It is society that puts Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited at risk, because of the gaps in services and the inaction that's taken, really, at every level.

As members of this House, we have a sacred responsibility to act immediately to protect Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited. This government needs to make this a priority.

And so, I would ask the Premier to tell us what the government is going to do immediately to protect Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited.

Mr. Goertzen: I know that there is no member of this House that would suggest that—the—it is Indigenous women who are at fault for this, Madam Speaker.

I also have no doubt that there are individuals outside the society, some of whom may be engaging with the member on things like social media, who are. And they should be condemned and rightfully condemned.

This government has taken action on many things, including, as I described, an integrated missing persons unit that would be able to triage and would be able to look, from the thousands of different reports that are coming of missing individuals, which ones are the most likely to be at risk. And so, the police can dedicate those resources to ensuring that those who are most likely at risk can be found before they fall into harm.

Addiction Treatment Services Government Approach

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Last week our party was proud to stand with front-line service organizations providing life-saving supports for individuals with addictions and offer our support for the work that they're already doing by stopping Bill 33.

This PC government has failed to consult and listen to these community organizations and medical experts, and instead of working with them in partnership, they tried to end their good work and tie it up in red tape and bureaucracy.

My question is: Now that Bill 33 will not pass, will the minister stop dragging her feet and start actually listening to experts who are saying that her PC government's approach is wrong?

Hon. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): Monday was a very sad day for people in Manitoba.

On Monday, Bill 33—a bill that offered safety for individuals seeking support services, offered safety for community, for family—was stopped. As a result, the safety, consistency and accountability that we owe individuals seeking these addiction services was ended.

No to Bill 33 means no to safety from the NDP.

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

MLA Asagwara: Not just community organizations, but doctors are concerned about this PC government's approach to addictions.

The minister recently received a letter from the IMAPLES group of doctors and other professionals, which is an inter-professional organization passionate about clinical care, advocacy, research and education related to supporting people who use substances before, during and after pregnancy.

They say that they are concerned that the PC government, and I quote, will create additional barriers to organizations working with people who use substances and will negatively impact services provided. End quote.

These organizations need a partner that will work with them, not shut them down.

Will this minister do the right thing today and support life-saving care in Manitoba? And I will table that letter from those expert doctors.

Ms. Morley-Lecomte: Bill 33 was a bill that ensured continuum of care for individuals. It provided prevention, it provided treatment and it provided a pathway to recovery so individuals who are seeking the supports of medical were able to then ensure that they and their family members knew that they were safely being able to access services and ensure that they were able to then recover in a better manner.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, we know, unfortunately, that this PC government doesn't listen to Manitobans and they certainly have not been listening to the expert health-care providers and medical evidence.

The doctors and other professionals state in their letter to the minister, and I quote, we are in the midst of an addictions health-care crisis with people dying as a result. Action is needed and the most impactful action will be evidence based and community informed. End quote.

Now that our team has stopped this minister's red tape, will she reverse course and take action today to support the current work of organizations saving lives every day in our province, including Sunshine House?

Ms. Morley-Lecomte: Bill 33 offers individuals—accessing services, treatment that are—offers services to individuals who are particularly vulnerable, and Bill 33 was offering them an opportunity to have a safe environment.

Removing Bill 33 and not having standards and regulations in place also then means that individuals now have no requirements with which they set up these facilities. So this means, then, that anyone can open up a site. It could be in your neighbourhood; it could be beside your school; could beside your child-care facility.

Where's the safety of all the community members and those accessing the services at this point? There is none. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Commercial Fishers on Lake Winnipeg Consultation Concerns

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): I recently met with the pioneer fishers out of Gimli. They represent commercial fishers on Lake Winnipeg and they're not happy with this PC government.

They told me this government and this minister are not listening to their concerns and this department is not working collaboratively with fishers.

* (14:10)

Can the minister explain why his government is not working collaboratively and not involving commercial fishers in decisions that are directly affecting our commercial fishing industry here in Manitoba?

Hon. Greg Nesbitt (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development): Our government has consistently met with commercial fishers, and we certainly want to enhance the commercial fishing industry in Manitoba, and I'm prepared to meet with any commercial fishery that wants to meet with me. I've met with several now, and I'm always open to meetings.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bushie: Perhaps he's not referring to the fishermen that were not allowed into the minister's office.

Commercial fishers do not feel respected by this PC government.

In 2019, this PC government—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bushie:—changed mesh size requirements, which directly affected the livelihood of our fishers here in Manitoba. Fishers were not adequately consulted or supported with this change, but rather had the change imposed by this government, and many lost thousands of dollars.

This lack of collaboration continues as fishers say they are being harshly fined and targeted for minimal infractions, and that they're not able to work collaboratively with Manitoba Conservation.

Can the minister explain how is his government is going to repair the relationship with Manitoba's commercial fishers today?

Mr. Nesbitt: The member on the opposite side continues to put false information on the record. My office is open to any commercial fisherman that wants to come and see me.

Our PC government is making key investments to protect our valuable 'commerching' fishing industry. It contributes \$100 million to our economy every year. We've invested \$600,000 in additional funding to enhance provincial fisheries field programs. We've lobbied the federal government to confirm Manitoba fisheries were included in the \$469-million Canadian seafood 'stabilation' fund.

We're taking action of the government, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Bushie: Commercial fishing is a key economic driver here in Manitoba, but being ignored by this government. Many Manitobans in the North and Interlake rely on fishing to feed and support their families.

However, under this PC government, fourth- and fifth-generation fishers are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. And at this rate under this government, we will no longer have a viable commercial fishing industry.

The minister talks about having respect for our commercial fishers, but his actions show anything but respect. Our fishers here in Manitoba feel as though

the PC government is implementing a top-down approach without consultation and collaboration.

Fishers feel that the minister's more worried about enforcement and punishment rather than working together.

Can the minister commit to changing his approach and instead work with Manitoba's commercial fishers, and not against, and will he do so today?

Mr. Nesbitt: The NDP's policies were a disservice to the hard-working commercial fishers who rely on the lakes for their livelihood.

The lack of investment in science-based management research and innovation led to habitat destruction and declines in catch rates, which made our commercial fishers struggle to make ends meet.

Our government is committed to reversing this trend and implementing policies that prioritize the sustainability of the industry and the protection of our lakes.

Provincial Energy Strategy Report Timeline

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Manitoba Hydro is a Crown jewel that benefits all Manitobans, but neglect and mismanagement by this PC government puts it all at risk.

Both Hydro's 2040 strategy and their integrated management plan are not informed by an overall—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala:—provincial energy policy. This government did release an RFP almost two years ago, stating that an energy policy would be complete in March 2022—a year ago—but still, we've seen nothing.

My question for the Minister of Environment and Climate (MLA Klein): How much money has his PC government spent on their non-existent provincial energy strategy, and when will we see it?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): I will say the Manitoba Hydro is working diligently on their integrated resource management plan. We look forward to reviewing that in the near future.

I will say, as well, in terms of investments in Manitoba Hydro, we've allowed Manitoba Hydro to keep an extra \$180 million this year alone, Madam Speaker. This will save Manitoba ratepayers money in rates, and it will also serve to strengthen the balance statement at Manitoba Hydro.

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

Mr. Sala: That has zero relationship to what was just asked. We'll do it again.

Madam Speaker, we've been raising questions for years about Hydro's rates and planning and the absence of an overarching energy strategy from this PC government. Documents we obtained in response to a FIPPA request indicate that this minister's department has already given \$1.2 million to Dunsky Energy to develop an energy policy framework, but those same documents state, quote, MEC does not currently have a provincial energy strategy. End quote.

When will this minister reveal the PC energy strategy?

Mr. Cullen: Well, interesting question coming from the opposition, Madam Speaker. We know they had 17 years to develop an energy strategy, never took one step towards achieving an energy strategy in Manitoba.

In fact, what they did, actually, in their time in office, through Manitoba Hydro, they actually went around the Public Utilities Board. They ignored the Public Utilities Board on our way to the biggest boondoggle capital spend in Manitoba's history: \$4 billion over budget.

That's the NDP legacy.

Madam Speaker: The honourable leader—the honourable member for St. James, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Sala: Just like everything else with this government, there's no follow-through: announcements, but no action.

Manitobans are—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: —rightfully concerned with this PC government's mismanagement of their oversight responsibilities with our Crowns. They've privatized and sold off parts of Hydro, and their failures—their failures—at MPI with the ballooning costs of IT upgrades are putting our rates at risk.

When will this minister release the provincial energy strategy, or will he keep it hidden, like their privatization agenda, until after the provincial election?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, let's talk about where Manitoba Hydro is today: \$24 billion of debt, mostly at the hands of the opposition members when they were in government.

Madam Speaker, we as a government are cleaning up the mess the NDP left behind. That is why we've taken measures this year alone to reduce ratepayers' fees by \$180 million—that's something the NDP never did—\$180 million savings to Manitoba ratepayers, and it will also lead to a better balance sheet for Manitoba Hydro.

We're taking action on the mess the NDP left behind.

Transportation Costs for Dialysis Treatment Constituent Case Concern

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Manitoba's health-care system is in crisis, and one reason is because this government deliberately held back funding for care.

As I table, in 2019, it took three years for the PCs to sign a \$400-million agreement for home-care and mental health funding. At the same time, actual health 'spending'—funding was cut, frozen and clawed back by up to a quarter of a billion dollars a year, a 3.5 per cent cut.

The PCs said the signing delay was to add dialysis to treatment, but Tom Wilson of Roblin is facing a \$21,000 bill for transportation to get dialysis 53 kilometres away and was told if he wanted care, he should move.

Is this government going to help cover his costs for their cuts? What happened to 'het'—care closer to home?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I want to thank the member from St. Boniface for the question. It gives me an opportunity to put some facts on the record.

Madam Speaker, our government is taking action. And I'd like to share some of the initiatives: 80 new physician training seats, including 10 international graduate seats; \$129 million in incentives to attract and retain nurses; \$141 million to triple the size of St. Boniface's ER—I know the member represents this hospital; \$50 million to increase Health Sciences Centre surgical capacity by 25 per cent and so much more.

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

Mr. Lamont: Tom Wilson is only travelling 53 kilometres to Russell three times a week for dialysis. He's on a fixed income, and he got a bill for one year for \$21,000, which has depleted much of his life savings.

* (14:20)

When this government talks about downloading costs, let's be very clear that they, by freezing municipal transfers for seven years straight, downloaded these costs straight onto Mr. Wilson.

These are PC budget documents, which I table, that show that transfers to Manitoba from 2015-16 to this year are up by 103 per cent, from 3.5 to seven three-point three billion dollars. So, the same 'budgetments' sure-show that it didn't make it to health care.

What is this government going to do to make sure that instead of being asked to move, Mr. Wilson can afford dialysis without going bankrupt? Will he be compensated for his loss?

Ms. Gordon: I encourage all Manitobans who feel that they have had out-of-pocket expenses as a result of accessing health care to send that information in to Manitoba Health, to have those receipts and their trip, or their care, adjudicated, and they will receive a response from Manitoba Health, Madam Speaker. It won't be adjudicated here on the Chamber floor; it's in the department.

But I want to state that our government is committed to providing care closer to home. Just this week I was able to shake the hands and do a send-off to Dr. Manusow, who is offering retinal eye care in Dauphin to all those individuals in the Parkland region, saving them hours of travel time and out-of-pocket expenses, Madam Speaker.

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

School Libraries Staffing and Funding

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, school libraries are essential for learning. Yet the inequity present under NDP and PC governments in Manitoba has been nothing short of appalling.

Today, only three school divisions in our province have both teacher-librarians and library technicians. Teacher-librarians play a critical role to develop literacy skills and help students find resources to learn the difference between real news and fake news.

When literacy is a primary goal, why are school libraries in Manitoba so chronically underfunded and understaffed? Is the government more interested in propagating false news than in promoting the critical thinking to defend its spread?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I appreciate the question coming from my friend from River Heights in regards to literacy and in regards to funding for the K-to-12 system, Madam Speaker.

As I've said many times in this House, \$100 million—a 6.1 per cent increase this year alone to the K-to-12 education system, Madam Speaker. So, the member from River Heights, he brings forward a very important question; and it almost sounds like the member from River Heights is wanting me to interfere with the democratic process in regards to the election of school boards.

So, we all know that school boards make those decisions within their school communities, and within their—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —each individual schools, to make sure that the priorities of their communities are covered on a day-to-day basis—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —Madam Speaker.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

I would indicate that it's not the member's turn; there is—I believe it might be the member for Dawson Trail?

Mental Health State of Emergency First Nation Communities

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Yes. Currently, First Nations across our province are declaring states of emergency over the significant increase in mental-health-related crisis.

Currently, 16 First Nations are experiencing a state of emergency. We know the minister has been in contact with Indigenous leadership.

Can she please share what important steps are being taken to address this emergency?

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): I thank the member from Dawson Trail, and every day we wish him well on his journey, as well.

Our government's deeply concerned with the rise of mental health emergencies in the First Nations communities, especially the extensive reports that we've received the last few weeks. And that's why we are

giving MKO, as well as SCO, more than \$1 million each, for a total of \$2.1 million, to increase the capacity of their mobile crisis units.

These units are essential to provide emergency supports in a culturally sensitive way. I commend the work of these units, and I wish them well as they hire more staff and are able to do more work for their communities.

But we will continue ensuring that people get the supports they need.

Thank you.

University College of the North Funding Levels

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, Manitobans know this PC government is no friend of post-secondary institutions. Since day one, they've cut their funding and they've forced tuition to be hiked.

And, unfortunately, this trend continues with University College of the North. Funding for UCN in this year's budget is less than other institutions and it's way below the rate of inflation. This government should start adequately funding UCN so that we can provide more opportunities for people in the North, not less.

Can the minister explain why her government is leaving UCN behind?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Our government, in this budget alone, has increased funding to post-secondaries by 11 and a half per cent. We are proud to work with our partners within post-secondary and support the students as they seek their post-secondary education.

The member opposite is again trying to fear monger. I am in constant discussions with—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: —post-secondary stakeholders and their leadership and we are working together to address the labour market needs and those needs of students as they seek further education.

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, for many people in the North, UCN is their only option for higher education. That's why it plays such a vital role in northern Manitoba. It served nearly 2,500 students at multiple locations across the entire North.

Yet, the PC's budget is failing UCN. It's well below inflation, and those cuts hurt the students in the North. It means that UCN will be forced to make cuts; it means more difficulties, less opportunities, for students to get ahead in the North.

Will the minister simply explain why she's choosing to leave UCN behind?

Mrs. Guillemard: We appreciate and value all of the hard work that UCN does to support their students, as well as to increase various programs for those who are looking to study in the North.

In fact, our government has invested more than \$4.3 million for 37 additional nurse training seats at UCN to help to add towards our 400 nursing seats.

This is an area that the NDP ignored for 17 years. They knew of the nursing shortage that was about to come and they ignored it. They didn't increase a single seat for nursing.

We will do better because we know better. I fear for the future of Manitoba if they ever get near government again. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Moses: Well, Madam Speaker, the government continues their pattern of ignoring people in the North. This PC government clearly makes it abundant for all Manitobans to see that UCN is not a priority for them.

UCN plays a critical role in the lives of students in northern Manitoba to give them opportunities to get ahead and grow their community and grow their economy. But, when funding gets cut like this, and it's well below inflation, it sets people behind and makes life more challenging for people in northern Manitoba.

It's unclear why the PCs refuse to do the right thing and refuse to fund UCN properly.

So, will the minister clearly answer for all of us here today: Will she commit to fund UCN properly and stop leaving them behind?

Mrs. Guillemard: I really am curious as to why members opposite continue to put fiction on the record. Manitobans can see for themselves that UCN did get an increase. All post-secondaries did get an increase in their funding—operating funding this year.

So, the member opposite claims that it's a cut. I would like him to table the documents to prove this, and when he realizes that that is factually—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: –incorrect, I want him to apologize to Manitobans for misleading them.

* (14:30)

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Health-Care Coverage

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Health care is a basic human right and a fundamental part of responsible public health. Many people in Manitoba are not covered by provincial health care: migrant workers with work permits of less than one year, international students and those undocumented residents who have lost their status for a variety of reasons.

(2) Private health insurance is not a substitute for public health insurance. Private insurance plans available to most migrant workers and international students are paid for by the worker or student. They do not provide coverage for all of the potential health needs covered by public health coverage. Individuals are required to pay up front for health expenses without a guarantee that they will be covered and wait weeks for reimbursement.

(3) Racialized people—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare:—and communities are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, mainly due to the social and economic conditions which leave them vulnerable while performing essential work in a variety of industries in Manitoba.

(4) Without adequate health-care coverage, if they are ill, many of those without provincial health coverage will avoid seeking health care due to fear of being charged for the care, and some will fear possible detention and deportation if their immigration status is reported to the authorities.

(5) According to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, denying essential health care to undocumented irregular migrants is a violation of their rights.

(6) Jurisdictions across Canada and the world have adopted access-without-fear policies to prevent

sharing personal health information or immigration status with immigration authorities and to give uninsured residents the confidence of access to health care.

(7) The pandemic has clearly identified the need for everyone in Manitoba to have access to public health care to protect the health and safety of all who live in the province.

We therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to immediately provide comprehensive and free public-health-care coverage to all residents of Manitoba, regardless of immigration status, including refugee claimants, migrant workers, international students, dependant children of temporary residents and undocumented citizens.

(2) To urge the minister of Health and seniors care to undertake a multilingual communication campaign to provide information on expanded coverage to all affected residents.

(3) To urge the minister of Health and seniors care to inform all health-care institutions and providers of expanded coverage for those without public health insurance and the details on how necessary policy and protocol changes will be implemented.

(4) To urge the minister of Health and seniors care to create and enforce strict confidentiality policies and provide staff with training to protect the safety of residents with precarious immigration status and ensure that they access public health care without jeopardizing their ability to remain in Canada.

Madam Speaker, this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

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

Provincial Road 224

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

Ekosi.

Right to Repair

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitoba consumers believe products should last longer, be repaired when broken, and that planned obsolescence has environmental consequences that threatens a sustainable future.

(2) In 2021, the European Union set minimum design standards for many electronic devices with new right-to-repair legislation.

(3) The Biden administration in the—in US has formally backed the right-to-repair movement in January 2022, following the European Union's lead.

(4) Right to repair enables consumers access to the resources needed to fix and modify their products, appliances, including cellphones, washing machines and refrigerators.

(5) Right to repair also allows consumers and electronic repair businesses access to the most recent versions of repair manuals, replacement parts, software and other tools that the manufacturer uses for diagnosing, maintaining or repairing its branded electronic products.

(6) Right to repair further allows consumers to reset an electronic security function of its branded electronic products if the function is disabled during diagnosis, maintenance or repair.

(7) In addition, the right to repair ensures manufacturers replace electronic products at no cost or refund the amount paid by the consumer to purchase the electronic product, where they refuse or they are unable to provide manuals or replacement costs.

We petition the legislative of Manitoba—Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to adopt right-to-repair legislation, requiring manufacturers of electronic devices and appliances, including washing machines and fridges and farm machinery, to make information, parts and tools necessary for repair available to consumers and independent repair shops.

This petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Home-Care Services

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Home-care workers in Manitoba provide skilled and compassionate care that helps better the quality of life for thousands of Manitobans.

(2) Robust home-care services are proven to reduce the strain on health-care services and demand for hospital beds.

(3) Home care reduces the demand for long-term-care beds, as it allows people to continue living in their own space.

(4) Studies show that a third of the 200,000 Canadians living in long-term-care homes could stay home with proper home-care support.

(5) Investing in home care saves money, as daily services cost half the price of a long-term-care bed and one seventh the daily cost of a hospital bed.

(6) The provincial government's cuts to home care in Manitoba has resulted in chronic staffing issues that caused the WRHA to cancel 27,000 home-care appointments in the month of April 2022 alone.

(7) Many clients in Manitoba only receive home-care services once a day, where countries such as Denmark offer up to six visits a day.

* (14:40)

(8) Home-care workers in Manitoba are paid poor wages, are offered little benefits, lack sick time and are overworked, resulting in difficult retaining and attracting workers.

(9) Home-care workers have been without a contract since 2017, due to this provincial government's interference in labour negotiations.

(10) Investing in home care is a proactive approach that would save the Province millions of dollars as well as allow more Manitobans to age in place.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health and the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care to immediately increase investment in home-care services so that home-care workers can be paid a fair wage and clients can receive the level of service they require.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): [*interjection*] Thank you to the member for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler).

Could you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

HEALTH

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Can the— I'm going to start by asking some questions of the minister regarding vacancies specific to nursing.

Can the minister share the total provincial-wide nurse vacancy number? So, you know, what is the number, is it 2,400, is it 2,500, and what percentage that is exactly.

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): With regard to the member for Union Station's question, I seek clarification. Which years is the member wanting the number of vacancies and the percentage of vacancies? For which year, please?

MLA Asagwara: The most current and up-to-date information that the number—the minister can provide, rather, is what I'm seeking. So, the most current information that the minister would have available to her regarding the vacancy number and what percentage that is.

Ms. Gordon: I would like to take this question under advisement, please.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister advise whether or not she'd be able to provide that information in today's session or can we expect it in the next day or so, or sometime after that? Some clarity around the time would be appreciated.

Ms. Gordon: We commit to having that information available at Estimates tomorrow.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that commitment and clarity around when that information will be provided.

I'm going to—I'd like some clarity around the attrition rates currently.

So, we all know, we're well aware that we have lost nurses from the health-care system due to retirement or burnout, in some cases. Certainly during the pandemic we saw that, and we continue to see that.

I'm wondering if the minister can provide what the current annual attrition rates are for nurses leaving our health system. And if the minister also would have any additional information in terms of whether or not the attrition is specific to retirement or burnout, or if there's any indicators that they have clarity around, that would be appreciated as well.

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for Union Station for the question. I would ask to take this question, as well, under advisement and we commit to having the information available for the member at tomorrow's Estimates.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister and her staff for committing to take that under advisement and being willing to provide that information tomorrow at Estimates. I appreciate that.

So, in regards to nursing, we know that there's been an increase in nursing seats in post-secondary institutions, but we also know that nursing seats were actually cut under this government—2019, I believe it was, that there were 75 nurse training seats cut from Red River College.

And so now, when we look at what's going on in our health-care system with a nursing crisis shortage and we see the challenges our health-care system is facing, I'm wondering if the minister can provide whether or not she thinks that we're currently training enough nurses. So I would make the point that we are well aware, I am well aware, of what this government has announced it's doing in terms of adding additional post-secondary nursing seats.

* (15:00)

So I'm not seeking clarity in terms of what those historical announcements have been. What I am seeking clarity around is whether or not the minister, through her own observation and understanding—and I'm sure the minister gets, you know, reporting from her department on this issue—does she think that there are currently enough training seats for nurses?

And, a follow-up to that would be, how many fewer nurses graduated over the past seven years? Again, we know that those 75 seats were cut at Red River, while there have been some seats added back to the—to that post-secondary institution, it doesn't make up for that cut of 75.

So I'm wondering if the minister can also tell us how many fewer nursing—how many fewer nurses, rather, have graduated over the past seven years due to the decrease in the nurse training seats that took place.

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for Union Station for the question, and I would direct the member to the Estimates for the Department of Education to obtain exact numbers about training seats and how many more because those numbers and training seats are allocated through the Department of Advanced Education.

But I do thank the member for the question because it gives me an opportunity to talk as well about what we are doing to help nurses to get licensed here in the province, and our health human resource action plan is the foundation of all the work that we're

doing. And there are three pillars; training is just one pillar. Recruit and retain is also very, very important in terms of stabilizing the number of nurses we have in the system.

So again, training is just one component of that, but I can share with the member that the challenges that we're having here in Manitoba are not unique to Manitoba. This is being faced across the country. I talked to my colleagues who are ministers of health in other Canadian jurisdictions, and even globally, and they are saying they are experiencing the same challenges.

So we're currently supporting nurses through \$123-million investment. And how we're doing that is: offering a new hourly premium for nurses who work weekend hours; a new annual payment for nurses who hold the equivalent of a full-time position, as this helps to build more stability in the workforce; we're reimbursing the costs of nurses' professional licensing fees; an annual incentive for nurses who are eligible to retire but choose to remain in the workforce for up to an additional two years, of course, to retain value, expertise and build capacity as new nurses are recruited into the workforce; an incentive for nurses who have previously left the profession, but choose to return to the workforce; a new refer-a-nurse program for current nurses who refer a prospective nurse to a Manitoba employer.

We're developing a provincial float pool to support nursing staff needs across the province. We've added a travel nurse incentive, which will provide an additional hourly premium for nurses who travel to work in remote locations and a wellness incentive, which adds additional funds to the health spending account of full- and part-time nurses to help to cover the costs of eligible expenses.

So, I do also want to share that other nursing initiatives—because the member mentioned that we—our efforts to get to the 400 new nursing education seats—\$19.5 million has been invested to date to add 259 nurse training seats at five post-secondary institutions; \$4.3 million for 37 additional nurse training seats at University College of the North. We've also worked with our post-secondary institutions to allow for an additional intake of nursing students, raising the total to three a year.

And so a lot is happening there for our nurses, but—that are here in Manitoba—but then we look at the nurses—the individuals who are here in Manitoba, who came with hopes and dreams of following their—doing

the—working in the profession they were in their homeland that aren't—are not working as nurses.

And so our government had to take action, to work with the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba to establish seven areas of improvement for internationally educated nurse pathways towards licensure based on an interjurisdictional comparison. And, you know, I want to be able to share that, because I heard from so many internationally educated nurses—right here in my office. They sat and shared their stories of—

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

MLA Asagwara: I didn't hear in the minister's response whether or not she thinks that we're currently training enough nurses.

I was pretty clear when I said that I'm well aware of the government's historical announcements around their initiatives in this area, and I don't think that it's a good use of time in committee, necessarily, for the minister to repeat announcements that she's, you know, brought forward many, many, many times before, including in previous Estimates committees.

But I didn't hear an answer from the minister in regards to whether or not she thinks that we're currently training enough nurses, which is concerning to me, because, you know, the minister has redirected me to get the information around nurse training seats from the post-secondary education department.

And I can appreciate where the minister is coming from with that feedback. However, as the Minister for Health, one would think that she would have a good understanding, a sound comprehension as to whether or not we currently have enough training seats for nurses. That is certainly within her purview. And I didn't get a clear answer from the minister in regards to that question, which I—is a bit disappointing. But I will surmise from the minister's response that she does think we have enough training spots available—enough training, enough, rather, available for nurses at this time.

I don't know that that is what nurses on the front lines or even those folks who deliver the training would necessarily say, given the shortage that we have. I think that most folks will point to historical cuts to training seats and highlight that as a big concern in having a real impact on the number of nurses we currently have in our health-care system.

But I'll leave that question, as the minister, I don't think, is going to provide any clarity for me there, unfortunately.

* (15:10)

I do think it's really important that we get a sense of what's going on with the current number of job postings for nurses. I've heard anecdotally from nurses that there are job postings that have gone unfilled, that had been, you know, posted for quite some time, and— or have needed to be reposted.

This is an area of significant concern, and I'm hopeful that the minister can provide clear information around this. So, can the minister provide what percentage of the current nurse job postings right now are reposts? What percentage of the current nurse job postings are open postings with no application deadlines? Which of these postings are for multiple openings? And in that case, would be because they simply can't fill them.

If the minister can provide clarity around this area in terms of nurse job postings, that would be great.

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for the question. That information is gathered by Shared Health, so we will endeavour to obtain that information from Shared Health, and I will take the question under advisement. Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: Does the minister have a timeline, perhaps, of when that can be provided? I know that maybe it's a bit different having to get that information from Shared Health but, hopefully, that'd be readily available to them, so can the minister provide a bit of clarity in terms of when we could expect that information?

Ms. Gordon: Again, the information is held by Shared Health, and the member is asking about job postings for nurses across, I gather, for nurses across the province.

We have over 14,000 nurses in the health system. So, if we are going to be looking at job postings, and if the member can clarify, is it for a specific time period? Again, in the previous question, the member said it was for the year prior.

So is it for a one-year period, just so we can put some—a timeline around this? Because, of course, as I said, over 14,000 nurses are in the system. We will have to go to Shared Health to gather that information from every program area's human resource department. So the ability to act on this very quickly will depend on the timeline that the member has in mind.

If I could get some clarification, please. Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: If the minister could provide the most current and up-to-date information around those percentages, and the details around, you know, which ones are reposts or open postings with no applications—with no application deadlines—or postings from multiple openings because they can't be filled. So, I'd be looking for the most current up-to-date information possible.

And that would be, you know, the most recent reporting that's available through Shared Health.

Ms. Gordon: Based on the clarification from the member for Union Station, we will endeavour to get this information tabled, and—after taking it under advisement, within the reporting time frame, and I think that is 30 days if I'm not mistaken, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: Can the—or, sorry, thank you to the minister for endeavouring to provide that information. And I might go back to that, I might—I'm just sitting with something, and I might go back to that and ask for a bit more clarity beyond that window. But for now, I do appreciate the minister's commitment to that.

Can the minister undertake to provide a list of all technical appointments in her department, including names and titles?

Ms. Gordon: I'm pleased to respond to the member's question. The number of technical individuals is three. I have a senior adviser, an executive assistant to the minister and a special assistant to the minister.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister provide their names?

* (15:20)

Ms. Gordon: The three individuals include Matthew LaPage, who is the senior advisor; Tyler Thomas, who's the executive assistant; and Vanessa Wiebe, who is the special assistant to the minister.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that clarity.

Can the minister undertake to give an organizational chart that lists all employees and program areas?

Ms. Gordon: I—if—I would like to direct the member to the supplements budget 2023 document.

Page 14 has the org structure for Manitoba Health as of April 1st, 2023, with the reporting framework and the title of the various units within Manitoba Health, Mr. Chairperson. Page 14.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that direction.

I'm just wondering if she can undertake to provide an organizational chart that provides greater detail than what is already in the supplementary Estimates book; something that would list out all employees, various titles and program areas.

Thank you.

Ms. Gordon: With regard to the question, no single document or chart exists that lists the titles and names of all over 700 employees in Manitoba Health. It does exist at a unit branch or program level, so this is a—would be a significant ask in terms of collating all of that information for 700 people.

As well, there's an issue of privacy. The member is asking for the names of the individuals that are in these positions; they are civil servants, and so that would require a determination by the civil service commissioner as to whether the names of individuals who are in these positions can be released.

But we will take this under advisement, we will do the appropriate checks with individuals who can let us know about the privacy issues and we will endeavour to have—make that information available.

MLA Asagwara: To be clear, I'm not seeking any information that would, you know, potentially compromise, obviously, the privacy of civil servants. An organizational chart that lists all employees wouldn't require their names, wouldn't require that personal identifying information. Just roles, employee roles, I think would be more than adequate. And identifying the program area.

So, I appreciate that the minister is willing to take this under advisement. I recognize that perhaps it will take some time to collate all that information appropriately.

I do think that, you know, there's obviously hundreds of employees. However, being able to bring that information together in a way where, you know, I can see and we can see the organizational flow of what is going on would be very helpful, and it's really good information.

So the minister's already indicated that it does exist. Maybe not necessarily all in one place right now, but certainly appreciate the minister being willing to take this as an undertaking, and I respect the confidentiality of civil servants in terms of them not necessarily being identified, and that wasn't an expectation of mine.

So I thank the minister for that and I look forward to, at some point, receiving an organizational chart that lists employees and program areas.

I'll move on to vacancies in the department. This an area of really, really big concern, actually. We've heard reporting around vacancies in the department and as one would imagine, you know, it can be very difficult to execute any strategy if there are significant vacancies in a department responsible for doing so.

And so, clarity here is very important. And I'm wondering if the minister would be able to, today, provide a list of all the current vacancies in the Department of Health, and to list those vacancies by program area. And if the minister could also provide what the overall—the current overall vacancy rate is in the department.

* (15:30)

Ms. Gordon: With regard to the member's question, I do not have the breakdown at the program unit level. I do have the overall the member has requested.

The total 'vacance'—value of vacant FTEs is 217.16; however, 30 of those positions that are vacant are being transferred to Shared Health out of the department, because when the focus of the department changed, there were a number of positions that are going to the provincial authority of Shared Health.

And the overall vacancy rate is 26.7. Again, I don't have a breakdown available today, program area by program area, but we can take that under advisement.

I also want to go back to the previous question raised by the member about the org charts. Just to clarify, it will not be just one chart that the member receives; it will be a series of charts by division or program area, because we won't have one big chart. So I just wanted to clarify that so that when the information is forwarded, there isn't concern that it hasn't matched our commitment to provide a chart. It will be charts.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for not only her response in terms of the overall vacancy rate; I believe she said 26.7 per cent out of 217.16 available FTEs and for clarifying that 30 of the vacant positions are being transferred to Shared Health due to some changes there, some structural changes.

I might go back to that to get some more clarity around that, but I do thank the minister for that response. And for clarifying that I'm going to receive

several charts. I like organizational charts. I like that kind of documentation, so, I'm not disappointed that we're not going to receive one giant chart. I'm looking forward to being able to examine the many charts that we'll be receiving. So, again, I thank the minister for committing to provide that.

I'm going to move on now to mandatory overtime for nurses. This is an area of deep concern, obviously, for nurses, but certainly, the general public has a greater appreciation now for the impacts of mandatory overtime. We've heard stories of nurses across varying areas struggling to maintain any semblance of a work-life balance as a result of being forced to work mandated overtime. And we all, I think, understand the increased risks in the workplace, in terms of delivering quality patient care, when nurses are forced to work mandatory overtime repeatedly.

I mean, even just the challenges for nurses to get home safely after working, you know, forced mandated overtime shifts. We know that the burden of overtime, mandatory overtime, mandated overtime, has really been borne, the brunt of that, by nurses, and other health-care professionals, allied health-care professionals as well, unfortunately.

We, I think, all have an appreciation that nursing shortages have been so dire, and are dire, that this government has had to consistently resort to mandated overtime for nurses. We've seen the inappropriate use of mandated overtime as a staffing tool instead of the efforts appropriate, inadequate efforts being made to fill vacancies.

And I've heard many, many times, I've heard from so many nurses in so many areas the fear that they have of going into their shift and not knowing whether or not they're actually going to be able to get home, see their kids, follow through with plans that they have, or even personal appointments, medical appointments, because they might get stuck working overtime.

We're talking about 16 hours in a row, 20 hours in a row. We've heard situations of nurses working 24 hours; really unsustainable levels of mandated overtime.

Can the minister provide clear information around how many shifts—maybe the percentage of shifts—that are paid at overtime rates because there aren't enough people being hired into vacant positions?

Ms. Gordon: So, the question asked is the percentage of shifts paid at overtime rates due to positions not being filled. And the member's asking for—about mandatory overtime for nurses.

* (15:40)

Now, we capture overtime hours for nurses, but the number isn't divided between regular overtime or someone being mandated to work overtime. It's just one metric. It's overtime hours.

So, I wanted to ensure that the member is aware that it's not captured as a percentage of shifts that were paid at overtime rates, or that they were paid due to any vacancies.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for providing that insight. Does the minister have the information specific to what is available?

Ms. Gordon: We will take that under advisement and have it available for Estimates tomorrow.

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: My understanding—sorry—thank you, Minister, for agreeing to provide that information tomorrow. I appreciate that.

I understand that overtime is now paid at double the regular rates because things have gotten so difficult in the health-care system and so dire under this government that they've needed to change the rates in order to incentivize folks who are working overtime.

Can the minister provide what percentage of hours worked overall—actually, sorry, I'm going to reframe that.

Does the minister think that, given the amount of overtime that we know is being paid out, and we know that those numbers are significant, does the minister think it would be more efficient, like, more effective for our health-care system to train and hire more nurses as opposed to having to pay out these significant amounts of overtime?

And I know I asked the minister previously whether or not she thought we had enough training seats for nurses, but I'm asking for whether or not the minister thinks that, instead of, you know, paying out these massive amounts of overtime costs and, certainly, I'm not suggesting that the minister, you know, turn off that tap altogether and then, you know, those resources aren't there because, unfortunately, due to how dire things are in the health-care system, folks are having to work overtime, but what I'm asking is would it not be more efficient to train and hire more nurses. Does the minister not see that as a more efficient and effective path forward?

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member from Union Station for the question. I know that the member worked in the

health system as I did, as well. And the commitment was there when the member worked in the system and when I was there to train and hire more nurses.

Our government has come through—Manitobans have come through a very difficult time of the pandemic. And all jurisdictions, provincially and—across Canada and globally, are experiencing a nurse shortage. And, you know, the last time I was at the federal-provincial-territorial ministers of Health meeting, around that table, there was not one person that felt that they didn't need to hire another nurse or train another nurse. We all agreed that more needed to be done. It was—I was pleased to be the Minister of Health when we championed the health human resource action plan.

And, again, it's not one platform that will address the shortage; it's the three that we've identified. Yes, we need to train nurses. Yes, we need to recruit. And, yes, we need to retain. And that action plan is an investment of \$200 million, and it's the \$123 million for nine nurse incentives to train, retain and recruit nurses.

And then it's the work of Advanced Education. I don't have all the numbers for Advanced Education, so I'll have to refer the member there to their Estimates, but it's working collaboratively and with the other departments and areas of government, that whole-of-government approach to addressing an issue that impacts every Manitoban, which is health care. And so, ensuring that Advanced Education is increasing the seats so that we can train. But it's not as simple.

You know, I've had people ask, well, train 1,000 or— and so I sit down and I explain to them that that information comes forward, a proposal from the universities or the college about their capacity to deliver more training. That's why our government is assisting Red River College with a new nursing simulation and training centre—\$12.5 million, at Red River College Polytechnic, because nurses need to have the right environment to be able to train.

And so, it's increasing the seats. It's building the nurse simulation at the same time. It's adding another intake at college of nursing. It's incentives. It's a whole host of different strategies, and that—we're not making these up as we go along.

Mr. Chairperson, I sat with nurses at Health Sciences Centre, St. Boniface, Grace emergency department, and up in northern and rural communities, and I asked them: what do you think we need to do to bring more nurses into the system and to keep the nurses we have?

There was the \$123 million for nine nurse incentives. It came right from the front line. We negotiated these incentives with Manitoba Nurses Union representing the thousands of nurses. An MOU was signed as an agreement that these are the steps our government needs to take.

And so, we are following through on what we've heard at the front line and the health system leadership, from Manitoba Nurses Union, who signed the MOU and agreed to the strategies, and we are going to continue to move forward with training and hiring and retaining the nurses we have in the system because we value and appreciate their efforts and we want to have, as the foundation of the work that we're doing, the foundation of—ending mandated overtime to ensure individuals have the work-life balance that is so necessary for their overall health, the overall health of their family and the overall health of our communities and our provinces, Mr. Chairperson.

Thank you.

* (15:50)

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister share how much is being spent on agency nurses?

So, the most current available information, most current data on how much is being spent on agency nurses. And does she have a calculation from her department on the average cost of an agency nurse, compared to a nurse paid in the WRHA?

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for the question. I am able to—I know the member's asking for the average cost of an agency nurse compared to a nurse that is currently working in the public health system. I do not have that information. I would have to take that under advisement.

And I don't know—I can't say at this time whether that number would be different by health region. Because, for example, if someone in the North may need boarding, they may need remoteness allowance and a number of other costs. So, I'd have to take that back and look at that.

But I do have the agency nurse costs if the member would like that information: the overall for '21-22. Can the member state whether that is, in fact, something they are requiring?

MLA Asagwara: Sure, if the minister can provide that. And then, in addition to that, if the minister is able to provide any more current information in regards to agency nurse spending, that would be welcome.

Ms. Gordon: Okay, so, we have for the—I have for the fiscal year '22-23 up until January 31st: 42.9 million, which represents 8 per cent of the total annual nurses' salary cost.

MLA Asagwara: Does the minister have a sense as to where we are at this point beyond the January 2023 information? Are we on pace to surpass that information? So, January—yes, if the minister can clarify whether or not we're on pace to surpass those expenditures in regards to agency nursing for that time frame, that would be good information to have.

Or does the minister think that, you know, we're going to be significantly below, or below that previous spending? I know that the minister might not have a clear number right now, in terms of how much has been spent to date; however, I would imagine the minister would be informed as to whether or not we're on pace to surpass that most recently provided number.

* (16:00)

Ms. Gordon: Based on the numbers that I have reviewed, we are not experiencing any increase over last year. So, if I'm clear on what the member's question is, for the months of February—or, February, March we are not expecting to exceed the amount that I have quoted or I've put on the record. And we're projecting to not spend more than we have in the previous year for agency nursing.

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response, and I appreciate that she was transparent about the fact that she's able to see the February and March numbers and what their projections are in terms of agency spending.

Can the minister share what those numbers are that she has available to her from February and March of 2023 that they're sort of using to gauge whether or not the projected figures are going to be more or less than the year previous?

Ms. Gordon: I just want to clarify that we're using '22-23 to compare it to '21-22 at that January 31st window and we're not expecting for '23-24 to see an increase. I just want to be clear on what the years are. We do not have, at this moment, the '22-23 February and March.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that answer. I think I've wrapped my head around what she's communicating with me in terms of what they have access to and what they're using to project what it could be like. If I have any further questions, I'll go back to that.

I'm going to go back to asking the minister about training spaces. I know that she's directed me to the Advanced Education department to get clarity around spaces specifically, but, you know, something I want to highlight is that—and it stood out to me when I went over the budget, you know, specific to health, and looked at some of those training seats and announcements, that there doesn't really seem to be actually a clear strategy in terms of addressing the health staffing crisis that we have.

And, you know, the minister and her Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and other folks have talked about 2,000 more health professionals.

You know, they throw a lot of numbers out regularly, but there doesn't seem to be a cohesive strategy to address the health-care staffing crisis across the system, which is very, very concerning given just how bad things are and given that we continue to actively lose people from our health-care system to other jurisdictions who are providing more competitive, or perhaps, you know, work environments that are more conducive to a work-life balance that is sustainable and enjoyable for our health-care professionals.

And so, even after concluding a collective agreement with nurses, we know that this minister and her government had to go back with more incentives, because the vacancy pressures and challenges with staffing were so significant.

The minister talks about having met with nurses and other health-care professionals, so she knows that nurses have been really pleading with this government for seven years to stop mistreating them, and to stop the attacks on health-care workers, to stop the attacks on nurses in our health-care system who we all call heroes, but this government doesn't reflect that in their actions and how they treat nurses.

And so, after seven years of disrespect, you know, of course nurses are not going to say no to any help or incentives, or anything brought forward by this government that they hope might make a positive difference.

But nurses have made it pretty clear to me—very clear—that they don't trust this government whatsoever to do what is necessary to repair the damage they've done to our health-care system.

And so, I'm wondering if the minister—I'm speaking specific to nurse vacancy—nurse seats, rather, nurse training seats that this government has cut historically—how many—does the minister know exactly how many

nurse training spaces were cut at post-secondary institutions in the last several years, since 2016, prior to their recently announced increases in training seats? And, ultimately, how many nurse training seats were reduced each year under this government?

Ms. Gordon: I want to put on the record that when I met with the nurses—not just at Health Sciences and St. Boniface and Grace, but across the province, in rural and northern Manitoba, in my constituency they come on a regular basis to talk with me about the challenges of getting licensure.

I had an individual in my office, I think it was two weeks ago, that shared her story of—under the previous NDP government—trying for five years; I can't remember the exact dollar amount that she quoted, to get her licensure.

And I had someone stop in to my office in the constituency last week, and he shared with me: In 2001 he came here as a physician, wanting to practice his profession of physician, and he—I'll tell you, I have people sobbing in my office from the days of the NDP, when, according to this nurse—he's now a nurse—no one helped.

And they—the individuals that I've been speaking with have been talking about how much the compliance order that was signed by myself and our government last year has helped internationally educated individuals who felt like they had no hope whatsoever of getting licensed in this province.

I—two nurses from India approached me at an event and said they were sharing an apartment in Ontario, where they were driving from Winnipeg—or, from Manitoba to Ontario to pick up shifts, because they couldn't get licensed here. And how much the simple signing of a compliance order, which members in the previous government never, never did, has helped them to be able to practice. They're both actually now licensed here in Manitoba, and have given up that apartment in Ontario.

* (16:10)

So, when we're talking about respecting nurses, I want to say that the stories I've heard were—are stories of complete disrespect. That these individuals were not listened to, there was no sympathy from the previous government and no attempts whatsoever to work with the college to modernize their pathways for licensure to create new opportunities for English language attestation, as we have.

And so, the stories I was hearing, which I will not repeat, because I promised the nurses when I met with them that they weren't going to see their stories on the front page of any newspaper or on my social media platform.

In fact, I never even put on my platform that I met with any nurses. I know others did, but I committed to them that I would—I wanted to have a space where they could share with me their experiences, and their experiences were under the previous NDP government.

And that nothing had been done, and that, in fact, the pandemic had exacerbated and showed the gaps in the system. And again, they shared with us what they felt we needed to do as incentives to begin the process of healing.

So, our health-care employers are committed to reducing reliance on agency staff, and through initiatives to improve retention of nurses currently working in the health system and recruitment of new nurses into positions in the health system.

And, again, I just want to say these challenges are not unique to Manitoba. Some initiatives in progress to retain our current workforce and to recruit more nurses into positions include mentorship programs, establishing a provincial float pool.

And again, the nine incentives. And I also want to point to the recently negotiated collective agreement with the Manitoba Nurses Union, which also has a number of new provisions intended to increase recruitment and retention of nurses, including creating short-term locum travel for nurses to support staffing needs in northern communities and forming a new patient-care-optimization committee with the MNU.

So, a number of things are under way, but I certainly don't—

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

MLA Asagwara: I think that the minister really doesn't want to get into a back-and-forth about mistreating nurses. I don't think the minister wants to get into a back-and-forth about inactions of her government as it relates to nurses.

This minister's government has been in power since 2016—cut health care to the bone, fired hundreds of nurses, forced them—and I see members of her caucus here shaking their heads, which is disappointing because I know the nurses who walked down in the tunnels whose jobs were deleted, and had to compete with their friends to find new jobs.

And, you know, members in this room of the PC caucus can say that what I'm saying is garbage all they want. I'm sharing the lived experiences of nurses in our health-care system who are directly impacted by the mistreatment of this Conservative government.

You know, including Indigenous nurses, who had to fight—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —really hard. And we stood with those nurses because, under this government, they couldn't practise. Born and educated in Manitoba. And so, you know, it's long overdue that this minister and her government be accountable for the mistreatment on their end—since being in government—of nurses.

That's a great place for this government and this minister to start. If they start doing that, finally, after all these years, perhaps then nurses might begin to start contemplating being able to trust this government.

But as long as this Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) and her government and her colleagues in this committee room who want to have strong reactions to the truth that I'm sharing about the experiences of nurses—as long as they want to continue to deny accountability and to not be held accountable for their actions and mistreatment of workers and nurses, things will not improve.

Accountability is the starting point. It's disappointing that—yet, we continue to see that lack of accountability from this government and from members in the PC caucus.

Now, at this stage, you know, I think it's really important that we get clarity on what the impacts of those nursing training seats being cut has had.

So, I'd ask the minister again: What has been the impact over the past six years of this government's cuts to nursing training seats in post-secondary institutions? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

I think we should—*[interjection]* Order. I believe that we should—*[interjection]* Order. Order. Order.

I believe we should concentrate on the Estimates books for questions, and quit bantering back and forth because that's not going to solve anything. Things were going very smoothly and I would appreciate that we could get back to such a tone.

Thank you.

Ms. Gordon: I do agree with you that we are here to look at the Estimates—Supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure for budget '23-24 for Manitoba Health. I'm happy to get back to questions related to it. But I do want to put on the record that health is the employer—Shared Health, all the SDOs is the employer, and we hear on a regular basis from health-system leaders and front-line workers about the needs.

And I work very collaboratively with the minister responsible for Advanced Education because that's where the training seats reside. They have developed the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy that lays out the road map for addressing staffing shortages.

We have also developed a health human resource action plan to bolster their efforts in terms of addressing retention, training and recruitment of positions that we have been told are critical to the sustainability of the health system.

So, I will once again have to direct the member, in terms of the question of how many nurse training seats may have been reduced or added over the years, to the ministry of Advanced Education and to Department of Advanced Education's Estimates.

Thank you.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): As the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak and somebody who lives in the North, I know how stressful and how it could be complicated to attend a doctor's appointment in Winnipeg. First, you got to get child care. First, you got to make sure that there's enough food while you're away. Gas, hotel, meals; it's very stressful, as a northerner, to have an appointment with a specialist here in Winnipeg.

And I remember in 2016 we were all hyped up because The Pas Clinic was going to be built. And I seen actual documents; basically, the shovels were ready to hit the ground. However, that was cut by you guys.

Now, we don't have space for specialists and we still continue to stress out when it comes to attending medical appointments. When all those factors or some of those factors can't be solved, well, we miss our appointments. Which means we're going to get sick, even more sick; perhaps death. And so that's really concerning.

And guess what we have to rely on? The Northern Patient Transportation Program, which is pretty cheap. It hasn't been touched or looked at since 1995. We should really relook at it instead of, you know, like, \$15 a day for meals. That's impossible.

* (16:20)

You know, some folks—I get a lot of complaints at my office about that, saying, you know, how disrespectful, you know; we're treated like children, just given change when we have to come for major appointments with specialists.

Now, is there a way that this Northern Patient Transportation Program can get more dollars so we can be treated with respect and as people, instead of just given change and saying, good luck getting there and good luck getting back?

So, that's my question for the day, is the Northern Patient Transportation Program. Please, we need more funding in that area, since The Pas clinic specialists' space was gone. So, we still continue this dread to come to Winnipeg to receive medical attention.

Ekosi.

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for The Pas-Kameesak for her comments.

You know, one of the areas of priority for our government is ensuring individuals receive care closer to home.

And that is why we have the clinical preventative services plan, and have committed \$812 million. And a significant portion of those monies will be used in the creation of a new intermediary health-care hub in northern Manitoba, and teams are engaged with Indigenous leaders and stakeholders to help lead the *[inaudible]* plan for these projects—excuse me.

I also want to touch on the member's comments about the northern patient transport program.

So, our government has more than doubled the NDP's funding of the northern patient transport program, from \$7.9 million to \$18.1 million since we took office. So, there has been a change. And nearly 20,000 patients a year rely on this program, so we want it to be a program that meets the needs of people living in the North; and we are committed to ensuring that it's properly funded.

I know the member was talking about people saying that they were just receiving coins, or—for their meals, \$15. I will certainly take that back to the department to look at what those rates are, but I can say that we have doubled our funding to that program.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Ms. Lathlin: Well, I just—thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to put on record: You may have doubled, you

know, but the rates have to increase. So, I just have to put that on record.

Ekosi.

MLA Asagwara: So, we know that this government has kept allied health-care professionals without a contract for over five years; in some cases, closer to seven.

And things are really tough now for allied health-care professionals. We've lost a number of paramedics who have walked away from their jobs, either altogether not working in paramedicine any longer or have left to other jurisdictions like Saskatchewan because they earn more money there because they're allowed to practise to their full scope; whereas, in Manitoba, if you work in a rural community, you're not able to practise as a, you know, advanced-care paramedic.

You know, allied health-care professionals are critical to our health-care system being operational, functioning in any capacity whatsoever, and they've unfortunately been mistreated for several years now under this government and this minister's decision-making. They represent over 6,500 professional and technical paramedical workers in the health-care system. The minister is well aware of that.

I'm wondering if the minister is surprised—given what she knows, we all know, is going on, the challenges that allied health-care professionals are facing—you know, not having a contract for five years, having their wages frozen by this government at one point, even.

Is the minister surprised that she can't find people to fill vacant positions when folks like perfusionists, as a good example, are paid 40 per cent higher in their wages in other, nearby provinces. Is the minister surprised that she can't find people to fill those positions when there are better financial opportunities elsewhere?

And my follow-up to that would be, has the minister met with the Manitoba allied health-care professionals' leadership? And if not, why not?

Ms. Gordon: I know that the member for Union Station is aware that MAHCP is in active bargaining. They are at the table undergoing negotiations, and I am confident that the two sides will be able to reach a fair and equitable collective agreement. It would be inappropriate of myself as minister to insert myself into a bargaining process.

I do, however, want the member to know that allied health professionals is part of our health human resource action plan, so commitment of \$200 million

to add 2,000 additional health professionals. Under my direction, members of the health human resource action plan task force has been in discussions with MAHCP with regard to the incentives we committed to making available, not just for nurses and doctors, but also allied health. So, I look forward to seeing the outcome of those discussions.

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: So, just to be clear, I'm wanting to know if the minister has 'met'—met with, rather, the Manitoba allied health-care professionals' leadership.

So, I'm not asking if the minister has interfered with anything that's going on. I'm asking if she's met with the leadership that represents, you know, the over 6,500 professionals who we depend on to provide quality health care to Manitobans.

And I also didn't get any clarity as to whether or not the minister is surprised that she can't fill the vacant positions in allied health care, given the fact that that they are able to earn greater incomes in other jurisdictions and have better work-life balance.

* (16:30)

Ms. Gordon: I can confirm, and I don't have the date available, but I could take that under advisement and bring that back to the member that I have met with MAHCP since becoming Minister of Health.

I can also confirm for the member that, under my direction, the health human resource action plan task force is in current discussions with MAHCP regarding incentives that were committed to under the health human resource action plan.

I'm happy to meet with MAHCP in the future. I always say to groups that want to meet with me, that even when my door is physically closed, it mentally it is open to anyone to come and meet with me. Happy to meet with them after their negotiations have concluded and the bargaining process has produced an outcome of a new collective agreement. More than happy to have them stop by for a meeting.

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister explain the current organizational structure and the relationships and responsibilities of the provincial Health Department, Shared Health and the regional health authorities?

I understand that AFM and the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre, so MATC, have been taken over by I believe—well, it's either Shared Health or the WRHA.

So, can the minister explain the current organizational structure, the relationship of responsibilities between them and who it is exactly that's taken over the control and responsibility of AFM and MATC?

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question because it gives me an opportunity to place on the record that yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition, in his debate with the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), said that nobody can explain the benefits of Shared Health, and vowed to cut their funding.

Mr. Chairperson, the arrogance and disrespect the Leader of the Opposition showed the more than 18,000 Shared Health employees is astounding, and he should apologize to them. It may not be important enough for the Leader of the Opposition to look into, but it is important to this government.

Those benefits he dismissed are Manitoba's provincial hospital, the Health Sciences Centre, all of the front-line services it provides and the dozens of specialty services. Why does he want to close down Health Sciences Centre that has transitioned to Shared Health?

Here are some other program areas: Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, the Children's Hospital at HSC. He wants to close down the Children's Hospital at HSC. Manitoba's addictions services, Selkirk Mental Health Centre, diagnostic services in Manitoba, emergency response services in Manitoba.

These are all transitioned to Shared Health, where the Leader of the Opposition vowed to cut their funding. Which of the services is the Leader of the Opposition planning on cutting? How many of the 18,000 Shared Health employees is he planning on firing?

He should be transparent to Manitobans. Does the member for Union Station know? It would be helpful to be able to answer the question. Because these are important areas to health care in Manitoba and they are important to this government.

So I have shared the programs that have transitioned to Shared Health: the same programs that the Leader of the Opposition vows to cut.

And so, where would it be—where would it be? The Children's Hospital at HSC? How about Selkirk mental health centre? Which one, and why? Why close or cut funding to our provincial flagship hospital like Health Sciences Centre, the same hospital that our government has been working so hard to add supports to, ensuring that the front-line staff are heard there?

Is the Leader of the Opposition—perhaps the member for Union Station knows, and that is why the question is being asked about which program specialty services are—have moved to Shared Health.

So, as part of transformation, programs were moved from being separate entities that were funded separately to being under Shared Health: Manitoba's provincial hospital, HSC, Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, the Children's Hospital at HSC, Manitoba's addiction services, Selkirk mental health centre, diagnostic services in Manitoba, emergency response services in Manitoba.

The aim of Shared Health is to plan provincially and deliver locally, and these agencies were identified through a lengthy process of transformation and working with front-line staff in terms of which agencies would transition to Shared Health.

So they're not—it's not taken over. The Children's Hospital is still called the Children's Hospital at HSC. Selkirk mental health centre is still called Selkirk mental health centre. Emergency response services in Manitoba is still called emergency response services in Manitoba.

And I just want—I know the member was not an MLA at the time, but the transformation work was the outcome of a report that was commissioned by the NDP and it was the Peachey report. So these changes have been made based on a report that the NDP commissioned.

And, once again, I want to state very clearly for the record that no organization has been taken over. They still bear their names. They still have staff—18,000, to be exact.

And I just want to know, when I hear a statement like that from the Leader of the Opposition, who's going to be cut?

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

MLA Asagwara: That was quite the response. That was something from the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon). Fascinating response, for sure. A lot of reaching in that reply.

But I could tell the minister was trying to find a way to burn through five minutes, so I think she achieved her objective in her response there in that regard.

So, I do have a couple of additional questions. I'm hopeful the minister will provide a response to my questions.

You know, and I do want to state again that allied health-care professionals are incredibly valued. They're invaluable to our health-care system and it is a shame that the over 6,500 allied health-care professionals in Manitoba have gone, you know, over five years without a contract. They've had their wages frozen by this Health Minister and her government.

We've had folks leave the careers they love because they are burnt out, exhausted due to vacancies that haven't been filled, like, paramedics are a good example of that; perfusionists who've left Manitoba because they're able to earn 40 per cent more in other jurisdictions.

We know that, right now, allied health-care professionals are exploring the option of a strike, which is incredibly disheartening. These folks have all navigated a pandemic that was incredibly difficult for all of us across the province. Certainly, they bore the brunt of that in health care, continuing to provide the care that Manitobans need.

And that should have been met with a government who had their backs and supported them, not a government who continued to mistreat them and not hear them or listen to their expertise; not a government who would, instead, you know, resist providing an adequate and fair package by way of a deal.

* (16:40)

And it shouldn't take allied health-care professionals getting to the point of maybe striking for their voices to be heard by this government. It's really disappointing. And allied health-care professionals and health-care workers alike across Manitoba deserve better than this minister's leadership in health care, and they deserve better than this current PC government.

I am going to leave my questions there for today, actually, and I'm going to turn it over to our colleague, the MLA for River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Just a question, in terms of—can take an example, the Grace Hospital; the relative role of Shared Health and the relative role of the hospital management.

Who is responsible for allocating funds for employers, and who's responsible for hiring and firing the people who work at the Grace Hospital?

Ms. Gordon: The limit—I can—thank you, Mr. Chairperson. I can respond that it is the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

Mr. Gerrard: So, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority is the one which allocates funds, and which hires and fires all the people who work at the Grace Hospital. Is that correct?

Ms. Gordon: I can clarify that Manitoba Health allocates global funding to the SDOs, of which one of them is the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, and then the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority allocates funding to—for example, a facility such as the Grace Hospital—for their operations.

With regard to who fires people, I mean, I think it depends on the staffing level of that individual. If it's a position that has been appointed to the Grace Hospital by the WRHA, perhaps the WRHA would be letting that person go. If it's a front-line staff, it could be human resources at the Grace Hospital. So it really depends on the position.

Mr. Gerrard: Just to complete that: you mentioned a human resources person at Grace Hospital. Is that a person hired, fired by the Grace Hospital, or by the WRHA?

Ms. Gordon: I can say, again, that the WRHA funds the operations of Grace Hospital. A number of positions are hired at various levels. Some may be positions hired through WRHA, some may be facility hired.

I would just like to remind the member that we're here to consider the Estimates for '23-24 for Manitoba Health, and I'm happy to answer any questions related to the Estimates.

Thank you.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I mean, the—you know, a fundamental component of the Estimates is how the dollars are allocated and how they are spent. I'm interested in to what extent the minister is, you know, involved or knowledgeable or let know what's happening in terms of the situation of employees and so on at the Grace Hospital.

For example, I understand that there was a period where doctors were concerned that there was a—not enough, or maybe even no, night physicians at Grace Hospital.

And I'm just trying to understand, when would—the minister—when would you, as the minister, know about this sort of a situation, and what sort of input would you have?

Ms. Gordon: I'm pleased to put on the record, as it relates to Grace Hospital, that 46 new physicians have

been hired and are practising in Manitoba since we announced the health human resource action plan. This includes 30 family physicians, a cardiac surgeon, a neurologist and a neurosurgeon, among many others. And I'm proud to say that many of these new physicians are internationally trained doctors.

Our government has invested \$77.1 million into the Grace Hospital. This includes capital upgrades of \$63.1 million; safety and security measures, \$4.9 million; and medical equipment and upgrades, \$9.1 million.

The—again, the health human resource action plan is meant to address many of the issues related not just to nursing shortages, but physician shortages, as well. And it's my understanding that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority has approved the hiring of additional physician resources for the Grace Hospital, and these additional resources include physician assistants and a hospital medical officer for the overnight shift on the acute medicine ward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister has talked a lot about the \$200 million allocated to address the staff shortage situation and to address problems which may have arisen, or may not have arisen, during COVID or from before.

But the \$200 million, I wonder if the minister could provide a breakdown of what proportion of that \$200 million would go to, say, address shortages of physicians, what would go to address shortages in nurses, what would go to address shortages in allied health positions.

* (16:50)

Ms. Gordon: I'm happy to put on the record the health human resource action plan publicly funded initiatives that have been announced. And more work is being done through Doctors Manitoba and the health human resource action plan task force around incentives.

But I'm pleased to say 80 new physician training seats: 40 undergraduate physician seats, 10 international medical graduate seats, 30 two-year post-grad medical seats for internationally educated medical students. We extended primary-care patient hours for family and pediatric clinics, a financial incentive for doctors offices to extend hours so patients can access primary care more readily, \$450,000 for physician mental health supports through the peer support program, \$5 million for new emergency-care service vectors to virtually support patient transfers.

And again, I recently announced our partnership with Doctors Manitoba to reduce physician administration by establishing a joint task force to reduce administrative burden for physicians and reduce red tape that we have heard will lead to thousands of hours of physician time being transferred to direct delivery of care. So I look forward to the report that will be coming forward from this task force at the end of the year.

So, much more work is happening at the table with the task force responsible for the health human resource action plan, and I look forward to seeing more great, great outcomes and being able to stand with stakeholders and share the good news about the discussions that have been taking place.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Gerrard: Over the last couple of decades, there's been considerable expansion of the dialysis program, or programs, around the province.

I wonder if the minister could give us a number for the total number of dialysis units in Manitoba, and what are the capital and operating costs related to those units for this year?

Ms. Gordon: This is another request that where the data is owned by Shared Health. The dialysis program is a provincial program that is under Shared Health, so we would need to go to Shared Health for that information. Can the member tell me what the time frame is that—are they asking for this information, the upcoming Estimates, the one we're here to consider, '23-24? What is the timeline that is being asked for?

Mr. Gerrard: I would like to have the numbers for the current year, the Estimates, plus also the number for what was spent in the last fiscal year that we have just completed, '22-23. And the number of dialysis units, you know, last year, and if it changed this year?

Ms. Gordon: Sorry, Mr. Chairperson. Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. We will take this question—request under advisement and return with a response.

Mr. Gerrard: I know that there has been problems at times with sufficient physicians and nurses in Grandview, and I'm just trying to understand where the bottleneck is, whether it is in recruiting people, whether it is the allocation of funds, and what is the bottleneck for making sure that the emergency room and the hospital are fully staffed.

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

ROOM 255**EDUCATION AND
EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING**

* (15:00)

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

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I'd like to welcome everyone back to this portion of our Estimates dialogue. It's something that—I've mentioned before, in two previous occasions, I look forward to this dialogue because it allows us to get a real—I think a clear indication as to the direction that the department is going in.

You know, Mr. Chair, yesterday we had that absolutely terrible news of the discovery of yet another body in a landfill in Winnipeg, Linda Mary Beardy, from Lake St. Martin. The violence being perpetrated against Indigenous women and girls, two-spirited people is concerning and leaves—especially, I mean, for all Manitobans, but for educators who work with young people and want to provide absolutely everything for young people when they are at the school.

I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that myself and part of the Manitoba NDP team was invited by Lakeshore School Division to visit their school division and to take a look at the work that they're doing not only with their kids, but also with their communities.

You know, and in sitting at Ashern Central high, we had the opportunity to have lunch with the divisional leadership team, the school leadership team, teachers and most importantly, Mr. Chair, students.

I recall with great, you know, humility the opportunity to speak with young Indigenous girls that are attending that school. I know when we were sitting having lunch that was prepared by the school, which was also quite humbling—quite a humbling experience to see the lengths that they went to welcome us because they wanted to share their stories. As educators, we're always—we're listening to stories every day; the stories of our kids, our families, our communities. And we certainly were doing that that day.

And I was talking to some students and was asking them—because some of them are grade 12, ready to graduate—I asked a young student, what are your plans coming out of Ashern Central when you graduate? And this student said to me, oh, I'm going to be attending SAIT, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, for welding.

I thought, oh, that's interesting. A Manitoba student is leaving Manitoba to go to school outside of that—outside of Manitoba.

I asked, why are you leaving? You know, Mr. Chair, she said to me she doesn't feel safe in Winnipeg and her experience coming down to this city. That left me with a lot of pause. After the news of yesterday, it got me thinking about that.

And I know the minister and his department is talking about, on page 15, treaty education, Manitoba Aboriginal Languages Strategy, system-'wride' progress towards reconciliation, commission's Calls to Action. I know the minister has talked about Mamàhtawisimin [*phonetic*].

My question to the minister regarding this very serious issue and very serious concern brought up by this young person that we were talking to is how will Mamàhtawisimin [*phonetic*] mitigate the need for our Manitoba students to leave Manitoba to feel safer in another area instead of staying here in Manitoba?

I just—and this is not intended as a gotcha question, Mr. Chair. I truly want to know what concrete strategies are going to be put in place so that our kids, once they graduate, can continue on their path to post-secondary excellence and then becoming contributing members of our society here in Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member—minister, sorry, of Education and Early Childhood Learning.

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): We on the government side, as well, and I'd like to thank my friend and the critic of Education and Early Childhood Learning, the member for Transcona, for starting off our afternoon session with this topic.

And, absolutely, condolences go out to the entire family and, of course, the community. And it is tough. It's tough when we see things happen within our communities in Winnipeg, but not only Winnipeg, but, you know, various different situations happen around Manitoba.

And as the member knows, because he's worked as a educator for 33 years, there's been challenges and

various different things that I think all governments of all stripes have strived towards doing better.

And the member from Transcona made a couple comments, and so I'm going to probably take a couple times to be able to address some of the topics that he's brought up.

When we talk about Manitoba and we talk about making sure that—success for all learners, as I've said multiple times, no matter where they live, their cultural background or their own personal circumstance, I think it's very important, as we spoke yesterday and had a bit of a debate back and forth—it wasn't really a debate, it was more so comments back and forth, because we weren't really debating it, because we know how important it is to make sure we have safe learning environments for our kids in Manitoba.

And so, what we heard loud and clear from the K-to-12 commission was to be able to listen to those 30,000 Manitobans and come up with some directives, or some directions that Manitobans felt that we as a department in Manitoba Education should be going. And that's why the member brought up the fact that—how we came up with the Indigenous Education Policy Framework, called Mamàhtawisiwin.

And so, within the K-to-12 action plan, we have some very important pillars. And those pillars—and keep in mind, I've told the member before that the K-to-12 action plan is a living, breathing document—and those four pillars are high-quality learning; student engagement and well-being; excellence in teaching and leadership; and responsive systems.

And within those four pillars, or shortly thereafter, we also launched, as you said, the policy framework called Mamàhtawisiwin, The Wonder We Are Born With.

And the policy framework of Mamàhtawisiwin takes the various different cultures and takes a look at the different cultures and backgrounds of many different wonderful individuals that call Manitoba home and takes those opportunities and winds them in those four pillars that we—that I've already talked about, the K-to-12 system—or the K-to-12 action plan.

And Mamàhtawisiwin, basically, is helping to advance the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action numbers 62 and 63.

Now the member shares the story, and I appreciate the member's story in regards to a young lady who's going to leave the province to carry on with some post-secondary education in another province.

And we take a look at, throughout the province, and we do have students that leave, and we do have students that come to Manitoba.

* (15:10)

And we want to make sure that we are making those opportunities available, and I'll target more in—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Altomare: I do want to give the minister an opportunity to further elaborate on how Mamàhtawisiwin [*phonetic*]*—*what that particular strategy, through the four pillars—how is a school going to look different? How is it going to ensure that it's following the department's directions around what Mamàhtawisiwin [*phonetic*] *stands for?*

Like I said earlier, when you walk into a school, you notice the culture immediately. The type of—just through the ways kids navigate through the building, the way adults interact with each other. If I'm understanding the minister correctly, Mamàhtawisiwin [*phonetic*] *will actually have some really concrete pieces that'll impact student learning directly.*

I'd like him to expand a little bit more on how it'll impact student learning directly.

Mr. Ewasko: I know the—well, maybe the member doesn't know this. But I know we've shared, back quite some time ago when I had the opportunity to start off as becoming a guidance counsellor in Sunrise School Division—specifically, in École Edward-Schreyer School—and we talk about, at that time, Aboriginal academic achievement. And now it is the IAA, which is Indigenous Academic Achievement, through the department.

But back when I was still doing guidance counselling, there was an opportunity and a—I guess an advertisement for a position in the school. And then with that position came a larger opportunity to be on a leadership team for the school division, and again it was funded through the triple-A grant.

And so, I had applied, as a relatively new guidance counsellor in the building, as far as the title, but I worked with many students with varying degrees of abilities throughout my school career. And had that great opportunity of being chosen to be the triple-A leader for the school.

And then, in addition to that, was able to get additional training and be part of a Aboriginal education committee for the Sunrise School Division. And this was something that we did, and we worked with many

different organizations and committees from all across this great province of ours.

And I really feel that a lot of that training that I had back then was absolutely one of the best sets of training that I've had as an educator. Because it really—it opens your eyes to various different things that, you know I—to quote an elder that I see on a regular basis, she said to me: Wayne, my boy—hopefully I can say that—you don't know what you don't know.

And so, I think that, as time had gone on, there's many things—and I think everybody—I think we're all lifelong learners, and we want to make sure that we're moving towards some form of knowledge. And when we talk about the truth and reconciliation and the Calls to Action, I really feel that you can't have reconciliation unless you have the truth.

And so, that's why, again, I commend the hard work of not only the department, our Indigenous Inclusion Directorate, but also so many more Manitobans that had come together and given their thoughts and ideas on how we continue to move things forward. This isn't something that is going to be fixed or accomplished in one day, but at least I feel that we're moving forward.

And so, we've got many things that we've done as a department already, and I'll continue to elaborate on them as time goes on this afternoon.

But, you know, elders and knowledge keepers—we all sit at the foundation part of the school division planning, which is the framework for continuous improvement. We are having conversations with all of our school divisions to make sure that they're reporting back on how they are implementing Mamāhtawisiwin along with the K-to-12 action plan within their curriculums. This is also changing classroom teachers by providing more knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, as well.

We are having regional sessions throughout Manitoba, which I am seeing first-hand the great energy. And I really do think that Manitoba is a leader—not I think, I know we're a leader in the country in regards to some of things that we are doing towards Indigenous education and inclusion.

And, as I've mentioned before, one of the—three of the main topics coming out of the K-to-12 commission is focusing on numeracy, literacy and Indigenous education inclusion. And I will share more with the member my next—at my next opportunity.

Mr. Altomare: I did hear the minister talk about regional sessions. I'm genuinely curious about that

and would like to know a little bit more around where are those sessions taking place, who was leading the sessions and what the department was wanting to ensure teachers had.

I know that's three questions—it's kind of like location, who led it and what was the—what were the main learning outcomes that were desired by the department. So, that's three.

Mr. Ewasko: We got a little bit of feedback—oh, I know why. There we go. I'll uncover the microphone.

* (15:20)

So, thanks—I'd like to thank the member for the question, because it gives me an opportunity to put some of the good work that the department and the work that our government has been doing in regards to Mamāhtawisiwin and, again, the commitment for the department towards truth and reconciliation and our government's commitment to that.

So, Manitoba's Indigenous education policy framework, Mamāhtawisiwin, which is actually—the name has come from ceremony. And it's Cree, and it's The Wonder We Are Born With. And it's grounding all of the work, and is indispensable foundation for our education system. And the Department of Education funds school divisions and Indigenous education partner organizations to the tune of just over \$14.1 million to support the Indigenous education initiatives.

So, back in the winter and spring of 2022, 11 school divisions with three schools each piloted the initiative of elders and knowledge keepers. And this initiative was expanded for province-wide implementation with funding to all school divisions for the '22-23 school year, in the total of \$2.2 million in funding.

This initiative have been guided by the Elders and Knowledge Keepers Advisory Council, which is comprised of seven elders and knowledge keepers from all across this great province of ours. The council has met six times since inception of the project, and has validated the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools guidelines.

Now, we talked about the member wanted to know some of the sessions, and where some of them were located. So, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning funded the Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium, as we spoke about yesterday briefly, to facilitate the orientation of Mamāhtawisiwin for teacher—for teachers, school leaders, superintendents and Indigenous education leaders. Six sessions have

been held from October to March, with 155 total participants.

An Honourable Member: Three?

Mr. Ewasko: Yes. Sorry, so the member asked me if—what years, and so that was October of 2022 to March 2023, with 155 total participants, 89 who self-identified as front-line educators.

Nineteen school divisions and districts had participated. All divisions and districts are invited to five regional orientations sessions, and a French session on Mamāhtawisiwin for the tools for reflection, planning and reporting and Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools guidelines. The department is providing funding to divisions, districts, for superintendents, school leaders and principals, Indigenous divisional leaders, board trustees and divisional elders and knowledge keepers to attend.

As I was mentioning earlier, the Council had met six times since the inception—and that's the Elders and Knowledge Keepers Advisory Council. The co-ordinator of the initiative supports divisions and districts through strategic planning sessions.

So, 36 of the 37 divisions—districts had participated in strategic planning sessions with the co-ordinator, and still working and working with the 37th, and I'm sure that they will be coming on board, as well, as the—sort of early stages.

It's coming to a year now, I guess, with the document being published and out there. It is getting great traction. School divisions, school leaders, First Nation leaders are really taking to it because it's not just about Indigenous education and inclusion, it's about Indigenous education and inclusion. It's everybody.

And that's why, in my next answer, I'll elaborate a little bit on what we're doing for treaty education in the province as well.

Mr. Altomare: Just to further go down this a little bit more, I'm also going to assume, too, that there are more sessions being planned, and that this is a piece that will continue to occur as we progress through 2023.

An Honourable Member: Was that the question?

Mr. Altomare: Yes. That's the question, yes.

Mr. Ewasko: So, the question from the member from Transcona was: Is this work going to continue?

Well, my short answer to the member—but, of course, I'll want to elaborate on it—is yes, of course.

Because this is something that is important and has been important, and came out loud and clear in the K-to-12 commission. And that K-to-12 commission brought forward recommendations and ideas and thoughts from over 30,000 Manitobans.

And I know I shared this with the member before on multiple times, but I just like to continue putting it on the record that the K-to-12 commission—the commission on our K-to-12 education system here in Manitoba—the last Royal Commission on Education that was done here in Manitoba was 1957-58, I guess, when it was published or finalized.

And so, lots of things have changed since then. And I would like to commend my predecessors, the former Education ministers, and again, thank the hard work of our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and my colleagues in the PC government to actually move some of this forward.

We do have—on an ongoing basis, we have dedicated staff, not only with the Indigenous Inclusion Directorate, but also with other areas of our department. We have dedicated funding, which I can go into in my next earliest opportunity.

We're working with school divisions. As I had already mentioned, we expanded the Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium to northern Manitoba and, of course, other areas of the province. We are—as I mentioned earlier in regards to school divisions reporting, we've got the self-assessment tool, which is already in place and it's well received by many of the member from Transcona's, you know, former colleagues, and also some superintendents, as well, school divisions. And they're reporting on making sure that the policy framework is actually being implemented.

There's detailed roles and responsibilities in the document. I know the member is familiar with the document. So, basically, if the member would turn to page 23 in Mamāhtawisiwin—

An Honourable Member: I don't have that. I only have the Estimates book.

Mr. Ewasko: Oh, okay. So, I can endeavour—but you do—okay, so the member doesn't have the book with him right now, but I can endeavour to get him another copy. I think he's probably got one in his office.

But, so, when we talk about the various different roles and responsibilities, this is a very well put together policy framework. And I think, as we talked about the K-to-12 action plan, Mamāhtawisiwin is

definitely a policy framework, I think, that sets it up, lays it out quite well, the roles and responsibilities of everybody involved.

And keep in mind, not only is the K-to-12 action plan, but also the Mamàhtawisiwin, it is student centred. Everything that we're doing in education revolves around the students.

* (15:30)

So, there's roles for the students. There's roles for the teachers. There's roles for school-based support teams. There's roles for school leaders, roles for school divisions and district leaders. There's roles for, of course, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning.

And, basically, to just sort of sum up some of those roles and responsibilities, is that we do have a moral and professional responsibility to support students' proficiency and their ability to navigate and walk strong like two people—Dogrib—in both traditional and contemporary worlds.

And I know that we're working hard as a PC government to make sure, again, that we're providing the tools and the opportunities for all students in the province to, again, succeed no matter where they live, their cultural background or their personal circumstance.

Mr. Altomare: I'm going to assume that in the first part of that answer, that there are sessions that are being planned for later on in the year so that this can get through to other schools, because that was my question. I do believe the minister did acknowledge that and did in—say that's future thing—future sessions are being planned.

Describing the roles in the Mamàhtawisiwin [*phonetic*] piece are really important. I appreciate the minister going through that.

The minister knows that I frame a lot of my questions in question period and in our dialogue together around kids, families and communities. And I know, in the public education system we do a really good job with kids and families. The next piece—and, you know, it's a challenge that everyone faces, is how do we get through to our communities so that our communities know what's going on in our schools, Mr. Chair, because that's really important.

And the reason I'm kind of tying this back—I want to tie it back to, again, when I met with that young person and them feeling unsafe in the city of Winnipeg here to the point where they don't want to continue their education in Manitoba. There is an important role for

community, and I do also know that all schools are part of a community and an integral part of a community. The Chair will know that there are members in the House that come from small towns; and schools are at the centre of their communities. They play a really important role, Mr. Chair, often one of not only identity but also of espousing community values.

With Mamàhtawisiwin [*phonetic*], how is the department getting—or, is it the—you know what? There's kind of two parts to this; I just want to go through the first part. How is the department getting the Mamàhtawisiwin [*phonetic*] initiative out to communities, and is it expecting school divisions to communicate the strategy separate from the department?

You want me to repeat that, or—no? Okay.

Mr. Ewasko: I believe I answered the member from Transcona's question in the very first few seconds of my last answer, but I'll just repeat it.

Absolutely, this is ongoing. This cannot be a one-and-done. This cannot be something that is created in a curriculum support document.

And I know the member has similar experiences, and have seen this in schools, you know, not only in his own division, but across the province, as well, where there has been some curriculum documents or some support materials created in the past, and they've been delivered by courier in boxes and wrapped in cellophane and delivered to the schools. And then staff at schools at times have taken these boxes, and at times, leadership or teachers have taken these resources and taken them into their classrooms, and others, they've sat on bookshelves or shelves within staff rooms.

This is different. I think that Manitobans have absolutely embraced the fact that they were asked to come and have conversations, because I really do feel that our government is a listening and collaborative government working with our education partners.

Now, not all the time are we going to agree on things. For sure not. But we want to make sure that we're there listening, and the opportunities are there to listen. So, absolutely, the sessions are continuing to be planned.

We are really—this document was launched, you know, almost a year ago, and so we're sort of at the beginning. Because I think a lot of—you know, and I want to respect the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare), so I'm going to talk a little bit about the past.

But, of course, the member was not in his seat in the prior NDP government. But I really do think that

there was missed opportunities. There was missed opportunities under the NDP government that I don't think that they—I don't know if they didn't take it serious or what, or they just didn't have any forethought to planning for the next, you know, 40, 50, 60, 70 years of what was happening in Manitoba.

But I do want to commend, again, my predecessors in our government for moving forward on some of these various different education initiatives.

So, the elders and knowledge keepers symposium, the first one was held in October of 2022. Next November, we're going to have provincial—two days of learning, which is actually going to be the first annual Mamàhtawisiwin conference.

And within our school plans, and I know the member mentioned school plans, I think, on their first day here, or maybe it was during his debate of one—of the piece of legislation that's coming out. And that's all I'm saying about that, just so I don't get called out of order.

Various different things have to be reflected in their school plans. So, Mamàhtawisiwin is being reflected in their school plans. It's also being supported by Safe and Caring Schools, which is the newest in policy directive and action plan on student presence and engagement.

* (15:40)

And we know that the student presence and engagement campaign, which—we know that students who attend school regularly are more engaged in learning. They have a greater opportunity to access school and community resources and have a greater sense of belonging, as the member from Transcona knows.

And, you know, we've worked with various different communities, and we know that, at times, the schools within our smaller communities are the heart-beat of the communities, and so that's where many of the community partners go to share stories and get together.

And I'll continue in my next answer.

Mr. Altomare: I know the minister has often said that these are living and breathing documents, and I do want to put on the record that Mamàhtawisimim [*phonetic*] has some real potential to be transformative, right? And we talk about opportunities and this being one of them.

I'm also hearing that, in some of those responses, that community is really the next step to make it even more effective, so that once kids leave the school building, they're practising what they're learning, like, what they do every time they leave a school, Mr. Chair.

And that's the piece that I'm hoping for more progress in, the community engagement piece. Because that will be—that's where it'll have, I believe, some real transformative things occur—I don't know what the correct terminology would be—but it can have a real transformative impact on especially small communities, where, like we've both said, where community schools are really the hub of what that community espouses.

I do want to move on to another topic. And I know the minister knows this, that education is the great equalizer, providing opportunity for kids, for their families and, of course, for their communities. But we know that kids that grow up in poverty and in marginalized communities struggle with their learning and have some real challenges that they face on a daily basis.

I'd like to ask the minister, what are they—what is the department doing to address these inequities that kids living in poverty and marginalized communities deal with?

Mr. Ewasko: I appreciate any question coming from the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare) on—when we talk about poverty and education, and the fact that—of how many great initiatives that our PC government has brought forward, and also the Department of Education.

First off, what I'm going to share with the member—and he knows this because, of course, Manitoba is a small province and we're all a 16th degree of separation. And so our government, again, listening to the K-to-12 commission and making sure that it was part of the K-to-12 action plan, we developed a Poverty and Education Task Force, which the final report was publicly released on February 24th, 2023. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the task force members for examining the correlation between poverty and education and providing recommendations on how to reduce the effects of poverty on Manitoba's education system.

As the member knows—the member for Transcona knows, being an educator himself and, again, as I've said, I haven't recorded the amount of years as he had in education, but we do know that many of our, as he

mentioned, schools are the lifeblood of some of our small communities. And even within urban centres, I would say that many of the students and parents and guardians see their schools within the few blocks of where they live to be their lifeblood of their communities and that safe place to be at.

We know that teachers are being asked, and had been asked for years and years and years, to wear multiple different hats. And when we talk about poverty, I'm going to go over a few items that the Poverty and Education Task Force had come up with as far as recommendations.

But this is not just a Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning issue. This isn't just a Department of Families issue. This is not just a Department of Justice issue. This is just—this is not just a government of Manitoba issue. This is an all-of-province-of-Manitoba issue, and this is something that I think we can definitely continue to move forward as we continue to work together.

So, the task force, we know that it requires whole-of-systems approach to improve items such as food security and nutrition, mental health and racism and discrimination, to just name a few of the examples. The member in his next couple questions might or might not—I'm just going to throw it out there now—might want to talk about food nutrition and various other things that contribute, either to poverty or that are some of the barriers or speed bumps for families and for students.

I had the pleasure of being at an announcement with the now Minister of Advanced Education on the more than 200 per cent increase to the children's nutrition council of Manitoba, which was providing, according to their stats, roughly, food programs to nearly 40,000—over 35,000 students in the province.

* (15:50)

And when we more than doubled that funding, we took that funding from \$1.2 million to 2.5, and just recently—and this is why some of the discussion today, you know, around the budget—I mean, this is the Estimates process—I'm really hoping that the member across the way will stand up and vote for our budget, because we are annualizing those funds to make sure that it's sitting at that \$2.5 million, and we're—and we've got more work to do, Mr. Chair. And we're going to do that more work.

And I don't quite understand why, in the nine additional years that the NDP were in power since the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba was established,

why they didn't see fit to increase that budget, but I'm glad that we did, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Altomare: You know, it's interesting the minister brings up the Child Nutrition Council. And looking at—I guess the minister must have read what I presented in the House, because he was present there and listened with interest when I outlined the challenges that child nutrition—I can't even say it sometimes—nutrition council is facing. Very real challenges.

He references his government's budget. It's very interesting that he would reference that because, you know, budgets, Mr. Chair, are about choices. I've talked earlier in this process about this province being at an inflection point. You know, a government that really would have cared about nutrition programs would have completely eliminated the wait-list because the need is that great out there.

The minister referenced a Poverty and Education Task Force that included young Manitobans on the task force. And their No. 1 recommendation was to ensure that kids were fed in Manitoba schools. And what did they get from this government? A partial measure at a time when poverty is ravaging our province. And we know that it impacts our children the most. A place where children go every day is their school.

So, like I referenced earlier, Mr. Chair, the budget's about choices. So, what choice did this government make? They made the choice to cut cheques to out-of-province corporations to the tune of more than what they've put into the Child Nutrition Council requirements, when wait-lists exist—a challenge that was put before them that wasn't met, a partial measure, when what was really needed was a recognition of the need that's out there.

Mr. Chair, I will quote a particular piece that I found interesting, is that the department is reviewing its in-school meal programs and that they're assessing breakfast and lunch programs. Because like I said, obviously, they've listened to the things that I've brought forth in the House. I'm glad they're responding to it by reviewing in-school meal programs, by seeing what's out there.

It's an important step because then the minister and his government will know that that need needs to be met and they will have the data for it.

What I've put forward, Mr. Chair, is that every school report to the department and the minister regarding these particular meal programs so that they can tackle this challenge. Instead, what do we get?

A partial measure. He knows this. And as I said earlier, I'm glad that this data is being collected now.

So my question for the minister, Mr. Chair, is: What update can he provide at this time regarding a timeline for this review around in-school meal programs? And second part to this is: Can he identify the groups the department is meeting with to conduct this review?

Mr. Ewasko: I appreciate the member bringing up the fact on the good work, again, that our government is doing, especially on the food and nutrition—added investments that we have done.

And I know that the member brings up topics about this budget and how—you know, how much great work we are doing in regards to making sure that life is more affordable for families. And I'm hoping that he will try to convince his leader, the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew), to vote in favour of this budget, because some of the absolute, major tax savings—putting more money into people's pockets—are happening yet again in this budget. And that's making sure that life is more affordable, and that's to make sure that people have more money to spend on groceries, clothing, transportation or whatever priorities that those families see fit.

We launched the Poverty and Education Task Force. We've released the final report on many of the initiatives. The member talks about half measures—well, I know the member likes to talk about crumbs, Mr. Chair. But, really, when the member—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —comes forward with some ideas, he comes forward with some ideas now—he had 17 years. I don't know if he maybe didn't buy a party membership in those 17 years. Where was his voice then? I don't understand.

* (16:00)

And now he's coming and he's saying, PC government, why don't you do what we never did? And the nice thing is we're actually doing it.

So we've—200 per cent of funding to the children's nutrition council of Manitoba. We've got the Poverty and Education Task Force. We're listening to Manitobans; we are delivering on those promises. And again, Mr. Chair, and I look for unanimous consent in voting and support for the budget.

Many of the recommendations in the report from the task force are already under way. In the release of

the task force final report, our government committed to ongoing review of the report's recommendations in following the immediate actions.

As the member brought up, we're reviewing in-school meal programs to improve that access with a focus on needs-based distribution of funding and resources. I know that the member—and, you know, it's not really the member, Mr. Chair—I have to give him some credit because I know it's his leader and it's those talking points coming down from his leader about the partnerships.

They don't believe in partnerships. I had the pleasure of also participating in a great announcement with the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) in regards to moving forward with the menstrual products announcement as well. This is something that is breaking down barriers, and it's our government that's doing it.

So we've more than doubled—so, 200 per cent to the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba. We've partnered with Shoppers Drug Mart on menstrual products to schools and to shelters throughout Manitoba and to First Nations communities.

We're developing a clear anti-racism policy directive and sets—that sets expectations and guidance in all Manitoba schools. We're expanding the community schools program by investing almost \$600,000 to fund five additional schools and communities which experience high poverty.

I can go into a little bit more depth on that, but I did want to also talk about the hard work of our community activists, advocates that worked with us also on the presence and engagement.

I want to just read a quote from one of those community advocates. And the community advocate says, personally, I believe it is the most important initiative I have ever been involved in. Who said that, Mr. Chair? Mr. Sel Burrows. He did say that.

Mr. Altomare: And, yet, there remains a wait-list. And, yet, when you talk to the Child Nutrition Council, they remain disappointed in the level of communication with this department regarding the needs. That is true, that is definitely true.

And that's in our dialogue that we have had together. Again, growing up—and the minister knows this—I know he's younger than I am, right? But I will say that my parents taught me that when presented with a challenge, you do the full job, Mr. Chair.

Half jobs only create work later on down the line. And they disappoint people. The full job needed to be

done when it came to nutrition programs. And it wasn't done, Mr. Chair, clearly. The wait-lists are growing.

I want to remind the minister that this is a challenge that was not lived up to—one that is still existing, and one that the government needs to respond to. It's an important piece and it's something that is brought up regularly to myself as critic.

Now, another piece that has come up is some of the confusion around online high school and online education access. We do know that, outlined on page 17 of the Estimates book, there is mention of an online high school.

We also know, Mr. Chair, that the only online school for grades 1 to 8 is closing. And that's caused some confusion out there as to how these students will be serviced. And I do know that parents and kids and school divisions are wondering about next steps here.

The department—and I—you know, I don't want to put words in the minister's mouth when it comes to this, but this is out there, and I don't know if he said it—but they're assuring that students who are immunocompromised or who reside within an immunocompromised high school—household will continue to have these remote services delivered by their local school divisions. Yet there are local school divisions that are saying that government has not directed them to provide remote learning.

So, there's some—so who is going—so my question to the minister is, regarding this, is—there is information out there that immunocompromised kids that were in that grade 1 to 8 remote learning centre were told that they'll receive that service from their home school division. The school divisions, they're saying they have yet to receive that directive from the department.

Can the minister clear up this confusion today or provide direction for these families regarding next steps around the remote learning centre?

Mr. Ewasko: So, we've got a couple of topics here we're going to address in these next five minutes and maybe over the next few days here, as well, as we continue with the Estimates process for Education, Early Childhood Learning.

So, again, the member puts—I'm going to have to say puts false information on the record, on his first topic, and then I'll talk about the misinformation and the fear mongering that is coming, that he's putting on the record in the second topic.

So, first topic is the children's nutrition council of Manitoba and the funding. So, the children's nutrition council of Manitoba was established in 2006 with \$1.2 million. That was the former NDP government; have to give them some credit for that, absolutely.

But what also the member from Transcona is failing to recognize and failing to point fingers at his own group on the opposition side of the benches is that children's nutrition within schools and poverty within Manitoba had continued to grow. And they, as a governing party for 17 years, after 2006, really did not a whole lot in regards to children's nutrition or poverty.

* (16:10)

And so, just recently we more than doubled the funds to the children's nutrition council of Manitoba. Nobody has said here, including myself or our government, that all that work is done and we're—and that, you know, washing the hands of anything. There's many great things that need to be done yet, and we will continue to work with our education partners.

But I take offence that the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare), again, takes a look at a 200 per cent increase to the funds going to the children's nutrition council of Manitoba as mere crumbs. Because they didn't do it; the NDP didn't do it. He talks about a half plan, going halfway. Well, at least we got going on the journey, where the NDP failed to even start the vehicle, or get on their bicycle and even get pedalling.

It's—I can't believe—I'm pretty sure that many of the member's membership, or supporters, are also disappointed in their 17 years of inaction on this file. We're moving the needle, and we're making great strides in breaking down some of those barriers, and when we have a community advocate giving us credit—the PC government credit—for many of the great initiatives that we're doing, I think speaks loudly and is a great compliment.

And I think that also shows the fact that our PC government is continuing to work with partners of all political stripes. Because no one person holds the key to any good—to good ideas. It's good to share and to collaborate across party lines.

So now, getting to the information in regards to the Remote Learning Support Centre, the—grades 1 to 8. It was put into place as an emergency measure for COVID-19 for students that are immunocompromised.

And we have—we are strongly encouraging families to reach out to their respective school divisions regarding the transition for this coming school year.

Students who continue to require accommodations will be supported by their local school division and their dedicated staff as part of student-specific planning.

I'm hoping that the member from Transcona is going to—put—is going to apologize for the misinformation he's put on the record, where he is saying that I am saying that school divisions are going to deliver remote learning. That's not it at all.

The fact is, is that we're encouraging these students to reconnect with their school divisions and local school communities, work with the great student services teams that are within those school communities; because all those resources are still available to those educators and those student services personnel who are going to help with those student-initiated planning to make sure that success is being had by all students in this great province of ours, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

Mr. Altomare: I'm hoping that when parents and families reach out to the department that they're going to get some clarity around this remote learning centre, and the supports that divisions are expected to provide. There is confusion out there; I want to put this respectfully on the radar.

I also do want to address—and the minister was correct when he said that I did not put words in his mouth; I was looking for clarification. That's the whole point of this process, to ensure that we're clear. Because there are families that are really concerned about their kids, and ensure—and they want to ensure that they're going to get the support, because they had an amazing amount of success with the remote learning centre. It was a highly regarded piece that was put in place.

I'm willing to put that on the record, absolutely. And people were caught off guard by the remote learning centre being shut down with very little notice. That is the piece that has left people disappointed, I will say, Mr. Chair.

And so, I want to put this on the record and on the radar for the department so that they're ready for when they get asked questions regarding this, as to what the expectation is moving forward for kids that are immunocompromised.

I do notice that my colleague from Tyndall Park has arrived and would like to ask the minister questions.

Mr. Ewasko: Before we get to my colleague from Tyndall Park's questions, I do want to ask the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare) also, then, if he's not

putting words on the record that's putting misinformation out there—and that's according to his words—then, I'm hoping that he will—some of his colleagues will stop putting, then, misinformation on the record in regards to the remote learning centre.

So, that it is clarity for those parents and guardians that they know that the department had, again, had put in place the remote learning resource centre—support centre in the emergent piece under COVID-19 for those students or those households that had immunocompromised family members. Worldwide pandemic.

I'd like to commend not only the department, but also all of our education partners that worked together to make sure that students were able to—well first of all, teachers and divisions were able to keep their schools open to continue learning.

But then, for those students and those families that were immunocompromised had the ability to do the remote learning. And I do want to commend, of course, the centre was operated by the St. James-Assiniboia School Division since January of 2021.

And the contract and the design of the program was designed to be short-term. And, again, to the families affected, there was communication sent out early February—and I know that the member is listening 'intently' and will share this along with many of his parents or community members that have taken part and want some clarity around this topic—but, the information was sent out in February.

Because, myself, I know as a former guidance counsellor working with those students who had to then do classes and course selections, getting in time for that spring break time so that the school administration had the time to build those timetables, to build those opportunities, to sit down with student services personnel and plan out what are those learning opportunities and challenges for those students so that they can hit the ground running in school year of '23-24.

And so, that's why families—again I'm going to put this on the record and the member can definitely quote me so that he can make sure that the proper information for clarity sake—and we're making sure that we're working with those school divisions and making sure we're getting information to families, superintendents, administration to make sure that they're clear on the expectations. And that families are strongly encouraged to reach out to their respective school divisions, which—in regarding to the transition, students who continue to require accommodations will be

supported by their local school division and their dedicated staff as part of the student-specific planning.

At this time, if further support is needed, families or school leaders can reach out—and I'll give the name—to Ted Fransen, who is our provincial lead for remote learning, at ted.fransen@gov.mb.ca.

I know that not only the Remote Learning Support Centre was in place to help students and families with immunocompromised. I know that many schools and school divisions and school personnel all across this great province of ours really stepped up to make sure that they had the students at the centre of their attention, making sure that they continued to learn as time had gone on through COVID.

* (16:20)

And, even though we had the Manitoba Remote Learning Support Centre, I know that school divisions had done some other individualized education plans, adaptive education plans, to make sure that students' learning had continued throughout COVID.

And I want to thank everyone involved, including the staff who worked with the Manitoba Remote Learning Support Centre.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the minister and the department for joining us here today and answering some of our questions, as well as the critic for Education from the NDP for allowing me some time here to ask some questions.

I'm going to be circling around. I know I have a little bit of time here, but I'll jump, sort of, from topic to topic a little bit.

The first question I have is more—just to be abundantly clear, we're very excited about the \$10-a-day child care. I want to get on record and make sure I can reflect back to it, that—does \$10-a-day child care also extend to extended-day programs as well as holidays? Will parents still only have to pay \$10 a day on these days?

Mr. Ewasko: I welcome and thank the member for Tyndall Park to participate in the Estimates process.

I'm just going to ask her just a quick clarifying question. When you were asking the question, were you specifically talking about any particular age group or were you talking in general?

Mr. Chairperson: Before I recognize the member for Tyndall Park, I'll just remind the members to direct questions and answers through the Chair.

Ms. Lamoureux: Just to clarify, I would love answers to all ages, but I was just thinking children specifically who are in child-care spots, whether that be facilities or home child-care spots, before and after school.

Mr. Ewasko: I guess, for clarification to the member from Tyndall Park, easiest way—and, as the member knows, we did a—we did the great announcement not that long ago and her federal partner was in town for that announcement as well, and I've been working with the federal minister for child care, as well, fairly closely over the last 14, 15 months, to be able to bring \$10-a-day daycare to fruition.

And the member knows that the Canada-Manitoba agreement, prior to that, Manitoba had one of the lowest child-care fees outside of Quebec. And the fees had been kept affordable through our provincial operating grants and the provincial subsidy program, with a total investment of almost \$140 million annually.

And so, what we did last year—this time last year, March, we expanded the subsidy thresholds to make sure that more parents and guardians had access to the subsidies.

And so, this is something that, under the former government—and the member knows this—that under the former government they had roughly about 6,000 child-care spaces in Manitoba that were subsidized. And when we expanded those thresholds, we increased the income thresholds by—the eligibility by about 45 per cent. So, by doing that, we actually, for full- and part-time subsidy—or full or partial subsidy, we had taken those 6,000 spaces and actually elevated that all the way to 18,000, so that's 300 per cent increase on that.

So, beginning April 2nd, just a few short sleeps ago, 2023 parent fees were reduced to \$10 per day for infant, preschool and nursery spaces through additional provincial investment. School-age fees are also being reduced to \$10 for a regular day of three periods of care.

So, again, when we talk about infant for—as an example, we went from \$30 a day for parents who had an infant in daycare to \$10 a day, which is a savings of about—not about, it's \$100 a week, which is significant.

* (16:30)

I know the member was asking specifically about before and after school periods, and so, as we said, when we talk about school-age fees that are being

reduced to \$10, that's for a regular day of three periods of care: before school, lunch and after school.

So, keep in mind that all these fees, even though it's \$10 a day, if parents apply and they get subsidy, they could be paying as low as \$2 and in—you know, between \$2 and \$10.

If those school-age students are only doing two periods of care, say a before and after school, and they're—I'm just using examples—but before and after school and then they're having lunch at school, say, they're paying—*[interjection]* No, no, lunch at school—so—okay—\$8.60, and then three periods of care is that \$10. And keep in mind, they can also apply for that subsidy, which then could potentially bring them down to that \$2 a day.

So, hopefully that helps for some clarity, but at the same time, I would highly recommend the member—and we tried to get this out not only to our child-care centres, but also to families to make sure that they go to that website, 'mb.ca/10aday', and it takes them right to the website to—and there's questions and answers there, and there's clarity as far as exactly how much they would be paying.

And also to the member, just keep in mind that the Canada-Manitoba agreement—that's a national agreement that provinces have signed on for \$10 on average a day. We went above and beyond and we brought in \$10 a day starting April 2nd, which is actually three years ahead of schedule for parents.

Ms. Lamoureux: The minister mentioned the announcement that was made recently, and it does—it has been reflecting upon it and the terminology that was used was regular hours.

And so, I'm hoping that minister can answer and then clearly define, to the best of his ability, what regular hours means. Because since the announcement, I have had people come to me and say that their child-care fees are not going down to \$10 an hour because they don't fall under those regular hours. If he can confirm where the confusion is coming from.

Mr. Ewasko: Again, had the opportunity to be joined by the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and the Prime Minister and some well-known people to the member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux), as well, for the announcement on \$10-a-day daycare. And so, I know that the member's father was there as well, and we participated in the announcement.

And so, all these rates in regards to any type of scenarios are on that website. So, when we are talking

about the varying degrees of care—so we've got, again, four to 10 hours per day—for a regular period of care, four to 10 hours per day; the maximum daily fee will be \$10 per day for children ages zero to six. Infant fees are being reduced from \$30 to \$10 a day. Nursery and pre-school fees are being reduced from \$20 to \$10 a day.

And, in the school age, those are three periods of care: before school, lunch time and after school. Those are the three periods. Those are also \$10 a day, and each and every one of those spaces and those students, children—their parents or guardians can definitely go and see and apply for subsidy, and they could be paying even less than the \$10 a day.

Ms. Lamoureux: Okay. So, I think I'm just looking for, like, very much so clarity. Just say yes or no. I believe it would be a yes or no question.

So, a child who is in an extended day program or attending child care on a holiday, are they still eligible for \$10 a day?

Mr. Ewasko: So, the rates for infant preschool and school age: as the announcement goes on April 2nd—and that's when it came into effect—is definitely \$10 a day for a regular day of care.

Now, the member's asking about extended care and part-time care and all of that. So, we've significantly reduced the amount of money that parents have to pay for child care in Manitoba. And keep in mind that Manitoba was already a leader in the country.

* (16:40)

And so, the part-time fees, if they are—if the parents and guardians are seeking part-time care for their children, they will be paying less than the \$10 a day.

When we talk about extended care—and this is where we worked quite closely within the department and the Manitoba Child Care Association to take a look at these fees and the various different service providers and child-care centres throughout the province. We have to keep in mind that extended care is just that, it's extended care on top of a regular day.

And, as we said, a regular day of care for an infant in preschool is looking to, you know, four to 10 hours per day. School age, which is grade 1 and higher, we're looking at three periods for the day, and that's before school, lunch time and after school.

As the member may or may not know—and again, I'm going to direct the member to the website and then if there's any—and this is what I've been doing as well—

any parents, because they've contacted me—and we're just trying to provide as much clarity as possible. The website has some great information on it to be able to provide the specific situation that parents or guardians are in for their children, to be able to know exactly how much they're paying. I think under our government we've been even more transparent in regards to what fees are being offered.

So, when we talk about extended care for an infant, for less than four hours per day—here's that partial—maximum daily fee charged to parents is \$5. And, again, I know that the member is—frantically wants to write some stuff down; this is all on the website. So, for less than four hours per day, it's \$5. So, if it's four hours to 10 hours a day, it's \$10. For more than 10 dollar—10 hours per day for an infant, it's \$15. Keep in mind the amount of subsidy that we have now provided to those parents and to those child-care centres.

The original extended time or period of care for those infant children used to be \$45 a day. It is now down to \$15. That is significant savings. That's \$30 of savings per day. So, that's \$150 a week if those parents had sought more than 10 hours per day of care.

Preschool, less than four hours a day under the new maximum daily fee is \$5. Four hours to 10 hours per day is \$10. More than 10 hours per day is \$15. Now, for preschool children, the original fee was \$31.20 for extended hours of care. We're now down to \$15. That's a savings of \$16.20. Again, significant. Eighty-some-odd dollars per week savings.

Again, direct the member to the website. I know that when we talk about extended periods of care, I know that members are asking, parents are asking, guardians are asking. I think, you know, the opposition tries to paint us with an insincere brush at times. I think right from the start of the announcement we've been very clear: it's \$10 a day for a regular day of care.

And keep in mind that we've increased the subsidies for people to even pay less.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister's time is up.

Ms. Lamoureux: Time goes by very quickly here and so recognizing that this will be my last opportunity to ask a question, I'm going to ask three and if the minister and the department can just do their best to answer and address them that would be great.

First question: Can the minister list how many ECEs are needed, given the expansion of child-care spaces?

Second question: Is there a process for assessing literacy and numeracy issues in child care? Can the minister explain if there are any plans to oversee issues such as these?

And No. 3: Can the minister explain the reasons the Online Child Care Registry was discontinued and what measures the government have taken to ensure data for child-care accessibility remains readily accessible?

Thank you.

Mr. Ewasko: I appreciate the question coming from the member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux). And I think what she could endeavour to do moving forward is work with the member from Transcona and maybe get her a little bit more time or a couple more questions.

But we're going to endeavour to answer her questions as quickly as I can in the short amount of time that I have. So, we're going to start with the last one first and then move to the other ones.

So, in regards to the child registry, I mean, the member from Tyndall Park absolutely knows that the system that was under the former NDP government absolutely was a mess. And it led to confusion; it led to wait-lists, wait—you know, wait-lists all over this province of ours and, really, they didn't have a good handle on it at all.

And so, what we've done is there is a new system in place that responds to the needs and gives real-time spaces available. And so, we encourage parents to reach out to those child-care centres, but also, online—because the child-care centres update it weekly—to go to Manitoba Child Care Search. And the centres update that weekly to see where the different spots are, and parents can actually go directly to the centres as opposed to going on a provincial-wide list that I don't even know if the members opposite, you know, from the NDP side, ever really took a look at that list, ever. But it was a mess. This is tighter, this is cleaner.

And, as the member knows, we've made a commitment to increase child-care spaces to the tune of 23,000. And there's so many initiatives that we have embarked on to make sure that we're striving towards that goal of 23,000; and that's—whether it's building more spaces; whether it's, again, as we've already talked about the \$10-a-day making child care more affordable to families.

* (16:50)

But then also, I think this is—I'm not going to say it's the most important part, because I think all three are really, really, really important—is to make sure that after 20-plus years, our early childhood educators—I think it's really important to make sure that we all show that we value them.

Because really, in regards to moving Manitoba's economy forward, we need child care. And Manitoba works because of child care. And so, with that, we're making sure that we're building on the work force as well. So we're looking at 2,000 ECEs and a thousand CCAs.

We've—we're working quite closely with our post-secondary institutions. I don't know why this wasn't done under the previous government, but there is many things that weren't done under the previous government that I think has all Manitobans scratching their heads. But we're getting it done. And so, we're making sure that we're working with the post-secondary institutions. We're making sure that we're working with post-secondary institutions to make sure that we're increasing those seats.

But at the same time we're recruiting those young individuals, or people who want to get into the child-care sector, by also giving them a \$5,000 per student per year of education. Because why? Because this goes to her second question: literacy and numeracy. What do we strive for? We want to make sure that whether it's our education system or early childhood education system, that we're providing high quality early childhood education and K-to-12 education, and making sure that our workforce has that—the superb training that they need to, again, work with our most precious resource, and that's our kids in this great province of ours.

So, we're making sure that we're checking out on—in regards to literacy and numeracy, early assessments are addressed through inclusion support program. Because, at the same time, when the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) appointed me Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning, she took those two departments and amalgamated them, because that transition to go from zero to the age of 19-ish, I think was—I don't want to say it was a no-brainer; I think it was something that should have been done a long time ago, because as we continue to transition from early childhood education into the K-to-12 system, I think those synergies and that ability to collaborate and have those conversations about making sure that—where those students are in the continuum are very important.

Mr. Altomare: Thank you for the opportunity. There is one thing that I want to end off on before we get to the end of our time here today. I do want to remind the minister of the fact that the modest funding announcement that came in February has certainly fallen flat in Manitoba when it comes to public schools, to the point where that many in the sector are—remain disappointed.

They are—been unable to reinstate the cuts to services that they were forced to make during the previous seven years. It's been well noted. During that time from February to March, when there was an opportunity to do something about it, they didn't do anything about it, despite the warning signs that were coming from the partners that work with the department, that being school divisions. For reduction in staffing levels, deferred maintenance, cuts to programs, the use of emergency funds: these are happening right now. And I want the record to show that, Mr. Chair.

The day-to-day reality that is being faced by school divisions is one that required, brought on by this government's years of underfunding, to now where we have situations where deferred maintenance of—piling on deferred maintenance is going to have a real impact on a school—on a child's experience at school. And we know that funding is a big issue in this province.

So, my question to the minister is this: Is the new funding model done? Has the Cabinet considered the plan, and will it be released before the election, so that Manitobans know exactly the direction that this government wants to take public school funding?

Mr. Ewasko: I'd like to thank the—well, sort of thank the member for the question. I know that, you know, some of my answers, unfortunately the member refuses to listen to them and cites some misinformation onto the record. I know that some of his NDP supporters throughout the province have been quite vocal putting misinformation on the record.

I know that, as he knows—I don't know what kind of safe, money safe, the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare) has in his house, Mr. Chair, but when the member from Transcona—and again I'm going to more so blame his leader for this. When the Leader of the NDP party passes along to the member for Transcona verbiage such as \$100 million to K-to-12 education and two point—or a 6.1 per cent increase as crumbs, and he said it again, crumbs, \$100 million, and he says, a drop in the bucket. [*interjection*]

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: I know that the—see, now the member's not only taking his leader's words, but he's taking an editorial's words: \$100 million, 6.1 per cent increase to K-to-12 education funding.

When you take a look back to when we came—took office, Mr. Chair—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

I would remind the member that the minister—honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that, for your guidance and setting us in committee on the right path. I stress the word right.

So, when we took office in 2016 to today's—to this year's '23-24 school year's funding announcement of \$100 million, 6.1 per cent increase, that's a 20—that's over a 23 per cent increase. That's actually closer to 25 per cent increase in education funding.

And the member opposite from Transcona—which, again, he put on the record yesterday and again today, has called it, \$100 million, this year crumbs, and he quoted an editorial of a drop in the bucket. Well, Mr. Chair, it looks like we need to do more work to help the NDP opposition with some of their numeracy work on how to calculate increases. More is not less.

I've tabled the documents for the member in the House, but it just so happens I had this feeling that the member was probably going to bring this type of question up, so I'm going to table—I'm not sure how many copies I need for a committee; do I still need three or four? Two only—two copies of education funding. It's a chart for the member.

I know sometimes maybe he has a tough time and maybe he's reading it upside down, but he's an educator; I'm going to give him the credit. And he's a former administrator. I'm going to hand these over to the Mr. Chair to share with the member. The member has this already.

But the steady increase, Mr. Chair. The chart starts in 2013-14: a steady increase and quite the jump in '23-24, as well, over the last, you know, 10 years.

With this fall, education tax coming off of property, which is going to be 50 per cent of reduction, I know the member's going to throw that into his safe at home because he doesn't need that money. Because he is one of—must be one of those multi-millionaires that he continues to reference on the record, Mr. Chair.

I look forward to—

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

CHAMBER

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (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 of Executive Council.

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

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Oh, sorry. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I have Kathryn Gerrard, who's the Clerk of the Executive Council. I have Brad Salyn, who's the chief of staff, as well as Braeden Jones, who's our director of communications and a whole bunch of other things. Does a great job.

* (15:00)

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mark Rosner, Esq., joining us today.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Kinew: Does the—will the Premier call an inquiry into the police headquarters scandal?

Mrs. Stefanson: It's my understanding that there was a settlement and an agreement with the City of Winnipeg that the City of Winnipeg accepted. And I know that the issue of a public inquiry went before City Council and I believe there was no renew for a call of a public inquiry from the City of Winnipeg, so we respect where they're at on that.

And, of course, the Leader of the Opposition will know that this also remains before the courts. So that process will continue to unfold.

Mr. Kinew: Does the Premier believe that an inquiry into the police headquarters scandal will ever be warranted?

Mrs. Stefanson: As I just indicated to the Leader of the Opposition that this issue remains before the courts, and so we'll let those proceedings—those legal proceedings continue and—to unfold. And we won't be making any decision until that is concluded.

Mr. Kinew: Has Cabinet ever discussed whether or not to call an inquiry into the police headquarters scandal?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I—again, what is discussed in Cabinet is confidential.

Mr. Kinew: Do any Cabinet ministers or staff have to recuse themselves from discussions around calling an inquiry into the police headquarters scandal?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, I would say that what happens in Cabinet is confidential, and—but what I will say is that there are no conflicts with respect to any staff and—or ministers.

Mr. Kinew: Has the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) ever consulted the Conflict of Interest Commissioner on the matter of conflicts regarding the police headquarters scandal?

Mrs. Stefanson: There are no conflicts, so there would be no reason to engage with the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

Mr. Kinew: Who has made the determination that there are no conflicts of interest?

Mrs. Stefanson: The Leader of the Opposition will know that within any employment contracts, that it's required for those individuals, those employees to disclose any conflicts of interest that they have at that time, and the same goes for any Cabinet ministers.

Mr. Kinew: So, based on that assertion, who made the determination in this instance that there are no conflicts of interest?

Mrs. Stefanson: The onus is on the individual to declare a conflict of interest. That's part of their employment contract. So the onus is on the individuals.

Mr. Kinew: Did Scott Fielding, the former PC Cabinet minister, have a conflict of interest on the police headquarters scandal?

* (15:10)

Mrs. Stefanson: The Leader of the Opposition will know that, as an MLA—each MLA is required to file a conflict of interest form with the Clerk's office. And if, you know—so, that's up to the individual to disclose those conflicts of interest. That goes over—and those are filed at the Clerk's office.

So, I don't have Mr. Fielding's conflict of interest here, but I know that that is public knowledge, and the Leader of the Opposition has every right to go and get a copy of that, if he'd like.

Mr. Kinew: Was the Premier ever briefed on this matter when she served as the minister of Justice for the province of Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: I believe there—I mean, I don't recall all the details with respect to briefings that took place, but there would have been a briefing, I believe, from my department on this issue at some point.

As I recall, at the time, there was an RCMP—an ongoing RCMP investigation at the time, and I believe that RCMP investigation continued past my time as the minister of Justice.

Mr. Kinew: So, we now know that the RCMP recommended, and I quote, criminal charges relating to financial crimes with an estimated value of over \$33 million, end quote, in May of 2018.

Was the Premier aware of this when she was Justice minister?

* (15:20)

Mrs. Stefanson: The Leader of the Opposition referred to something in May 2018. I don't recall the specifics of what he's referring to. I do know that the ongoing RCMP investigation went beyond my time as the minister of Justice.

Mr. Kinew: We've previously tabled a briefing note in this House saying, and I quote, in May of 2018, and here the quote begins, or rather, the RCMP recommended, quote, criminal charges relating to financial crimes with an estimated value of over \$33 million, end quote.

So, just to reiterate that recommendation contained in the briefing note, May of 2018, the Premier was the Justice minister until, I believe, August of that year, so can she explain?

Mrs. Stefanson: It's my understanding that the RCMP investigation continued beyond that, though, and was not concluded until after my time in—when I was in Justice.

Mr. Kinew: The substantive matter of the question is that there was a briefing note during the Premier's time as minister of Justice saying that the RCMP recommended, quote, criminal charges relating to financial crimes with an estimated value of over \$33 million, end quote.

How did the Premier follow up on this information?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, the Leader of the Opposition, I guess, has stated that the RCMP came out with charges in May of 2018, and after that process, I

certainly don't get involved in that; that would've been up to the prosecution to decide from there whether or not, you know, which—whether or not they decide to prosecute.

Again, I was no longer minister of Justice after August 1st of that year, I believe, and became the minister of Families. And I believe that was an ongoing review that took place in the Prosecution Service. And that's up to them.

Mr. Kinew: And we know now that a judge has ruled the former CAO of the City of Winnipeg accepted a \$300,000 bribe as part of this police headquarters scandal.

Does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) believe that there are no more outstanding questions regarding this matter?

Mrs. Stefanson: I believe there's an ongoing—this, you know, issue remains before the courts, and so—be inappropriate to comment on that.

Mr. Kinew: Can the Premier tell this committee if she thinks supervised consumption sites are part of a harm-reduction strategy?

* (15:30)

Mrs. Stefanson: Our government continues to work with service delivery organizations, as well as community partners, to advance harm reduction programs and policies throughout the province of Manitoba. We are absolutely committed to a range of harm reduction strategies, and we are continuously evaluating these in order to respond to and implement the most cost-effective, safe and evidence-form strategies in the province of Manitoba.

The Leader of the Opposition will know that we've invested over \$2.2 million in annual funding in harm reduction initiatives right across the province. These include improving the safe distribution and disposal of needles and other harm reduction supplies, supporting a 24-7 safe space and ensuring that Manitobans have access to life-saving medication in the event of drug toxicity, overdose, through Manitoba's take-home naloxone program and a Narcan pilot program. The take-home naloxone program has more than 200 distribution sites right across Manitoba and provided over 17,000 free kits to Manitobans in '21-22 and more than doubling the 8,300 kits that was distributed in '20-21.

So, again, we are doing—we are taking significant action when it comes to harm reduction in the province of Manitoba, but I think it's also important to note that we also are taking a recovery approach. We

want to ensure that we are getting, you know, helping Manitobans get off of their addictions. And so that, of course, is the second part of this as well. We want to make sure harm reduction is there, which we are investing in a number of initiatives and also focusing on recovery.

Mr. Kinew: Why did the Premier make up a story about the non-existent California supervised consumption site?

Mrs. Stefanson: You know, I already stated that I made a mistake there, and often, you know, as politicians we do make mistakes. And I had read something about California not moving forward with supervised consumption sites; I probably misread it. It does happen from time to time. You know, not all of us are perfect when it comes to these things and so I, you know, obviously stated that as well when asked by the media.

But I know that there's other areas where, you know, these harm—you know, these supervised consumption sites are not necessarily the panacea. They are not the panacea, although—you know, for harm reduction. I know the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite think that they are, but I think there's also evidence out there that shows that they're not.

And we want to look and do this based on evidence. That's why we're looking at placing our investments in other areas of harm reduction.

Mr. Chairperson: Before recognizing the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew), I am obliged to caution about the phrase makeup. It is very close to accusing the First Minister of lying, which is well established to be unparliamentary. So I issue that caution; stop short of requesting withdrawal, but certainly, a caution is necessary.

But, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: I made no speculation about the intent of the minister's statement there. And so happily will leave it on the record.

We know that Manitoba's Interprofessional Maternal and Perinatal Team for Leveraging Empowerment and Services is a group with expertise on not only the topic of harm reduction but also the topic of addictions medicine. It's a group of dedicated health-care professionals, doctors, nurses, Ph.D.s; some cases, medical doctors who also have Ph.D.s, and they released a letter this week saying that they're opposed to Bill 33.

They write, and I quote here: We believe the act, as it stands, will create additional barriers to organizations working with people who use substances and will negatively impact services provided. We are concerned with the lack of consultation with people who use substances, with their loved ones and with those who work with, care for and support this community. We respectfully request The Addiction Services Act be rescinded and a community consultation proceed. End quote.

Does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) believe these front-line health-care workers are mistaken in their opposition to Bill 33?

* (15:40)

Mrs. Stefanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and, certainly, this is something that's near and dear to my heart. And I think it is for all of us, because we all know of either family members, or friends, relatives, neighbours, who have suffered with a loved one or themselves with addictions challenges and the challenges in how that affects those families. And so my thoughts go out to all of those who are not just suffering from addictions problems, but to the families that are trying to help them.

And, I know, certainly, that, you know, what we want to do is focus on harm reduction as well as recovery, making sure that we're putting in place investments in areas to help Manitobans recover from their addictions, so again, focusing on getting Manitobans off of their addictions.

And I believe that that is what Manitobans want us to do, is not to keep Manitobans on their addictions, but to focus on helping them during those difficult times and also focusing on getting them the programs that they need to get off of addictions.

I think it's unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition and members of his party are very, very focused on one area, and that's supervised consumption sites as being the panacea of the addictions challenge that we face, not just in our province but across the country and around the world.

There is no panacea when it comes to addictions and helping getting Manitobans off their addictions. There is no one solution. Manitobans know that. The Leader of the Opposition and members opposite think that there is just one solution, and they seem to be fixated on supervised consumption sites.

But the Leader of the Opposition also talked about Bill 33, and I want to be very clear about what

Bill 33 is all about. It's about safety. And, you know, I am extremely concerned and disappointed that the NDP made a decision to block legislation that will actually keep our most vulnerable Manitobans safe.

They have chosen, effectively, politics over the safety of vulnerable Manitobans, and I think that that—you know, that's their decision. And I think it is a wrong decision, but that is their decision, because again, Bill 33 is all about safety, not barriers.

The bill includes entirely reasonable measures to ensure that addiction services are provided in the safest possible manner to the most vulnerable people in our society. That's what Bill 33 is all about. So it's important, obviously, to ensure the linkages with the broader continuum of health and addictions care services, including health-care workers themselves.

Bill 33 is about safety for those dealing with mental health and addictions issues—safety for their families, safety for front-line workers, and safety for communities at large. And I think it's very unfortunate that the NDP has decided, again, to take an ideological approach to this.

Bill 33 is about safety, and they have decided to block that. So they have decided to ensure that Manitobans with addictions problems will not have safe measures put in place to help protect them as they're going through, you know, this, you know, this very difficult time in their lives.

So that's on the NDP. That's on the Leader of the Opposition deciding to not allow Bill 33 to go forward. It's about safety, and they have chosen not to allow for safety when it comes to those vulnerable people. I think that's wrong.

Mr. Kinew: I think we'll side with the medical doctors on this one and not the PC caucus. I think we'll side with the addictions medicine experts and not the Premier on this one.

Again, I read from a letter signed by a number of experts on addictions medicine who did write the Premier on this, and we've yet to hear a single expert cited by the Premier or her government on Bill 33. Instead, we've heard an avalanche of concern from the experts on addictions medicine.

And I think the thing that Manitobans should be concerned about in the Premier's comments just now is where she seeks to argue with and dispute the facts asserted by these experts in addictions medicine.

Again, I'll reread a section of this open letter. It says—these experts are asserting: the act, as it stands, will create additional barriers.

The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), in her answer, says it's not about barriers. So she's disputing the assertion of these experts.

They go on to say that—these experts in addictions medicine go on to say that they will negatively impact services provided.

The Premier disputes that.

So, I would like the Premier to explain how it is that these experts in addictions medicine, these medical doctors, these infectious disease specialists, along with many others in other open letters sent to the Premier, why does she think that these front-line experts are mistaken when it comes to Bill 33?

Mrs. Stefanson: And I just think it's incredibly disappointing that the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite are fixated on just one area of being a panacea to a challenge that people are faced with in their addictions. Harm reduction is an important part of that and we have invested millions of dollars in harm reduction initiatives. I've stated that.

But the Leader of the Opposition and nobody on his bench ever talks about wanting to get people off and helping get Manitobans off of their addictions. And I think that that's really disturbing, actually. I would hope that everyone would want to help Manitobans, some of the most vulnerable Manitobans, get off of their addictions. That's a recovery model. They would want Manitobans to recover from their addiction challenges.

But the Leader of the Opposition never wants to talk about that. They just want to talk about, you know, supervised consumption sites, which is one part of this whole equation, and I can tell you that I think people who are suffering from addictions deserve better than that.

* (15:50)

We have a plan to help get them off of their addictions, while helping them in the interim, as well, in harm reduction. But the Leader of the Opposition likes to, you know, talk about some doctors that agree with, you know, his area and what the NDP—and support their narrative, okay. That, apparently, you know, supervised consumption sites are a panacea to dealing with people with addictions.

I can tell you that the plan that we have put in place is supported by some of the top doctors in Manitoba. Our chief public health officer and our Chief Provincial Psychiatrist are two of those individuals—the highest ranking doctors in our province when it comes to addictions. And I can tell you that I will take the advice of those doctors over the NDP any day.

Mr. Kinew: I would just say the following: Everyone in Manitoba knows that the addictions crisis is worse than it's ever been, and it's happened under the PCs' watch. Their approach has been an utter failure when it comes to addictions.

And so we have the addictions medicine experts and the physicians on our side. We have the front-line workers and community organizations on our side. And so, we stopped Bill 33 and just took another important step in dismantling the PCs' failure of an approach to respond with compassion and to listen to the evidence when it comes to addictions.

Of course, their approach is just like Brian Pallister's approach.

An Honourable Member: Out of touch.

Mr. Kinew: Yes.

So, hopefully, we will be able to turn the page on this dark portion where the addictions response in Manitoba ignored the evidence and just focused on what Brian Pallister thought was best, right?

Because Manitobans want better. They spoke loudly and clearly, and the PCs know that. Which is why they will never say Brian Pallister's name again, even though he is the reason that almost all of them were elected. But we'll change that. There will be far fewer PC MLAs in the near future.

Anyway, on said topic of Brian Pallister and his failing plans for health care—I do use the present tense, because, while Brian Pallister may no longer be an MLA or around the Cabinet, his failing plan for health care continues to be alive and well.

So, on the subject of rural health care, I'd like to know if the Premier can confirm whether she still supports and is actively implementing the Clinical and Preventive Services Plan first developed by Brian Pallister?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, I'm extremely disappointed in the Leader of the Opposition, who has no plan to get people off of their addictions. He is fixated on one small component of this—supervised consumption sites—as being the panacea to everyone who has

addictions. I can tell you that is not a plan, Mr. Chair. He's just admitted that he does not have a plan to get people off of their addictions.

We have a plan. A plan that includes harm reduction. A plan that includes recovery. To make sure that Manitobans have the tools they need to recover from their addictions.

And that's the difference, I guess, between us and them, is that we believe in those Manitobans. We want to make sure that those Manitobans have hope for the future. That they are going to be given the recovery that they need. We'll offer them the tools that they need to recover from their addictions. While the NDP wants to keep them on their addictions, because they have no plan to get them off, we are going to focus on helping them during this time, but also helping them to recover.

And I know that, you know, the Leader of the Opposition is fixated with Brian Pallister. You know, that's his issue. You know, he wants to continue to mention that, and that's his issue.

But, certainly, you know, we stand side by side—two of our top doctors in the province of Manitoba who support our plan: the chief public health officer and the Chief Provincial Psychiatrist—two individuals, top doctors in these areas to help people with their mental health and addictions.

And I know this is hard for the Leader of the Opposition. I'm sure as he's, you know, saying some things and heckling from his seat. But to me, this issue's too important. It's too important to Manitobans who are suffering from addictions themselves, but to their families.

Their families are crying out for help and we are there to help them with a plan to help them get off their addictions: a recovery plan. Again, the Leader of the Opposition has no plan. His only plan is about supervised consumption sites to keep people on their addictions; he has no plan to get them off.

We believe that Manitobans suffering from addictions deserve more than that. They deserve better than that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kinew: Thank you.

The clinical and preventative services plan first developed under Brian Pallister, and that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) is now implementing: does she support this plan?

* (16:00)

Mrs. Stefanson: The Leader of the Opposition should know that the clinical preventative services plan is all about offering health care closer to home, and so many of the investments that we're making—and I know that I was out in Brandon last week for the Manitoba Winter Fair, where we announced \$135 million for the hospital in Brandon that will act as a hub for the entire Westman and Parkland region.

And that offers that—the investments that are going in there also include investments into CancerCare, which will offer those services for cancer patients in the region so that those cancer patients no longer have to come to Winnipeg to get their cancer treatments. They can go to Brandon, closer to home. And so that, of course, is what this is all about, and that's why we're making these investments, you know, in the Brandon hospital.

We are also—and, again, the Leader of the Opposition is opposed to that. Certainly, they all voted against that, because it's in the budget and they voted against that. I think that that's unfortunate. And we'll make sure that the people in Westman and the Parkland region are aware of the fact that the Leader of the Opposition will reverse those decisions, that—no longer make the investments in the Brandon hospitals so that those individuals can get health care closer to home—those cancer patients can get, you know, those treatments closer to home. I think it's unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition is opposed to that.

I guess what he's also opposed to is \$185.5 million for a new hospital in Neepawa. Again, offering those services closer to home for people in those communities, so that they don't have to travel the longer distances to Winnipeg to get the care that they need, they can go to Neepawa, to the hospital, once that is going.

But again, all of the members opposite voted against that. They voted against these initiatives. So, we'll be sure to let the individuals who are living out in those communities know that the Leader of the Opposition will no longer build that hospital. He was against that. He doesn't like that. And so, we'll be sure to know—let those individuals know that the Leader of the Opposition is opposed to that.

I guess they're all so opposed, because they voted against it, \$5.1 million for new endoscopy, chemotherapy spaces, at the Dauphin Regional Health Centre. Again, those services provided to those individuals in Dauphin. You know, we'll be sure to let the people of Dauphin know, and the people in the

surrounding communities know, that the Leader of the Opposition is opposed to allowing Dauphin to offer those endoscopy and chemotherapy, you know, right there in Dauphin for those—that's better health care closer to home, Mr. Chair.

So, again, we will let, you know, Manitobans know that the Leader of the Opposition and all of the members opposite, that they are opposed to these things. You know, they had an opportunity to vote in favour of these good initiatives that offer health care closer to home for people outside of Winnipeg, but the Leader of the Opposition and all of the members opposite voted against it.

We think that's wrong. We think this is good for people in the Westman and Parkland regions. We think that that's a positive thing for people in those communities, that they would be able to have that access to health care closer to home.

We think that's a positive thing. I think it's unfortunate that members opposite disagree with that.

Mr. Kinew: I just wanted to thank the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) for confirming that she is continuing to implement the Clinical and Preventive Services Plan, which was first developed under Brian Pallister and released publically in 2019. Manitobans have always suspected and known that the Premier is implementing Brian Pallister's plan for health care, but it's good to have clarity after her comments in the Estimates committee today.

Now that that is on the record in her own verbiage, I'd like to table a document related to the Brian Pallister plan on health care. This is one that's been shared publicly, and I'm sharing it with the committee today so that we can ascertain greater detail about the exact contours of how the Premier intends to implement Brian Pallister's plan to cut health care across rural Manitoba, under the guise of the moniker Clinical and Preventive Services Plan.

So the document that I just tabled includes a long list of closures of emergency departments, and not confined to one health region either, I would add. There are closures here in Prairie Mountain, in Shared Health, Santé Sud; there are closures put on the agenda here in Interlake-Eastern RHA. Some of the communities that are being contemplated are places like Melita, Glenboro, Carberry, Treherne. I would point out that many of these communities have dealt with closures this year or in years past.

So I'd just like the Premier to tell us, with specific reference to the emergency departments listed here, is

this still the plan? Does she intend to close these emergency departments? And, if not all of them, which ones will she close?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, Mr. Chair, it's disappointing that the Leader of the Opposition is going down this path of fear mongering for Manitobans.

I think it's important that we remind Manitobans what we inherited from the previous NDP government.

Not only did they run in an election, Mr. Chair, in 1999, to end hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million, but 15 years later under Greg Selinger, the Leader of the Opposition's previous leader and mentor, you know, they—under Greg Selinger in 2015, 15 years after they said just for \$15 million we're going to end hallway medicine, we're going to fix health care. That's another thing the Leader of the Opposition's also—he's claimed that he's going to fix health care.

Well, I do recall, back in 1999, part of their platform back then was to fix health care. And did they do it? Did they fix health care? No, they certainly didn't fix health care; 15 years under their watch after that, the Grace Hospital was among the longest wait times in their ER in the country.

So, let's talk about trust when it comes to the Leader of the Opposition and the NDP, who ran an election on ending hallway medicine and on fixing health care, and in fact, they made it worse.

So, Manitobans know that. They know that they don't want to go back to those dark days. And, of course, when we took over office, we had to act to make sure that we moved in a direction to ensure that we cleaned up the mess of the previous NDP government, who for 17 years didn't make our health-care system better; in fact, they made it worse.

And so those are the facts, Mr. Chair. It's unfortunate, but those are the facts. And I think what's also the facts—again, I will go back to health care closer to home, which the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite don't seem to want for Manitobans.

* (16:10)

They don't want Manitobans to have better health care closer to home. So I will remind the Leader of the Opposition once again, and all the members opposite of what they actually voted against.

They had voted against more health care closer to home. Oh, and Selkirk—the Selkirk Regional Health

Centre—\$45.7-million expansion to the Selkirk Regional Health Centre.

Again, we will make sure that all of the people in the Selkirk and surrounding communities know that the Leader of the Opposition and all of the members opposite voted against and are not in favour of this investment in a Selkirk Regional Health Centre that will offer better health care closer to home for people in that region.

Mr. Chair, I think it's unfortunate, because those Manitobans deserve to have that health care closer to home, and we, as a government, are going to make sure that they get it.

Mr. Chairperson: Before recognizing the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, I have to draw attention to one particular member whose exuberant commentary seems to sometimes be a little louder than it should, so I would just caution that particular individual. I'm sure they know who they are.

And I encourage them to listen and participate in ways that are not over the top, that are appropriate to the room that we are in.

Mr. Kinew: Looking at my colleague from Springfield, and I don't know that he understood the message, as genteel and polite as the phraseology was. His expression betrays one of confusion.

Anyways, the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) previous commentary is directly contradictory of the facts of her time in office as well as that of Brian Pallister. And in particular, the document that we just tabled was created by this government under their Brian Pallister Clinical and Preventative Services Plan, and it lists a number of emergency departments that they were scheduling to close.

So the question for the Premier again is, is this still a list of closures for emergency departments in rural Manitoba, and is this still the plan that this government is implementing?

Mrs. Stefanson: What the Leader of the Opposition seems to forget is that we have just recently gone through a worldwide pandemic, okay? The Leader of the Opposition has conveniently left that out of his narrative in all of this, Mr. Chair, and I think that's unfortunate because those were very, very difficult times, not just for Manitobans, but for people right across this country and around the world, some of the challenging times that people had to face.

And for the Leader of the Opposition to just disregard those years—those COVID years—I think is

very unfortunate because, certainly, during that time in our health-care system, we learned a lot during that time.

So, of course, as a result of the things that we have learned during the pandemic, we will be making improvements—further improvements—to our health-care system.

And so, our health-care system is ever-evolving. Changes will take place. And we learn from different things, and particularly during the pandemic, so there will be changes. There's no question.

It's an evolving situation when it comes to our health-care system. We will continue to listen to Manitobans, to work closely with Manitobans, and to the experts, and listen to them as to how we can make improvements within our health-care system.

So, that's what our plan is. I don't believe the NDP has a plan at all, actually, because certainly, they haven't come forward with anything.

But I think Manitobans—it's important, Mr. Chair, that once again, we remind Manitobans of the dark days of the NDP government and what Manitobans I don't think want to go back to.

And I—the days when, under Greg Selinger, the Leader of the Opposition's mentor, in 2015 and '16, Winnipeg had the—according to CIHI—sorry, the CIHI report, Winnipeg has the longest ER wait times in the country, not just for the Grace Hospital but also for the Concordia Hospital. Now, I know members opposite like to ask questions about the Concordia Hospital, but you go back to the dark days of the NDP government where, in fact, that hospital had the longest ER wait times in the country. Now, that was under an NDP government, not under a Progressive Conservative government.

But let's also look at the CIHI report on wait times for priority procedures in Canada. Again, in 2015, under the previous premier, Greg Selinger, of course, the mentor to the current Leader of the Opposition, Manitoba was the worst province west of the Maritimes for cataract surgeries. Now we have depleted the wait-list, the pre-pandemic wait-list, for cataracts in Manitoba. We are making significant progress in those areas. What Manitobans don't want to do is go back to those dark days of the NDP government where we are the worst—where we were the worst in the country. That's nothing to be proud of as a Manitoban. We don't want to go back to those dark days of the NDP, Mr. Chair.

And I will go on. I know the Leader of the Opposition has more questions, so let him ask more of those questions, but I think it's very important that Manitobans are aware of what the NDP did to our health-care system when we—when they were in government, because Manitobans, believe me, do not want to go back to those dark days.

Mr. Kinew: I think Manitobans, both rural and urban alike, are concerned when they see a Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) refusing to address questions about her government's own plan to close rural emergency departments. I mean, the dodge and deflection seems to be revealing. Like, if this is not the plan, why not just say, we're not going to close those emergency departments? The fact that the Premier can't say, that's very telling.

So let's turn to the EMS stations on this list. Again, there's a long list of EMS stations in a variety of health regions: Interlake-Eastern, Prairie Mountain, Southern Health-Santé Sud, and these are in communities right across southern Manitoba, the Parkland, Westman, as you would expect.

So I would like to ask the Premier, is her government still planning to close these EMS stations as part of their Clinical and Preventive Services Plan?

* (16:20)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Chair, I think it's important to note that, again, going back to the dark days of the previous NDP government, again under Greg Selinger, the Leader of the Opposition's mentor, where more than 16 emergency 'debarments' across rural Manitoba were closed. That was under the NDP's watch.

We have no plans to close rural ERs, Mr. Chair, and—but let's—I think it's very important that Manitobans know what happened under those dark days of the Leader of the Opposition's mentor, Greg Selinger.

Let's talk about the ERs that they closed and see what that means to the people in Emerson, where they closed that facility, that ER. They closed the ER in Manitou. They closed the ER in MacGregor. They closed the ER in St. Claude and in Gladstone and in Vita. They also closed the ERs in—and that was in Southern Health and Prairie Mountain. They closed the ERs in Erickson, in Rosburn, in Wawanesa, in Birtle—*[interjection]*—oh, just wait for it, the list goes on and on. In Birtle, in Rivers, and in Baldur, and in McCreary, and in Winnipegosis, and in the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority. They closed the ERs in Whitemouth and in Teulon.

So, again, we have not closed rural ERs. The Leader of the Opposition is part of a party where his mentor, Greg Selinger, who was the premier of the province at the time, went through and closed all of those, and there was more, too, as well, Mr. Chair.

The fact of the matter is, it's their track record on closing ERs in rural and surrounding communities, in Prairie Mountain and Southern Health and Interlake-Eastern, Mr. Chair. That's their record and they have to live with that.

And Manitobans don't forget that. But in case they do, I'm just reminding them today because we think it's important for the people in all of these communities that they know that that's what the NDP did before because that's exactly what their plan is in the future.

Mr. Kinew: There have been a number of closures of health-care facilities under the Premier's time in office: Altona, Glenboro, Melita, as well as looming closures in Carberry and Eriksdale.

Can the Premier tell the committee why so many rural emergency departments and EMS stations are closing in this province under her watch?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think it's important, also, to remind Manitobans, Mr. Chair, that those closures—the ER closures under the NDP government—took place not after a worldwide pandemic. And, in fact, during those years, they were getting record increases in health-care transfers from the federal government. And yet, they were still closing rural ERs at that time.

Again, that is their track record. That is not our track record. That is the record of Greg Selinger, who was the premier at the time—again, the Leader of the Opposition's mentor, you know, who shut down all of these rural ERs. And again, not after a worldwide pandemic where we have significant health human resource challenges.

Again, those health human resource challenges are not just challenges here in Manitoba. They're right across the country, and certainly, the pandemic made that much more challenging for all of the provinces right across this country and the territories.

And, of course, you know, we are addressing those issues. That's why we have invested more than \$200 million to attract more than 2,000 health-care workers—the province of Manitoba. And we're well on our way to achieving that, Mr. Chair.

But it's important to remember that we are taking action in these areas. We know and we—and you know—and we did just come out of a worldwide pandemic.

* (16:30)

So these are challenges that we have been facing, but we've been facing them head-on to ensure that we're bringing—you know, we're recruiting new people: 2,000 more health-care professionals—the province of Manitoba. We're retaining—putting in place a retention strategy, as well as a training strategy, to ensure that we have more health-care professionals working in their areas of profession.

And so I think it's, again, very important that we remind those Manitobans of why we don't want to go back to those dark days of the NDP government, because that is indicative of what they can look forward to if the NDP ever got back into government.

Mr. Kinew: Manitobans know well that the problems in health care were caused by Brian Pallister and this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson). They don't need to be reminded of it, because they've seen that every day for the past number of years. And we know that this is part of the reason why Brian Pallister was chased out of the building. But, certainly, we haven't seen any improvements under this Premier.

In fact, more people are leaving the bedside; more people are leaving the health-care system today. And if you were to do an exit interview and ask those folks who are leaving the health-care system, are you leaving as a result of issues arising from the pandemic? They would say, no; we are leaving because we're frustrated with the PC government's mismanagement of health care.

So, where the PCs have invested in bureaucracy and closed front-line services and cut those working at the bedside, we would restore investments in local communities to ensure that Manitobans can get the health care that they need.

It's often said by many observers who have been deeply frustrated with the Stefanson government and Brian Pallister's failures on health care, it's often said that what they've done to health care, they're going to do to the education system next.

Of course, we heard this loud and clear all summer long after the Premier co-signed and seconded bill 64. But those concerns definitely continued on well past bill 64 and our successful campaign against it.

There are many concerns about this government's future plans with respect to education funding. We

know that this government ordered a review of education funding and commissioned the creation of a new education funding model. However, as part of the operation desperation on the other side of the House, the PCs delayed the release of this new education funding model until after the election.

Of course, every Manitoban knows what version of the PCs you're going to get after the election should they be given a chance to pursue bill 64-like policies again. It's going to be more of the negative impacts on schools in Manitoba.

Manitobans are wondering what's up with this education funding model and what in it is so bad that they're not allowed to see prior to this year's election.

So, will the Premier just tell Manitobans about this education funding model? What in it is so bad that she had to stop its release prior to this year's election?

Mrs. Stefanson: I certainly appreciate the question from the Leader of the Opposition when it comes to the funding of our education system, our K to 12.

I think it gives me an opportunity to remind Manitobans once again of the significant investments that we have made in our K-to-12 education system.

In fact, a 6.1 per cent increase in education—over \$100 million more, just this year, to our education system. That's more funding for—to educate our kids. We want to make sure that we get the best education that we can for our kids.

And what does that mean? Not one single school division; every—actually—sorry. Every single school division in the province of Manitoba received a significant increase to their education funding.

And, of course, I think it's important at this point in time to remind Manitobans that every single one of the NDP across the way voted against those investments in education in our province.

Can you imagine, can you imagine, that in Beautiful Plains School Division, a 12.4 per cent increase, Mr. Chair?

That's a significant increase to that school division for the people and the children that go to school within that school division.

That's a significant increase to those—for those children. And what did the Leader of the Opposition do? He voted against that. Why would he do that, Mr. Chair? I think that that's just unfortunate.

And then, of course, we go down to Border Land School Division, and they received a 4.2 per cent increase—significant increase for the children in those communities—making sure that they get better health care in their—sorry, better education in their communities.

And, again, I think it's important that we remind Manitobans that each and every one of the NDP voted against those investments, the increases of investments for those students in the Border Land School Division.

I think that that's very unfortunate, but we will remind the people in those communities about the facts that the Leader of the Opposition voted against the increase in funding for education in that area.

And we go to the Brandon School Division. Brandon School Division got a 10.2 per cent increase to their education budget. Again, more money for the kids' education in Brandon.

And I can't even believe, even Brandon. The Leader of the Opposition voted against that and we'll make sure that all of the people in Brandon are aware of the fact that the Leader of the Opposition and all of his MLAs voted against that increase for the children in the Brandon community.

And you know, Mr. Chair, I think, in general, I could go on here and I probably will, because I think it's very important that Manitobans know and understand that we are making significant investments into funding education in our province, and that the Leader of the Opposition and each and every one of the NDP MLAs and the Liberals voted against that.

So, in Evergreen School Division, they got a 6.4 per cent increase to education funding in that school division. And once again, the Leader of the Opposition and all of the members opposite voted against that, so we will take no lessons from the members opposite when it comes to funding education in the province of Manitoba.

Because on one hand, they say, well, you should be funding education more, you should be funding education more. And then we do, and what do they do, Mr. Chair? They turn around and vote against that.

That is just not right. There's something just wrong about that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kinew: Okay, why did the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) break the promise to release a new education funding model before this year's election?

* (16:40)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, the Leader of the Opposition will know that the NDP, when they were in government, had 17 years to fix the funding model in the province for education, the K-to-12 education in the province of Manitoba, and they did nothing. So there hasn't been a comprehensive review in well over 20 years. And, you know, they had an opportunity to do that when they were in power in their latter years and they chose not to.

So we have, and we are still committed to, a funding-model review. But it's very important that after, you know, decades of nothing happening, that we take the time to get it right. And so we are taking the time right now to ensure that we consult with stakeholders within the education field to make sure that we get it right.

And we think that that's the prudent thing to do. We wouldn't want to rush forward on that, and make sure that we get it right. So that is, of course, what we were doing.

But I think the most important thing is that we are, in the interim, making sure we're making those investments in our K-to-12 education system.

And again, the Leader of the Opposition and other members across the way have said that they have wanted to see an increase in the funding of education, and we delivered on that. We have delivered on that. But now that we've done that, they seem to want to vote against that. They voted against every single increase to all of the school divisions across the province of Manitoba.

So, you know, we're going to remind the people of Flin Flon: the people of Flin Flon, Flin Flon School Division, got a 3.7 per cent increase to their budget. And we will remind the people of Flin Flon that the Leader of the Opposition and all the members opposite voted against that increase for the Flin Flon School Division.

I wonder what the children in Flin Flon would feel about that, or the parents would feel about that, where the Leader of the Opposition and everyone opposite voted against an increase for the—that school division.

And we look at the Interlake. The Interlake got a 4.3 per cent increase in their school division. Again, that is more money, not less money.

So the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite want to continue to fear monger and put misinformation on the record. I would say that that is— it's just simply not true.

And so they have their narrative though, and their reason why they want to put false information on the record, because what is true—and these are the facts—these are the facts, Mr. Chair—that in the Interlake they got a 4.3 per cent increase to their education funding.

And we look at Park West. Park West got a 10.4 per cent increase in their education funding. And again, this is all part of a formula out there, which of course we are reviewing that right now and making sure we want to come up with a fair and equitable funding model that, you know, we take the time to get it right when it's been decades of the previous NDP government doing nothing about that at all, not bothering to do that. They didn't care about the education of children back there. Certainly, they didn't care enough to look at the funding model and want to make some changes to that.

And now I know the Leader of the Opposition, this is, you know, may be hard for him. He doesn't like this, but these are the facts, and I think it's important that we put the facts on the record.

So when it comes to Seine River School Division, a 5.5 per cent increase in the funding in Seine River. And, of course, that is more funding for that school division, not less funding. And, well, it's important that the Leader of the Opposition—all Manitobans know that every single school division in the province of Manitoba got a significant increase in their funding.

And it's important to just remind Manitobans, once again, that the Leader of the Opposition and all of the MLAs—all of the NDP MLAs—voted against that. Shame on them.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, we've spoken and visited with many of the school divisions, but the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) name checks, thereby fulfilling an important public service that she and her caucus have refused to carry out.

What they told us in the Interlake is par for the course with what many of the divisions have said. They've said they're going to be forced to cut teaching positions in the region.

And so, for the Interlake School Division, when we were there as a result of the, you know, policy choices that the Premier is trying to gloat about here, they're going to have to cut two teaching jobs.

And so the school trustees in that region are forced to contend with the decision of, should we cut a position from Fisher Branch, or should we cut a

position from Ashern, or should we cut a position from a high school or should it be an early-years school?

This is the impact of the PCs' failures on education for the entirety of their time in office, and that's an area where there is supposed to be a PC MLA. Not once did he meet with this board; not once has he raised this issue here in the Legislature.

That's what's happening in the real world outside the PC bubble. It's not good. This is a part of the province where young people could use a lot of help on their path to reaching their full potential, and that's not happening.

Questions were about the education funding model, over which this Premier broke her promise to release this year. This is one of the first commitments that she made as Premier. The press release outlining the timeline that the government committed to—this press release was released on November 18th, 2021.

* (16:50)

And all the consultations and, you know, processes that the Premier alludes to as the pretext for breaking her word on this issue—in that press release were outlined as supposed to have been concluded in 2022 and with the entire project to be completed by February of 2023.

And this new education funding model to be in place by 2023-2024 school year. Now, the Premier, in her response previous to this one says that the reason why she broke her word is because she's so busy talking to these school divisions.

I can tell you for a fact that the Interlake School Division, of which I was just referring to, has heard nothing about this new education funding model from this provincial government. That statement is equally applicable across any number of school divisions that we've spoken to.

It suggests that the pretext for which the Premier broke her word on this topic is false—or at least the proffered excuse that she gives in this committee today, that it is false. More likely there's some sort of political reason. Most likely it's—the education funding model will mean further cuts and negative impacts on education in Manitoba and as part of their election year operation desperation, the PCs didn't want to release that prior to voting day.

It seems like the most logical scenario to me. But yes, I don't expect that the Premier is going to answer these questions substantively. I imagine that there's going to be continued proffering of these talking

points, even though we're talking about an issue of schools in Manitoba that are underfunded under this government and the impacts on children.

C'est la vie avec les PCs. That's life with a PC government. So, rather than adequately fund education in Manitoba, we know that admin and bureaucratic costs have risen in the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) department. The costs for the executive council increased by 6.8 per cent this year. You'll note that that percentage increase is higher than that offered to, you know, kids in schools.

So, why did the budget for the executive council increase by 6.8 per cent this year?

Mrs. Stefanson: The Leader of the Opposition just talked about and questioning the adequacy of funding for the K-to-12 schools. And you know, we have a 6.1 per cent increase average funding to the K-to-12–to K-to-12 schools, the school divisions.

Let's look back under Greg Selinger. Again, back in 2016–Greg Selinger, of course, Mr. Chair, is the Leader of the Opposition's mentor. And if he's talking and saying and questioning the 6.1 per cent increase that we just passed, and that he voted against–if he says that that's not adequate, I wonder if he could comment on the 2.5 per cent increase that was under Greg Selinger–again, his mentor–back in 2016.

Because, surely, if 6.1 is not adequate, then what does he say about his own NDP–paltry 2.5 per cent increase back in 2016? So maybe the Leader of the Opposition will maybe comment on that. I'm not sure, but certainly, that is the record of the NDP.

We're making significant investments in education in the province of Manitoba.

Again, the Leader of the Opposition and every member opposite voted against those increases for those school divisions. And I just want to point out, too, the Winnipeg School Division–of course, that is where the Leader of the Opposition's constituency is–there's a 6 per cent increase to the Winnipeg 1 school division in the province of Manitoba.

And I wonder, how does–what does he say to his constituents, all of the children in his constituency–what does he say to them when he lets them know that he voted against a 6 per cent increase to the school division, which could cover off all sorts of activities for the kids, education within that school division? I wonder what he's going to say to his constituents.

I wonder what he says to the constituents–where some of his representatives reside, in the St. James–

Assiniboia School Division, where they received an 8.1 per cent increase to their school division; I wonder what they are saying to their constituents, and to the families and to the children in those constituencies. What do they say to those individuals, because I don't think that they would be very happy to know that those MLAs voted–the NDP MLAs–voted against that.

And so, I wonder if the Leader of the Opposition would care to comment on that, if he thinks that a 6.1 per cent–if he's questioning the adequacy of a 6.1 per cent increase, historic increase in the province of Manitoba to K-to-12 funding; if he's questioning the adequacy of that, then what does he say about Greg Selinger's paltry 2.5 per cent increase in 2016? Wonder what the Leader of the Opposition will be telling his constituents about that.

Mr. Kinew: I'm going to tell the constituents right across Manitoba that we stopped bill 64 and Brian Pallister's terrible plan for education. *[interjection]*

The Premier's heckling, she's saying, hey, don't forget my role in bill 64; I seconded that terrible piece of legislation.

So, you're right, I'll amend my comment: We stopped Brian Pallister and the Premier of Manitoba's terrible bill 64, thereby giving local voices a chance to be heard when it comes to your school's education.

The Premier's, you know, operation desperation, you know, 2023 re-brand attempt falls flat when her own department, the Executive Council, gets a bigger percentage increase than anyone else, than the funding for school kids. You know?

Call me a wild man, but I think if you got an extra dollar in government, you should invest it in children and their education. We just haven't seen that from the PCs.

Not until, you know, operation desperation was launched this year. And I think that, you know, obviously, I'm poking fun at the PCs' personal approaches to these issues, but the substantive issue is very clear. Children in Manitoba need investments to be able to reach their full potential.

And the PCs, rather than making these investments, have chose to cut huge cheques to billionaires who don't even live in Manitoba: the owners of Polo Park mall; one of the Koch Brothers; Galen Weston. These are all facts; they've all received massive cheques.

And you know what you could do for the same amount of money? You could pay for a province-wide nutrition program that would be accessible in every school division in Manitoba. So you're going to have a clear choice this year, Mr. Chair. You can choose the PCs, with more cheques for billionaires, or you can have the NDP, who will help feed hungry kids in Manitoba. The choice is yours, and I think the choice is clear.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 5, 2023

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