

**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**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
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 26, 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

Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

### MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Yes, Madam Speaker, I rise on a matter of privilege.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Union Station, on a matter of privilege.

**MLA Asagwara:** The prima facie case is simple. While all MLAs enjoy the freedom speech, as many speakers such as Parent and Fraser have noted, they must do so with great care.

In discussing the limits of freedom of speech, spare-Speaker Parent noted that suggestive language or innuendo with regard to individuals or an individual's association with others can provoke an angry response which inevitably leads the House into disorder, as a specific limit.

This is even more pronounced when the words made in this House concern another member. These words interfere with and prevent MLAs from doing their job, and as such, a matter-result in a breach of privilege.

Yesterday, the Minister of Education stood in the House and said to the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew), and I quote: "Seems to stand in this House on a day-to-day basis, pretending to be some kind of actor. He's no Adam Beach." End quote.

The comment was made on the record while the member had the floor. It is present in Hansard, as well as audible and visible in the recordings of the proceedings of the House shared publicly.

It's a deeply disrespectful and demeaning remark regarding the Leader of the Official Opposition. It is an insult, which in itself is a violation of privilege.

It is a breach of privilege in an additional sense as well. This comment would not have been made about a non-Indigenous member of this House. What's more, it would not be tolerated in another workplace. The only basis for the comparison is the race of the Leader of the Official Opposition.

The Leader of the Official Opposition is being singled out on the basis of his race. It is a disrespectful comment with a racial characteristic. It's outrageous the minister has not apologized for it. It's meant to 'diminish' and insult an Indigenous member of our Chamber. It was meant to pretend that there are two sorts of Indigenous people in our province: the so-called good ones and so-called bad ones.

Madam Speaker, I need to pause here to make a clear point. The idea that there are good Indigenous people and bad Indigenous people in our province, and that the minister can decide who they are and then hurl abuse at one group is an awful thought and should never be expressed in this Chamber. It is an insidious comparison that tries to use a fact-use the fact a member of this Chamber is Indigenous to undermine the content of the words that they say.

The MLA who made this remark, incredibly, is charged-is in charge of the provincial education system and has a duty to advance efforts aimed at reconciliation.

Comparisons that try to divide a community in this way, Madam Speaker, are gross. This interferes in the performance of parliamentary functions. The disrespectful comment with racial characteristics unduly influences the performance of parliamentary functions of not just the Leader of the Official Opposition, but

potentially other members who are Black, Indigenous or people of colour—as we know, BIPOC—including myself as well. Because it calls to mind our own experiences with racism.

The influence these comments could have are chilling on the effect of participation in question period, debate or even attending this Chamber in person. This influence is undue because it singles out the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) in a way that other members who are non-Indigenous do not have to contend with. Comments of that nature are a detriment to all members of this House, and all members should be aligned in knowing these types of comments have no place in any space anywhere.

Race, including indigeneity, is a protected characteristic under the Manitoba charts—Manitoba Human Rights Code, rather. If the minister will not apologize, then the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and yourself as Speaker should take action.

I raise this at the first opportunity, as I took the time to consult the relevant authority and to review Hansard.

I move, seconded by the MLA for Point Douglas, that the House call on the Minister of Education to apologize immediately, and to fully and unconditionally retract his remarks.

Thank you.

**Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** Just on this matter of privilege, Madam Speaker, I was just looking back into Hansard to make sure that what the member opposite is saying is accurate.

I'm not denying, Madam Speaker, that, in fact, in Hansard, that it said that I was actually pointing to the member for—the Opposition Leader and said that on a day-to-day basis he pretends to be some kind of actor, he's no Adam Beach.

I did say that, Madam Speaker, because Adam Beach is a well-known Indigenous famous actor right here in this great province of ours. When it comes to the member from Fort Rouge, he does stand on a day-to-day basis, and I was pointing out the fact that he's not a great actor, like Adam Beach.

I could've used multiple other actors. Yes, I used an Indigenous one, Madam Speaker. I did not in any way, shape or form mean to intimidate the Leader of the Opposition or talk down to his Indigenous culture. I could've used multiple different actors, famous actors, and compared the member for Fort Rouge to those

actors of that fact that he stands in this House; Manitobans see through his actorship that he puts on display each and every day.

So, I guess, Madam Speaker, I will apologize for using Adam Beach's name, and referencing the Leader of the Opposition, tying him to Adam Beach. I've met Adam Beach on multiple occasions at South Beach Casino because—ties in there with Brokenhead First Nation at times, and the Adam Beach film studio. I have—I hold Adam Beach in high regard, Madam Speaker. And the Leader of the Opposition is no Adam Beach.

\* (13:40)

I could have used other actors. I could have said Denzel Washington, but then the member would have got up, hammered me on that. I could have used Jim Carrey, Madam Speaker, but the member would have got up and hammered me on that. But you know what, actually, Jim Carrey, he does have a film called—a 1997 film called Liar Liar. Now, that being said, I could have compared the member to Jim Carrey.

But, Madam Speaker, on this matter of privilege, there was no ill intent meant. Just pointing out the fact that the Leader of the Opposition is not a great actor, and Manitobans are seeing it displayed here today as well, as the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) stands up and tries to smear me.

Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Before recognizing any other members to speak, I would remind the House that remarks at this time by honourable members are limited to strictly relevant comments about whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised at the earliest opportunity and whether a prima facie case has been established.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Yes, Madam Speaker, this Legislative Chamber is a really important venue for debating ideas and policy and the future of this province, what's happening in the province.

But we have gone far too far in the last few weeks and months in making personal attacks on people. And I think that the—what you, as Speaker, need to remind people is that we're not here to denigrate others in this Chamber, to try and cut them down, to try and imply—particularly when there are racial overtones—to try and make implications that somebody is less than somebody else. I think that we need to stand up against the personal attacks, and this needs to be much more vigorous than it has been in—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Gerrard:** –the last few weeks and months.

And this is an example. It's really the tip of the iceberg in terms of what's happening at the moment. And we need to dig deeper and look at the whole picture, and we need to be very careful.

And I think that the member, the Minister of Education, may not have meant to say something that was offensive, but in trying to cut the Leader of the Opposition down, he has done so.

And it's really important that—because the metre—the Minister of Education should be providing a role model for students. The really vital thing that we have to remember, as we're debating here, is that we need to be examples for young people growing up, because we want young people in this province to have a really good future. And we need to have, in particular, a minister of Education who can stand as an example of behaviour to all Manitobans, but particularly to all young people.

Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** I would indicate that a matter of privilege is a very serious concern.

And I would also indicate as the Minister of Education did not provide an unqualified apology, I am going to have to take this under advisement to consult the authorities, and I will return to the House with a ruling.

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

**Madam Speaker:** Introduction of bills?

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### Standing Committee on Justice First Report

**Mr. Ron Schuler (Chairperson):** Madam Speaker, I wish to present the first report of the Standing Committee on Justice.

**Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk):** Your standing committee on Justice—

**An Honourable Member:** Dispense.

**Madam Speaker:** Dispense.

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

### Meetings

*Your Committee met on April 25, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.*

## Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 6)** – *The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société d'assurance publique du Manitoba*
- **Bill (No. 12)** – *The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2023 / Loi corrective de 2023*
- **Bill (No. 15)** – *The Court of King's Bench Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Cour du Banc du Roi*
- **Bill (No. 18)** – *The Legislative Security Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la sécurité de la Cité législative*
- **Bill (No. 19)** – *The Provincial Offences Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les infractions provinciales*

## Committee Membership

- Hon. Mr. GOERTZEN
- Mr. HELWER
- Mr. SANDHU
- Mr. SCHULER
- Hon. Mr. SMITH (Lagimodière)
- Mr. WIEBE

*Your Committee elected Mr. SCHULER as the Chairperson.*

*Your Committee elected Mr. HELWER as the Vice-Chairperson.*

## Public Presentations

*Your Committee heard the following presentation on **Bill (No. 19)** – *The Provincial Offences Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les infractions provinciales:**

*David Grant, Private citizen*

## Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 6)** – *The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société d'assurance publique du Manitoba*

*Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.*

- **Bill (No. 12)** – *The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2023 / Loi corrective de 2023*

*Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.*

- **Bill (No. 15) – The Court of King's Bench Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Cour du Banc du Roi**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 18) – The Legislative Security Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la sécurité de la Cité législative**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 19) – The Provincial Offences Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les infractions provinciales**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

**Mr. Schuler:** Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Dauphin (Mr. Michaleski), that the report of the committee be received.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### TABLING OF REPORTS

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to table the 2023 report on the repeal of acts not in force required under part 6.2 of The Statutes and Regulations Act.

**Madam Speaker:** And, in accordance with section 28 of The Auditor General Act, I am tabling the Auditor General's report titled Manitoba's Rollout of the COVID-19 Vaccines, dated April 2023.

Ministerial statements?

#### MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

##### George Wong

**Hon. Andrew Smith (Minister of Municipal Relations):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize a Lagimodière constituent who has been both a notable role model and professional community leader with significant achievements that have contributed to the community.

George Wong began to serve his community by volunteering as an interpreter and translator at the international centre in Winnipeg. He would then further his work for the community by co-founding both the Association of Foreign Medical Graduates of Manitoba and the Burmese Community Organization

of Manitoba, organizations that assist immigrants in establishing their lives here in our province.

He assisted newcomers in Manitoba as president of the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba, where he oversaw the funding and construction of 67 settlement house units in Winnipeg.

Some of the most notable groups that this organization's units helped settle was the first group of Polish refugees our province received during the era of the Eastern bloc disintegration, as well as the first group of Kurdish refugees who came here during the first Iraqi war.

He has also remained very active in regards to our arts and cultural communities, being part of the Winnipeg Downtown BIZ Chinatown banner jury panel, as well as lending his time as a board member for both Folklorama and the Folk Arts Council of Winnipeg.

George is also a successful local businessman, a multilingual certified management consultant. He has successfully assisted local businesses as well as promote the management consulting profession both here and abroad.

In fact, his work in the field earned him an induction of life membership by the Canadian Association of Management Consultants and the distinction of being the first and only visible minority awarded to this honour, Madam Speaker.

He also spent a number of years sitting as a council member, the Seven Oaks Hospital Foundation.

He is a person who's always wishes to do what he can to help make our community stronger and better.

Please join me in recognizing our special guests: George Wong, his wife Dr. Eng Lyan Chan, his brother James Wong, his brother-in-law Kyaw Than and his nephew Nicklaus Than.

#### Workplace Safety for Health Staff

**MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** Nurses are a critical part of our health-care system. The last few years have been incredibly difficult for nurses with a pandemic, critical staffing shortages, mandatory overtime, no contract, the list goes on and on. And through it all, nurses showed up.

You know who hasn't showed up? The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and her Health Minister. They're too busy sitting around imaginary tables.

I've had so many nurses reach out directly, sharing that they don't feel safe walking to and from their vehicles. Nurses have shared pictures with me—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Fontaine:** —of their broken—vehicles that have been broken into, windows smashed, and just last week, feces was spread on the door handle of a nurse's car. Last July, we heard of a nurse whose car and credit cards were stolen while she was at work helping Manitobans.

The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and Health Minister have failed to take any actions to help solve this safety issue. In 2019, the government promised to implement institutional safety officers at hospitals. Four years later, still nothing.

The government's own report found that over half of Manitoba health-care workers are considering quitting and 67 per cent of nurses are considering to quit as well. That is a shameful testament to how badly these individuals have made our health-care system.

\* (13:50)

Our health-care system cannot afford another four years of this incompetent and callous PC government. It's time for a change, Madam Speaker.

And to all Manitoba nurses and to those working on the front lines, I am so sorry that you do not have a government that is there to protect and stand up for you. Please know that our NDP team sees you, and we stand with you.

Miigwech.

**Madam Speaker:** Further members' statements?

#### **Carla Martinelli-Irvine**

**Hon. Kevin E. Klein (Minister of Environment and Climate):** I'm proud to rise today and recognize the exceptional work of Carla Martinelli-Irvine, the founder and executive director of the Winnipeg Pet Rescue Shelter, Manitoba's first registered charity no-kill shelter.

Since its inception in June of 1999, the Winnipeg Pet Rescue Shelter has been providing a safe and caring home for thousands of abandoned, abused and neglected animals. Under Carla's leadership, the shelter has become a beacon of hope for animals in need, providing a safe place, food, medical care and love to the many pets left behind.

Through her work, Carla has also inspired many in our community, encouraging all of us to do our part in protecting and caring for animals—trying to get me to take a third dog. Her passion for animal welfare has been contagious, and her leadership has resulted in the Winnipeg Pet Rescue Shelter becoming a true community hub for animal lovers.

Thousands of volunteers throughout the years have supported the shelter. Currently, they have over 40 volunteers, some of which have been serving as volunteers for over 10 years.

Now at their new location in the Courts of St. James, the shelter has many seniors who pay visits and spend time with these loving animals, which is a moment of joy for both the seniors and the pets that are looking for a new home.

The Winnipeg rescue shelter is 100 per cent donor funded, and they are grateful to the community that has supported them for all these years. Their most significant fundraiser is the Paws for Life Gala.

In recognition of Carla Martinelli-Irvine's outstanding contributions to animal welfare, I ask all members of this House to join me in thanking her and her guests, Christina *[phonetic]* Richard, Marie France-Reid, Karen Erhardt, Paula Paunchard *[phonetic]* and Kelly Ryback for their commitment to creating a better world for animals and making our community better every day.

Thank you.

#### **St. Vital Provincial Sport Champions**

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** Simply put, Madam Speaker, St. Vital is full of champions.

First, I would like to recognize the Lancers, whose junior varsity girls' basketball team became provincial champions on March 14th by beating Maples Collegiate 74-67. The team's amazing championship effort was powered by all-star Emilie McLean and remarkably talented MVP Taylor Schepp, who scored 54 points, leading the team to victory.

Six days later, the varsity girls' basketball team won the provincial championship and successfully brought back a banner to the gym again, defending their provincial AAAA championship from last year. The team, led by all-stars Daria Rom, Izzi Fust and MVP Kyu Fust, defeated the Garden City Gophers 63-forty—67-43.

Along with the championship, I must also note the amazing accomplishment of the varsity girls' team

who has not lost a single game on a Manitoba court in more than two years.

Also joining us in the gallery today is the Dakota boys track team, whose outstanding athletics won the 2021-22 provincial championships in both indoor and outdoor track. The Lancer track and field coaches, Mikhail Gerylo, Ryan Hudson and Mark Rowland, have incredibly built up their team by focusing on participation, individual development and creating a welcoming space where young athletes know that there is a spot for them.

But Madam Speaker, there's even more.

This year's Glenlawn Collegiate Lions junior varsity volleyball team were on top of the province as well. Last December, they won the AAAA boys provincial title after winning a four-set match. The grouping of incredible young athletes, including all-stars Nico Nadeau, Augustine Okose and MVP Ben Doan, were motivated to learn, train to become the best they can be in their sport.

Madam Speaker, I ask all of us to join in celebrating the athletes in the gallery today from Glenlawn and Dakota Collegiate.

And I celebrate your hard work. Congratulations.

Since there are so many champions and the number is over 50, I'm going to ask for leave to include all the names of the athletes and coaches in Hansard.

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave to include all of those names in Hansard? [*Agreed*]

*Dakota Collegiate Student Athletes: Abby Akinbolaji, Steven Akintokun, Avery Anderson, Shae Anderson, Whitney Ashu, Adbeel Bhatti, Carmen Buck, Jordyn Buhr, Kalesha Campbell, Sylvain Carriere, Cheryl Cheung, Payton Cretkovic, Tyrell Davis, Izzi Fust, Kyu Fust, Adam Grieman, Dayne Jernbern, Brinley Lokstet, Faith Larocque, Hope Larocque, Emilie McLean, Chinonso Njelita, Chisom Njelita, Tolu Ogunsolu, Ava Osato, Darya Rom, Taylor Schep, Anna Sellers, Abby Sweeny, Juliana Tingchuy, Marcus Wahl.*

*Dakota Collegiate Coaching Staff: Ray Agostino, Mitch Catacutan, Paul Fust, Tiffany Hiebert, Mike Gerylo, Bolaji Rowland, Kukhanya Sibanda, Emma Thompson, Tait Starkell, Eric Sung, Madi Zadro; Ryan Hudson, athletic director; Jill Mathez, principal.*

*Glenlawn Collegiate Student Athletes: Luke Adrian, Mohamad Althyab, Liam Antonishin, Jacob Bohn, Royce Canlubo, Nathan Dedominicis, Ben Doan, Israel Elendu, Nicolas Nadeau, Amanze Njoku, Augustine Okose, Daniel Zabaneh.*

*Glenlawn Collegiate Coaching Staff: Russell Harder, Lance Letain; Dionne Potapinski, principal.*

### Joe Potenza

**Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade):** Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to honour Joe Potenza, a long-time resident of Red River North for his outstanding contributions to his Grand Beach/Grand Marais community.

Joe has over 40 years of serving the communities of Grand Beach and Grand Marais in various capacities. In the hospitality business, he was—he's operated both the former Grand Beach Surf Club and now the current Potenza's Restaurant and Bar. Potenza's is a mainstay of the area and frequented by both residents and summer visitors.

Joe was the founding chairman and president of the Eastern Beaches Development Corporation, and helped develop and implement several programs over the years, and many community economic initiatives have been—have benefited from Joe's involvement, Madam Speaker, assisting also to the development of the Thunder Mountain Water Slides and the development of the Grand Beach Entertainment Centre.

Joe recently in—was involved in the recent dredging of the channel in Grand Beach Provincial Park, between the lagoon, Madam Speaker, and Lake Winnipeg.

With the war in Ukraine, Joe felt a strong need to help refugees. He also helped families find housing, employment, household goods and food. He was instrumental in organizing a Ukrainian fundraiser, the rock benefit concert at The MET, which raised over \$100,000 to assist Ukraine refugees settle right here in Manitoba.

Joe is also a true humanitarian. In the early '90s, Joe was the recipient of a life-saving award from then-mayor, the honourable Bill Norrie for performing CPR on one of his neighbours. And also just recently, Madam Speaker, Joe was a recipient of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal.

Whether in his role as an entrepreneur in the hospitality business, spearheading and developing new



community initiatives or as a humanitarian, Joe is always there, ready and willing to help.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me today in welcoming and acknowledging Joe Potenza, who is here with his guest Onalee Ames, in joining us today here in the gallery.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

### Introduction of Guests

**Madam Speaker:** We have some other guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce you to.

We have, seated in the public gallery from Warren Collegiate, 30 grade 11 students under the direction of Lee Stewart, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler).

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

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### Health-Care System Privatization Concerns

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Manitobans are hearing from front-line health-care experts, who are very concerned about this Premier's plan to make more cuts to our health-care system and to privatize it.

Dr. Dan Roberts said, and I quote, there is a clear difference between engaging private companies in an accountable and appropriate fashion versus turning the system into a pork barrel. End quote.

Sleep doctors, they were forced to resign from the surgical task force committee that they were on, because their concerns were ignored. And, of course, Grace surgeons brought forward solutions for our public health-care system, only to have those proposals rejected by the Premier and the Health Minister's table.

Will the Premier tell the House why she ignored sleep doctors at the Misericordia, why she rejected proposals from Grace surgeons and why she ignores the advice of front-line health-care experts like Dr. Dan Roberts?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** Madam Speaker, we welcome the advice of all front-line health-care workers. But I will also note that the Leader of the Opposition, once again, is putting false information on the record in this Chamber.

\* (14:00)

We are making record investments in health care; almost \$8 billion, Madam Speaker. This year alone, a \$668-million increase—9.2 per cent increase—to health care. That's more investments in our health-care system, not less.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** You know, Madam Speaker, thousands of Manitobans are waiting for surgeries in our province right now, and it's because of the cuts that this government has made. It started under Brian Pallister and it's continued right through this Stefanson government's time in office.

Now, instead of pushing a privatization agenda, this government could listen to the front-line experts who are bringing forward all sorts of solutions that would see us invest in the front lines, investing in our public health-care system. But, of course, this Premier rejects those things out of hand and then comes to the Chamber and tries to deny that these events have taken place.

So, why is the Premier rejecting advice to enhance our public health-care system and pushing ahead with this privatization agenda?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Just factually incorrect, Madam Speaker, once again. The Leader of the Opposition continues to do this.

We are investing more—record investments in health care—almost \$2 billion more than the NDP ever invested in our health-care system.

We will continue to stand up for patients each and every day in our province.

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

#### Surgical Backlogs Timeline to Clear

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Well, Madam Speaker, here are the facts.

When you look at cardiac wait times, people are waiting longer than ever before. When you look at people waiting for hip and knee surgeries, they're waiting longer than they ever have, and it's because of this Premier's cuts to health care and the mistakes that they've made during their time in office.

That's probably why people like the Minister for Finance are quitting. They're frustrated with the state of our health-care system.

We know that there's a ton of mistakes being made each and every day, but one thing that this PC government has refused to do when it comes for surgical wait times is to set a clear date by which the backlog will be cleared.

Will the Premier do so today? Will she commit to Manitobans a specific date by which they will have to stop waiting for surgeries?

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon).

**An Honourable Member:** Let's talk about clearing the backlogs in the province of Manitoba.

In fact, we've completely eliminated the wait-list for cataract surgeries, CT scans. This, of course, is the pre-pandemic—or the pandemic backlogs, Madam Speaker, for ultrasound tests, cardiac catheterization, lab tests, pacemaker surgeries, pediatric neuro-developmental assessment, urology tests, the list goes on.

I'll continue in the next line of questioning.

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

#### **Rural Paramedic Services Working Conditions**

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** You know, Madam Speaker, I'll just table the documents created by this Premier's government that actually prove Manitobans are waiting longer than ever for the surgeries that they need.

We know that in rural Manitoba, rural paramedics are speaking out. Of course, they've been ignored for many years. They've had their wages frozen and they've been denied the ability to practise to their full scope of ability. Now, some of them are speaking out directly in public fora, like the media. In one quote, one rural paramedic said this directly: Have things gotten better? No. Simply, no. End quote. That's what they said. This was in the Winnipeg Sun.

Why has the Premier done nothing to address the bad working conditions for rural paramedics across our province?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** Madam Speaker, we want to thank all the paramedics for everything that they do to help patients in the province of Manitoba—both in rural Manitoba and in Winnipeg,

northern Manitoba, all over this great province of ours. We will continue to make record investments in health care to ensure that they can deliver on those services.

What Manitobans don't want to go back to is the dark days of the previous NDP government who, when they were in power, closed 20 rural ERs.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, the Premier's trying to distract from the terrible situation in health care right now. People in rural Manitoba are waiting longer than ever to have an ambulance show up during their time of need.

We have tabled these data points time and time again, and continually, the PCs reject the evidence that is present right there in their own backyards. The Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals' president spoke out, and he said that the situation for rural paramedics is, quote, honestly terrible. End quote.

It's wrong. The government is refusing to take accountability for the mess that they've made in health care, and they know it. That's why they have to heckle, because there's no action that they can point to that has actually improved health care in Manitoba.

Will the Premier acknowledge for the House that the situation for rural paramedics is, as they say, and that it's honestly terrible?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** While the Leader of the Opposition continues along his line of putting misinformation on the floor of the Chamber, Madam Speaker, I will remind Manitobans of what happened under the dark days of the NDP government, where they were closing rural emergency rooms.

In places like Emerson, they closed; Manitou, closed; MacGregor, closed; St. Claude, closed; Gladstone, closed; Vita, closed; Erickson, closed; Rosburn, closed; Wawanesa, closed; Birtle, closed; Rivers, closed; Baldur, closed; McCreary, closed; Winnipegosis, closed; Whitemouth, closed; Teulon, closed.

Madam Speaker, the members opposite should be ashamed of themselves.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary question.

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, the Premier continually tries to distract from how bad health care is in Manitoba right now.

Folks in rural Manitoba are waiting longer than they ever have for ambulances, and rural paramedics are speaking out. Everything that I said in the preambles to the previous questions was 'attributable'—attributable to a specific paramedic, the ones who say that things are getting worse, the ones who say that the situation is, quote, honestly terrible.

What does this government do? Do they invest in rural paramedics? No, they freeze their wages. Do they actually have a strategy when it comes to rural health care? No, they don't. They have talking points and heckling.

Madam Speaker, we know that the situation for rural paramedics is one that needs urgent fixing. We are committed to that project.

Why does the Premier continue to only bring talking points when Manitobans want investments in health care?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, Madam Speaker, this isn't a distraction; it's, in fact, just putting the facts on the record.

And I look forward to the Leader of the Opposition visiting all of those communities that I mentioned, because he should go out there and tell them the facts. The facts are that they closed their rural ERs in those communities.

So, I look forward to him going out there and actually saying the facts to those communities.

### **Health-Care System Wait Times Public-Private Service Delivery**

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Madam Speaker, after seven years of cuts, this PC government is now shifting to the next phase of their plan. This Premier is intent on privatizing and contracting out the delivery of health services, even though there's existing capacity that the PCs refuse to invest in.

We know they ignore proposals from orthopedic surgeons at the Grace to increase procedures and forced them to go public with their concerns.

Will this Health Minister tell Manitobans why she decided it was not possible to direct funding to the front lines of our public health-care system and fund orthopedic surgeries right here at home?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** So, today we see a continuation of what the member for Union Station was doing yesterday, which was more NDP smoke and mirrors, Madam Speaker, to try to

distract from Manitobans knowing what our government has been doing through the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force.

Madam Speaker, in terms of orthopedic hip surgeries, two—over 2,109 knee replacements, over 1,600 orthopedic hip surgeries; 200 more surgeries will be done at the Grace Hospital; standing up the Concordia fifth OR, 1,000 more hips and knee replacements.

Madam Speaker, more and not less.

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

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, you know, it's unfortunate that the minister didn't bother to outline the thousands of Manitobans who continue to wait for hip and knee surgeries right now in Manitoba, and it's sad that she continues to confirm that she doesn't think she's accountable for the current state of health care in Manitoba.

The PCs continue to put their ideology of cuts and privatization ahead of patient outcomes. Instead, this minister's own task force actually directed the Grace Hospital to cut their surgeries by 20 per cent and forced them to go public with their concerns.

\* (14:10)

My question for the self-declared minister of the art of the possible: Is it possible that her government's continued cuts and inaction over the past seven years is the reason why the public has no trust in her?

**Ms. Gordon:** It was only a few short months ago when—I intend, after I leave the Chamber today, to go and pull out that information and table it tomorrow that the members opposite were standing in front of the podiums in the rotunda and in media and right into my office and calling my office, pleading for our government to pay for out-of-province surgeries for individuals who went out of country for surgeries, Madam Speaker.

And then, through the task force, we created those pathways for individuals to get approval to be able to access a suite of services.

Now they're angry that we did what they had stood in front of podiums and media and asked to be done, Madam Speaker. They don't want Manitobans to know that we are taking the steps necessary to ensure they get the care they need.

**Madam Speaker:** I am—prior to the member proceeding with her question—*[interjection]*—their question, pardon me, I would like to indicate that when referring to members in the House, it should be by their proper title, and I would indicate that the member for Union Station was using an improper title for the Minister of Health.

So, I just want to indicate to all members that when you are addressing members in the House, it is to be by their official titles.

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, I thank you for—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, I thank you for that reminder and I will adhere to that moving forward.

Madam Speaker, sadly this PC Health Minister still thinks that seven years of cuts and chaos is the right move. Manitobans are correct in their assessment that this PC government cannot be trusted when it comes to health care. And while she hides in her office with her so-called table of solutions, she ignores advice from medical experts and health professionals across our province.

Talk is cheap, Madam Speaker. When will this Health Minister actually lead by example by investing in solutions for wait times, wait-time reductions at home here in Manitoba?

**Ms. Gordon:** Madam Speaker, I know the members opposite struggle with mathematics, so 200 more hips and knees and orthopedic surgeries at Grace—that is addition. A fifth OR at Concordia Hospital to do 1,000 more hips and knee surgeries—that is addition.

And all the funding that has gone into ensuring that Manitobans will get the care that they need, such as our investment—our capital investments: \$283 million for a new 90-bed hospital in Portage la Prairie, more addition again; \$127 million for a new 60-bed hospital in Neepawa—more—more physicians, more incentives for nurses to retain, train and recruit.

We continue to make record investments, something they never did.

### **Residential Group Home Placement Constituent Case Concern**

**MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** Rachel Lenz is desperately looking for help for her son Bentley, who has complex medical needs. Rachel knows her son needs much more support than she's able to provide. She reached out to CFS 17 months ago for help to

place her son in a residential group home. Bentley still has not received a placement.

She's burnt out and she feels as though, and I quote, she's treading water. End quote. She says that the family—the system has failed her family.

Can the minister explain: Why are families like Rachel's having to wait so long for the care that they need desperately right now?

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families):** Of course, the wait times were substantial. Of course, that was when we formed government.

There had not been any investments in respite or solutions for parents who were dealing with adolescents and children who are facing severe developmental and intellectual disabilities. There was no investments prior to our government forming office and committing to an \$8-million bridge program and an additional \$4 million in two respites that are now under way.

And, of course, if the member has a constituent that she would like me to look into their personal case, I would be more than happy to do it, but our government has recently invested \$12 million in supports that the member did vote against.

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

**MLA Fontaine:** Rachel Lenz has requested her son, Bentley, who has complex medical needs, be placed in a residential group home with 24-hour care.

She was told the average wait time is around 10 months, yet 17 months later, her family continues to wait. She says this puts an immense amount of stress on her and the whole family, Madam Speaker.

Can the minister explain what actions she is taking to ensure that children are able to get the group-home placements that they desperately need?

**Ms. Squires:** Of course, our government is committed to ensuring that we deal with the wait-lists and work individually with families and provide a person-centred approach. And certainly, willing to work with any family who is experiencing challenges and needs solutions to those complex challenges.

That is why our government introduced the first ever \$8-million bridge program, because we believe that it is inappropriate for families to need to put their children in CFS care when there are no protection issues at all, but just simply to get the additional

support that they need in dealing with their adolescents and children with complex disabilities.

And that is why we invested that \$8 million in the bridge program, and that is why we are committed to expanding that service.

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

**MLA Fontaine:** In May of 2022, Rachel was told by CFS her son, Bentley, was able to move into a group home in July. Two months went by, then in September, the family was told that their spot was given away. To this day, the family continues to wait for a placement for their son, Bentley.

Rachel is a social services worker and a health-care aide. She knows better than anyone her son, Bentley, requires more support than she's able to provide.

She is here today in the gallery with us, and I'm asking if the Minister of Families will meet with Rachel and her support today after QP to discuss her son Bentley's case?

**Ms. Squires:** Madam Speaker, that member and I just spent some eight hours in committee. We have been working on other issues together. I've been providing that member issues.

There has been plenty of opportunities for her to bring forward individual case information for my department and myself to look into. And I believe that any time a situation has been brought to my attention, I have actioned it accordingly and we have had a dialogue and contact with the family in helping work through their issue.

And so, there has certainly been an openness on my part and my department's part, and I certainly wish that the members opposite would have, you know, chosen to pick up the phone and contacted me to bring this information forward, so that I could action it—

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

#### **Crown Attorney Vacancies Recruitment and Retention**

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia):** Madam Speaker, Manitoba's Crown attorneys continue to be another group of provincial employees that are being disrespected by this PC government.

This morning, the Manitoba Association of Crown Attorneys issued a news release regarding the significant vacancies at Winnipeg and other regional

offices. In it, President Erika Dolcetti said, quote: We are concerned about the administration of justice in our province as well as the physical and mental 'wellbil-being' of our members. This cannot continue. End quote.

When will this government—when will this PC government, rather—stop disrespecting Crown attorneys and come up with a recruitment and retention plan to fill vacancies and address their high caseloads?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Of course, we do respect our Crown attorneys and the important, significant work that they do.

\* (14:20)

There was a formal grievance that was filed by the Manitoba Association of Crown Attorneys. It alleged that the workload conditions were putting prosecutors at risk of not fulfilling their professional obligations to the Law Society.

That was filed when the NDP were in government. I wonder if the member opposite said anything at that time.

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** Madam Speaker, the reality is, is that crime has increased under this PC government and, all the while, the responsibilities of those Crown attorneys have been expanding year over year.

This PC government has not increased support and time available to keep pace with the surge in the workloads they are dealing with. Although they are not compensated for it, Crown attorneys regularly work nights, weekends and holidays, all the while continuing to fall behind in managing their caseloads, as violent crime continues to rise.

When will this PC government stop with the cheap talk and support the work of prosecutors who are working to keep our public safe?

**Mr. Goertzen:** A few years after that complaint was filed, Madam Speaker, under the former NDP government, MACA also then came forward and said that some Crowns were juggling up to 400 files at a time and that the NDP had ignored warnings in 2009 about a report that was co-authored with Crowns who were looking at workloads. I understand from Crown prosecutions that the workload would be about half of what it was when it was stated that it was 400 files.

I wonder why the member would—is bringing forward cheap talk today but said nothing then, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** We'll continue to try to bring this minister into this decade and to the here and now where this Stefanson government continually disrespects our public servants, puts our province at a—and puts our province at a disadvantage when it comes to trying to recruit and retain prosecutors from across the country.

All the while, provinces like Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, even next door in Saskatchewan are actively and successfully recruiting away Manitoba's senior Crown attorneys. Manitoba's justice system is suffering and Manitoba's safety is at stake because of the actions of this PC government.

Why should anyone trust this government when it—when they show such disrespect to the work of the Crown attorneys?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, in fact, last year there were 14 new Crown prosecutors that were recruited in Manitoba. I understand that the vacancy rate at the end of this week will be around 6 per cent, which is where it historically is—or has been, Madam Speaker, at least under our government.

But, of course, under the former government, there were the workloads of about 400 files, according to MACA. And there were workers' complaints—or there was complaints that were filed by MACA under the former government where the member opposite said nothing.

I wonder why we should trust the NDP when they have a part-time MLA and a full-time defence lawyer.

#### **Settlement of RCMP Collective Agreement Retroactive Costs for Manitoba Municipalities**

**Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley):** Retroactive costs for RCMP services are owed back to 2017, and that represents a 23 per cent increase to policing costs that Manitoba municipalities are on the hook for.

Without any additional funding, municipalities will be forced to—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Naylor:** —make cuts, raise taxes or both.

Selkirk has warned that the back pay could cost \$101 tax increase per household, yet the PC government has been silent on this issue.

Can the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) explain why she has failed—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Naylor:** —to make this issue a priority? *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** The Premier has spoken out about this issue in her current role and in her former role as the minister of Justice. I have and former ministers of Justice have as well.

This House actually has a resolution currently before it that has been debated two times, calling on this House to unanimously agree that the federal government should fulfill that back pay for municipalities. We have agreed to that. I'm not sure about the Liberals. But the only people who haven't supported that resolution are the NDP.

If they actually believed this, why don't they support the resolution?

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

**Ms. Naylor:** This government likes to blame others. They have blamed the federal—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Naylor:** —government but when I say they've been silent, they have not said what they will do to help.

Municipalities are waiting for leadership from this PC government. After a seven-year funding freeze, municipalities simply can't afford any additional major costs; major costs like \$45 million of back pay that's owed to the RCMP.

The Province needs to step up and support municipalities.

Can the Premier explain what actions her government is taking to ensure municipalities and their ratepayers aren't left holding this bill?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Madam Speaker, this government, this Minister of Municipal Relations (Mr. Smith) has provided record funding for municipalities. AMM has been very supportive of that funding. AMM has been very supportive of the call we've made to the federal government to ensure that that back pay was paid by the federal government.

But this isn't blaming others, Madam Speaker. There's a resolution currently before this House,

before the Manitoba Legislature, calling on all MLAs to agree that the federal government should do the right thing and pay that back.

The only people that are holding up that resolution are the very people who are asking this question. It's the height of hypocrisy, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

The honourable member for Wolseley, on a final supplementary.

**Ms. Naylor:** Madam Speaker, this government thinks that it's appropriate to starve somebody for seven years, then invite them to a banquet and then expect that they're going to be grateful. And that's what they've done to municipalities.

Nineteen municipalities in Manitoba pay for policing through the Province, not the federal government. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Naylor:** They want leadership from this government. Without any additional funding, they'll be forced to pick up the \$45-million tab for RCMP back pay. That would force municipalities to make cuts, raise taxes or both. That's not what municipalities or Manitobans want.

Can the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) explain what she is doing to ensure that ratepayers aren't being forced to pick up the \$45-million tab—

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

**Hon. Andrew Smith (Minister of Municipal Relations):** Madam Speaker, the AMM applauds the Manitoba government for providing an additional \$47 million in unconditional funding for municipalities. Who said that? The A-M president, Kam Blight.

As inflation has significantly impacted municipal budgets and municipalities are not permitted to run deficits, this historic municipal funding announcement will help local councils respond to current financial pressures, build stronger communities and finalize local budgets with certainty. Who said that, Madam Speaker? A-M president, Kam Blight.

As the second largest city in the province, this new funding will support and help the City of Brandon with long-term planning, while helping us deliver the best services to our residents. Who said that, Madam Speaker? Mayor Jeff Fawcett.

On this side of the House, we stand with municipalities—

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

As a courtesy to Hansard, I would ask that members try to contain themselves when these, you know, issues are being discussed. Hansard needs to pick up on all of this, and when there is such a loud noise in the House, I can't hear and Hansard can't hear and the clerks can't hear. So, we're all kind of stuck unless everybody respects the process in here.

\* (14:30)

So, I'm going to ask for everybody's co-operation please.

### **Health-Care System Reorganization Manitoba Health Report Findings**

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** The report we tabled in health-care resilience earlier this week really laid bare the reality of how this PC government has decimated the health-care system.

The Premier said it's a problem everywhere, but the report makes it clear it's worse in Manitoba than anywhere else, with half of workers considering quitting.

The Premier said it's the pandemic, but the report makes it clear it was bad before the pandemic. The Premier has denied cuts, but there, in black and white, it says many have faced wage freezes despite higher workloads, so people are leaving.

Was this report kept confidential and its urgent recommendations ignored because it undermines the government's entire narrative on what they've done to health care in this province?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** Madam Speaker, we value and appreciate all health professionals, whether they work in the civil service, whether they work in community health, acute care. We value and appreciate their feedback. We regularly send out surveys and ask for reports because it's about continuous improvement.

We recognize that there's more work to be done. We are committed to work with our health-system leaders, our leaders in the civil service, to ensure that any changes that are needed are made.

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

**Mr. Lamont:** I tabled a Global News story from September 2020 where, instead of getting ready for the pandemic's second wave, the then-premier and Health minister announced they were going to proceed with a self-described disruptive reorganization of health.

At the time Brian Pallister said the system was top-heavy and tough love was needed to cut the bureaucracy. The people who lost their jobs were payroll, human resource and accounts receivable. Incredibly, the Manitoba NDP is now running on exactly the same promise: to cut the people who do the paperwork so that doctors and nurses and health professionals don't have to.

The April 2022 resilience report—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Lamont:** —says changes like these drove people out of the system.

Does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) accept responsibility, or are they going to deny what this report says?

**Ms. Gordon:** Madam Speaker, our government is investing in health human resources. That is why I was pleased to stand with our Premier on November 10th of 2022 to announce the health human resource action plan, to announce a historic investment of \$200 million to add 2,000 health professionals to the health system.

We are continuing to work with unions. We're continuing to work with stakeholders, to listen to the front line so that we can achieve this growth that is needed in health human resources.

#### **Health Coverage for Work Permit Holders Residency Eligibility Requirements**

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Manitoba Health is denying health coverage for some individuals here in Manitoba on work permits because of a technicality.

Under current legislation a person must reside in Manitoba for 12 months straight in order to be eligible for health coverage. For the most part this requirement is met. However, some work permit holders are just a few days shy and they are being disqualified for health coverage.

Madam Speaker, those with work permits pay taxes and contribute to our economy just like everyone else.

What is this minister going to do to ensure those who are here on work permits are eligible for Manitoba Health coverage?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for bringing this issue forward because it's actually an issue we have been addressing with the federal government because it's actually a glitch in their work permit. And I ask and call on the member to contact the Liberals—the federal Liberals—to ask them to make the change in how their work permits are handed out and the timelines that is—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Gordon:** —given to individuals who received these permits.

We are more than happy, as Manitobans, this welcoming province, to ensure individuals receive health care, but it's a federal government glitch, Madam Speaker.

#### **Spine Assessment Clinic Funding for Physical Therapists**

**Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland):** Madam Speaker, while the NDP politicizes health care in Manitoba, our government is focused on patients and providing the quality care they need.

Our government has eliminated pandemic backlogs in 10 areas, including CT scans, cataract surgeries, ultrasound tests and backlogs in many other areas have significantly been reduced.

Can the Minister of Health elaborate on additional investments her government has made to help Manitobans living with back pain get the care they need more quickly?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I thank the member for Borderland for the question.

Madam Speaker, our government invested \$400,000 to hire four new physical therapists to reduce wait times at the spine assessment clinic.

As a result of this investment, patients living with back pain have seen wait times to see physical therapists reduce by more than 60 per cent in the past eight months. The increased staffing has allowed patient capacity to nearly triple from less than a year



ago, allowing for many more patients to be seen. I'm thrilled to see this progress.

Our government continues to be committed to improving patient care, bringing down wait times, including access to specialized services such as this.

Thank you.

### **Construction Industry Workers Wage Reduction Concerns**

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** Madam Speaker, this PC government is completely out of touch with regular Manitobans.

While the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) conveniently forgets to disclose over \$30 million from her investments, hard-working Manitobans in the construction industry are left waiting to find out if they'll get a wage increase this fall.

This past month, the PC government closed public input on their plans to cut wages for apprentices and others working in the trades.

When will the minister confirm whether or not these workers can expect a wage increase this fall when the general minimum wage is set to go up?

**Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training):** The member and I have sort of gone back and forth over this.

I have stated many times that we are not discussing anyone's wages being lowered. So I don't know why the member keeps bringing these false assertions to the floor of this Chamber. It's irresponsible and I think it's disappointing to Manitobans.

First and foremost, I want to thank all the apprentices who have chosen a career in trades. It is a rewarding career and our government has invested over the last seven years to enhance the program where, under the NDP, they lost track of hundreds of apprentices and never followed up to see if they could enhance their programs to help them complete their certificates.

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

**MLA Marcelino:** Madam Speaker, the cost of groceries keeps going up, gas costs continue to be prohibitive, but this Premier could not care less about the workers and apprentices—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Marcelino:** —who build our province.

Apprenticeship and construction industry wages are currently tied to the minimum wage, but the PCs are now looking to cut future wage increases for these skilled workers, and that's wrong.

Will this minister stop her plans to cut apprenticeship and construction wages today?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** It's unfortunate the member has to continually look at her notes and the prepared questions for her on this when I've already clearly answered her question.

Now, I can't help the member listen to the answers or understand what they mean, but I am happy to reassure Manitobans that we are not looking at reducing any wages of any apprentices here in Manitoba.

In fact, we did proceed with a process to get their feedback. It's something the NDP did not do. They don't reach to get feedback from industry, from stakeholders, from people who are going to be impacted by their decisions. They make their decisions and then they impact Manitobans with no ability, aside from elections, to give feedback.

We will not do that. We will not disrespect Manitobans like the NDP have.

**Madam Speaker:** The time for oral questions has expired.  
\* (14:40)

### **Speaker's Ruling**

**Madam Speaker:** And I have a ruling for the House.

Following oral questions on April 13th, 2023, the honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Mr. Khan) raised a matter of privilege regarding an incident which occurred over the lunch recess on that day, during an event held in the Rotunda. The minister alleged that during the event, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) attempted to physically and verbally intimidate him, including making several profane comments. The minister concluded his remarks by moving, and I quote, "that this matter be immediately referred to a permanent standing committee of this House for investigation." End quote.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition spoke to the matter of privilege, apologizing to the minister for the interaction, but also disputing the facts that they had been related. The honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) also spoke to the matter before I took it under advisement.

As members know, there are two conditions that must be satisfied in order for a matter raised to be

ruled in order as a prima facie case of privilege: Was the issue raised at the earliest opportunity, and was sufficient evidence provided to support the member's claim that their privilege or the privileges of the House were breached?

In his submission on this matter, the honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Mr. Khan) indicated that this was his earliest opportunity to raise this in the House, and I accept the member's words on that point.

On the second condition, of whether the member provided sufficient evidence to support a prima facie case of privilege, there are several factors to consider.

Regarding the issue of intimidation of a member, in order for a breach of a member's privileges to have occurred, Joseph Maingot advises on page 222 of the second edition of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* that the activity in question must involve a, and I quote, proceeding of Parliament. End quote. This concept is supported by numerous rulings from Manitoba Speakers, dating back as far as 1988. As was noted in those rulings, debate in this Chamber or in a committee constitutes a proceeding of Parliament; however, events taking place outside the Chamber, such as a public event in the Rotunda, do not fall within that purview.

Further to that point, Speaker Parent of the House of Commons ruled in 1997 that in order for a member to claim that their privileges have been breached, at the time of the alleged offence they must have been functioning as a member actually participating in a proceeding of Parliament. As well, on page 620 of the third edition of *House of Commons practice and procedure*, Bosc and Gagnon state that the Speaker has no authority to rule on statements made outside of the House by one member against another.

For these reasons, I must conclude that a prima facie case of privilege was not established in this case.

Before I conclude this ruling, though, I have some thoughts to share with you. I found it concerning there were—that there were two different versions of the same event shared within this House. As noted earlier, I am unable to rule on events outside of this Chamber, so it is not my place as Speaker to try to mediate that difference of facts. But I am troubled that either version of the incident could have occurred at all.

Whether you are serving as MLAs in a proceeding of Parliament, or whether you are out in the community, I wish that you could all treat each other respectfully and honourably. I cannot count how many

times I have stood in this spot and asked members to do better in your interactions with one another. I have expressed this sentiment in many ways over the years, and each time, I felt hopeful that the message would resonate.

I'm going to try that again now, and I truly hope that you will all take this message to heart. The 57 people chosen by the citizens of Manitoba to represent them in this place occupy rare air. We have all been granted an exceptional opportunity to try and make this province a better place to live for all Manitobans, and I strongly believe that every single one of you wants to do that.

I understand how this place works; I have been a continuous member of this Assembly longer than anyone in this room, so I know how and why partisan agendas drive the actions of members, and I know that partisan behaviour is an important part of how things get accomplished here.

I feel, though, that in recent years, the temperature in this room has been rising. I feel that the balance between partisan agendas and professional courtesies has tipped in the direction of partisan divisions and away from constructive and collegial interactions.

Let me be clear about this: I'm not saying that any one side of the House has caused this circumstance. Our entire political dynamic has shifted this way, in this Chamber and in our community. This is also not unique to Manitoba, of course. We see this across the country and around the world.

In the face of this trend, however, my personal wish is that this Assembly could be an exception. I believe it is possible for all of us to take a long, hard look in the mirror and resolve to do better, to be better, to be adversaries but not enemies.

People watch what we do here in this Chamber and in this building, and what we do here matters to the people of Manitoba. I would urge all of you to remember that, while we are doing this important work, that we can be civil and even kind to one another. We can disagree, debate, criticize and advocate, but if we cannot demonstrate the kind of civility and respect to each other that we would expect of people outside of this place—work associates, constituents, even our families—how can we expect our constituents to respect us and support us?

In a few months, most of you are going to be asking the good citizens of this province to cast a ballot with an X beside your name. When you are out knocking on doors and meeting folks, I hope you will

be able to tell them you have done better here, that you have done your best to represent them respectfully and capably while advocating for their best interests.

Thank you all for your attention to this ruling.

## PETITIONS

### Brandon University Funding

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

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Since taking office, the provincial government has been—has cut operating funding to post-secondary institutions such as Brandon University, while simultaneously increasing tuition and student fees.

(2) Brandon University is the only university in rural Manitoba and serves—and is an important hub for Westman.

(3) Brandon University is the largest university outside of Winnipeg with over 2,200 full-time students and just under 1,000 part-time students.

(4) Despite the important role Brandon University plays in Manitoba, the provincial government is continuing to cut the university's funding in Budget '23-24, as funding yet again fails to keep pace with inflation.

(5) Inadequate funding hurts students and the quality of education they receive as it may force Brandon University to raise tuition, cut programs and services, or both.

(6) Funding cuts also negatively impact Brandon University's faculty who are at risk of having their courses cut or being let go altogether.

(7) The provincial government has failed to explain why Brandon University's '23-24 operating funding increase falls below inflation, and why it is lower than other universities in Manitoba.

We therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to adequately fund Brandon University so that the institution can avoid making cuts and continue to serve students, faculty, Westman and the province of Manitoba as a whole.

This petition, Madam Speaker, 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.

### Right to Repair

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitoba consumers believe products should last—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Maloway:** —longer, be repaired when broken, and that planned obsolescence has environmental consequences that threaten 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 right to repair enables consumers access to the resources needed to fix and modify their products, appliances, including cellphones, washing machines and refrigerators.

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

(5) The 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.

\* (14:50)

(6) 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 are unable to provide manuals or replacement parts.

We petition the legislative 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, to make information, parts and tools necessary to repair—for repairs available to consumers and independent repair shops.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

### Health-Care Coverage

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the background for 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) Racialized people in—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.

(3) Without adequate health-care coverage, if they are ill, many of the uninsured 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.

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

(5) 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 to access health care.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to immediately provide comprehensive and free 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 residents.

(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 institutions and providers of expanded coverage for those without 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 they can access health care without jeopardizing their ability to remain in Canada.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

### Punjabi Bilingual Programs in Public Schools

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) According to census 2021, Punjabi is the fourth most spoken language in Canada and there are 33,315 people in Manitoba whose native language is Punjabi.

(2) Thousands of Punjabi newcomers are coming to Manitoba as students and as immigrants, looking to call this province home. People of Punjabi origin contribute a great deal to the social and economic development of Canada and Manitoba in fields such as education, science, health, business and politics.

(3) In coming to Manitoba, Punjabi newcomers make sacrifices, including distance from their cultural roots and language. Many Punjabi parents and families want their children to retain their language and keep a continued cultural appreciation.

(4) Manitoba has many good bilingual programs in public schools for children and teens available in other languages, including French, Ukrainian, Ojibwe, Filipino, Cree, Hebrew and Spanish. Punjabi bilingual programs for children and teens as well as Punjabi language instruction at a college and university level could similarly teach and maintain Punjabi language and culture.

(5) Punjabi bilingual instruction will help cross-cultural friendships, relationships and marriages and prepare young people to be multilingual professionals.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take steps to implement Punjabi bilingual programs in public schools similar to existing bilingual programs and take steps to implement Punjabi language instruction in other levels of education in Manitoba.

And this has been signed by Karmajit [*phonetic*] Singh, Kuldeep Singh [*phonetic*], Manpreet Singh, and many others.

**Madam Speaker:** Grievances?

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

#### House Business

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** I have a series of committees to announce.

I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Monday, May 8th, 2023, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 29, The Life Leases Amendment Act; and Bill 38, The Builders' Liens Amendment Act (Prompt Payment).

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Monday, May 8th, 2023, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 29, The Life Leases Amendment Act; Bill 38, The Builders' Liens Amendment Act (Prompt Payment).

**Mr. Goertzen:** Madam Speaker, I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Monday, May 8th, 2023, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 21, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act; Bill 22, The Emergency Measures Amendment Act; Bill 25, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act, wildlife firefighters; and Bill 36, The Fair Registration Practices in Regulated Professions Amendment Act.

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Monday, May 8th, 2023, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 21, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act; Bill 22, The Emergency Measures Amendment Act; Bill 25, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act (Wildfire Firefighters); Bill 36, The Fair Registration Practices in Regulated Professions Amendment Act.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'd also like to announce that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Tuesday, May 9th, 2023, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 23, The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Amendment Act; Bill 31, The

Animal Care Amendment Act (2); and Bill 32, An Act respecting Child and Family Services (Indigenous Jurisdiction and Related Amendments).

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Tuesday, May 9th, 2023, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 23, The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Amendment Act; Bill 31, The Animal Care Amendment Act (2); Bill 32, An Act respecting Child and Family Services (Indigenous Jurisdiction and Related Amendments).

**Mr. Goertzen:** Madam Speaker, I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Wednesday, May 10th, 2023, at 6 p.m. to consider Bill 10, The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act (Social Responsibility Fee Repealed).

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Wednesday, May 10th, 2023, at 6 p.m. to consider Bill 10, The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act (Social Responsibility Fee Repealed).

**Mr. Goertzen:** And, finally, I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Wednesday, May 10th, 2023, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 7, The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act; Bill 16, The Domestic Violence and Stalking Amendment Act; and Bill 27, The Intimate Image Protection Amendment Act.

\* (15:00)

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Wednesday, May 10th, 2023, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 7, The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act; Bill 16, The Domestic Violence and Stalking Amendment Act; and Bill 27, The Intimate Image Protection Amendment Act.

\* \* \*

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

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
(Concurrent Sections)**

**CHAMBER**

**JUSTICE**

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

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Mr. Chairperson, I'm seeking leave to recess this section of Committee of Supply to reconvene back into the House.

**Mr. Chairperson:** There has been a request to recess this section of Supply and reconvene back into the House.

Is it the will of the House to do so—*[interjection]*—the will of the committee to do so? *[Agreed]*

This House—*[interjection]*—the committee is recessed.

Call in the Speaker.

**IN SESSION**

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** I'm seeking leave to allow the two sections of Committee of Supply to sit concurrently with the House while the House considers other business, with the understanding that if a recorded vote is required in one section, the House will resolve into the Chamber section of Supply to conduct the vote.

And just for certainty, the two sections that will continue on are in committee rooms 254 and 255.

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave to allow the two sections of the Committee of Supply, which are sitting in rooms 254 and 255, to sit concurrently with the House while the House considers other business, with the understanding that if a recorded vote is requested in one section, the House will resolve into the Chamber section of Supply to conduct the vote? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Goertzen:** Is there leave to consider in the House this afternoon without notice a government motion regarding request for the provision of security camera footage?

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave to consider in the House this afternoon without notice a government motion regarding a request for the provision of security camera footage? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

**GOVERNMENT MOTION**

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):**

I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education and Training (Mrs. Guillemard), that, in accordance with section 34 and 52.1(1) of The Legislative Assembly Act, the Speaker direct the chief legislative security officer to provide to the Speaker a copy of the security camera recording concerning the incident that occurred between the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) and the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) during the lunch recess at the event that was held in the Rotunda of the Legislative Assembly on April 13th, 2023, and that, on receipt of the copy of the security camera recording, the Speaker is requested to take reasonable measures to make it available to all members, and to members of the Manitoba press gallery, in a manner determined by the Speaker.

\* (16:20)

**Motion presented.**

**Madam Speaker:** Are there any members wishing to speak in debate?

The—*[interjection]* Is the House ready for the question?

**Some Honourable Members:** Question.

**Madam Speaker:** The question before the House, then, is the motion just put forward by the honourable Government House Leader.

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

**Mr. Goertzen:** Could the section of Estimates in the Chamber resolve into Committee of Supply.

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the section of Supply will reconvene in the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
(Concurrent Sections)**

*(Continued)*

**ROOM 254**

**NATURAL RESOURCES AND  
NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT**

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook):** Good afternoon. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Natural Resources and Northern Development.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Greg Nesbitt (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development):** Well, good afternoon and thank you, Mr. Chairperson. It's my pleasure to be here today and speak as the Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development. This is a great opportunity to speak about how the department's programs will deliver value within this year's budget.

I want to state how pleased I am to be the minister of this new department that serves Manitobans in numerous ways.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the dedication and professionalism of all the staff within our department. As the minister, I take my role very seriously, and our vision is one of a working landscape where people, communities and nature thrive. This vision reflects our government's commitment to balancing the needs of Manitobans in all aspects while working collaboratively with stakeholders from local communities and Indigenous communities to industry.

Our goal is for the department to take a leadership role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of fish, forests and wildlife and protected space. These goals are not mutually exclusive and benefit all of Manitoba.

Over the last year, my department has been collaborating with many Manitobans across the province, Indigenous communities and other stakeholders, to promote the management and responsible use of our natural resources. Listening to Manitobans is something our government, and myself as minister, have been doing with great success, and this is something I will continue to do going forward. I am committed to listening to Manitobans and to stakeholder and industry groups to improve the services our department offers.

I want to highlight several priority areas of work in our department as a way to frame the opening of our discussion in committee today.

Parks and trails—provincial parks are special places that play an important role in the protection of natural lands and the quality of life of Manitobans. They play a critical role in conserving ecosystems, maintaining biodiversity, preserving natural, cultural and heritage resources and providing outdoor recreational and educational opportunities and experiences in a natural setting.

To enhance visitor experience, modernize funding mechanisms for parks services and identify opportunities to attract private and philanthropic investment to

upgrade facilities, my department is dedicated to renewing the provincial parks strategy. We have also pledged to take a leading role in developing and maintaining a provincial trail network for hiking, biking, snowmobiles and off-road vehicles, including funding mechanisms, tourism amenities and the reduction of regulatory barriers that restrict trail development.

As part of our parks infrastructural renewal strategy and trails strategy and action plan, we are working hard to create a high-quality network of accessible trails that will provide health, social and economic benefits for trail users and communities across the province.

Our provincial parks are more than just places to explore and enjoy the outdoors. They are essential for preserving our natural resources, promoting tourism and enhancing our quality of life.

Conservation Officer Service—I want to take an opportunity to acknowledge the service of our conservation officers. These dedicated men and women are responsible for delivering natural resource law enforcement throughout the province, working in regional and district offices and performing their duties on the landscape across our province, from Churchill to Virden and everywhere in between. They play a critical role in ensuring the safety and security of provincial parks and protected spaces, managing dangerous wildlife situations and responding to public concerns. Through their efforts, they protect Manitoba's natural resources and enable all of us to enjoy the beauty of our province's remote areas.

Conservation officers protect Manitoba's natural resources and keep our parks, protected spaces and remote areas safe for the enjoyment of all. I want to express my sincere gratitude for their hard work, which extends far beyond addressing unsafe hunting practices. Their contributions to ensuring sustainable fishing practices and responsible quota management are invaluable. By protecting our natural resources, they are ensuring that future generations will be able to enjoy the same privileges that we do in beautiful Manitoba.

Manitoba Wildfire Service—protecting the environment and our natural resources is a key component of our department. I would like to recognize and express my pride in our firefighting crews and leaders, who work tirelessly all spring and summer to protect Manitobans and their property from dangerous wildfires, ensuring that we manage these situations professionally and safely.

Our government is fully committed to supporting the Manitoba Wildfire Service and ensuring that personnel are hired, trained and working co-operatively with other agencies, from rural municipalities to Indigenous communities, to other provinces. Additionally, the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, based here in Winnipeg, is a Canada-wide organization that ensures provinces work co-operatively together by sharing resources each year where required, depending on where heavy fire activity is in the country. I'm very pleased with this show of partnership across jurisdictions, and I look forward to continued collaboration to protect our natural resources and keep Manitobans safe.

Fisheries and wildlife—the fisheries branch manages the province's aquatic resources and operates under several key strategies and initiatives, including the Recreational Angling Strategy, commercial fishing management and certification, aquatic invasive species strategy, live bait management and fish culture program. The branch is responsible for ensuring the sustainability and certification of commercial fisheries, monitoring and managing aquatic invasive species and producing fish for stocking numerous recreational fisheries across Manitoba.

The wildlife branch is committed to sustainable management practices and protecting threatened species in the province. They work collaboratively with stakeholders to develop a wide range of plans to ensure the sustainability of caribou populations and their habitat while balancing the needs of human activity across the landscape. Additionally, the branch is actively engaged in monitoring and responding to emerging threats to wildlife, such as chronic wasting disease. We have taken action to address the spread of CWD, including increasing funding for their Wildlife Health program and reviewing surveillance, prevention and response plans based on specifically rigorous principles.

\* (15:10)

Forestry and peatlands—moving to forestry, Manitoba's forest sector provides an opportunity to strengthen our northern and rural communities. In recent years, forest product markets have experienced a major upswing. Existing industry has demonstrated a surge in capital investment, and there's potential for new industry development. The department is actively working with industry and Indigenous nations to build a resilient and inclusive forest sector that is poised for growth.

We are working collaboratively with First Nations to increase participation in, and share benefits from,

the forestry sector. Historic revenue-sharing agreements have been signed with six First Nations to date, and we are in discussions with other nations to share timber dues revenue.

We are working closely with industry to ensure stability and certainty in wood supply, which is important for continued capital investment. Major initiatives include supporting partnerships and assisting with the navigation of regulatory requirements.

Consultation and reconciliation. We have been working with our Indigenous partners to build relationships and increase participation in all natural resource sectors to ensure everyone benefits. Our government is committed to meaningful consultation processes and renewing our relationships with Indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnerships.

In closing, there are many ongoing activities and crucial priorities for our department. We are committed to building partnerships and continuing our ongoing discussions and consultations with individuals, industry and Indigenous communities across Manitoba. I am excited to continue working co-operatively with all stakeholders to fulfill our mandates and priorities.

I want to state again that this is simply a small sampling of our various activities and programs, and I look forward to exploring additional details as we discuss our departmental budget Estimates.

Thank you.

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

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

**MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** My opening statement will be much shorter than the minister's, because a lot of the questions I'll be asking are specific to things that he referenced in his speech.

So I just want to say that, on this side, we certainly recognize and appreciate all the staff that work for Natural Resources, and recognize the tremendous hurdles that they've had to overcome with shortages of staff and underfunding and all the things that we've talked about many times in the House and haven't really got adequate answers for. And maybe we'll pursue some of those issues today and going forward with this Estimates process.

So I look forward to the minister's commitment to giving really good answers to the questions so that the



people of Manitoba understand exactly what some of the plans are, going forward, and what some of the issues may be that the minister really should be focusing on and getting addressed.

So, thank you.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the member for those comments.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 25.1(a), contained in resolution 25.1.

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

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I'd like to acknowledge the senior staff from my department that are with me here today. To my immediate left here is Ryan Klos, the acting deputy minister. We have Todd Callin, the executive financial officer and assistant deputy minister of the Finance and Shared Services Division. We have Jana Schott, the assistant deputy minister responsible for the Parks and Trails Division. We have Matt Conrod back there, the acting assistant deputy minister of the Stewardship and Resource Development Division. And we have Kristin Hayward upfront here, the assistant deputy minister responsible for the Resource Management and Protection Division, and my special assistant over there, Colin Robinson.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

The floor is now open for questions.

**MLA Lindsey:** Appreciate the minister's staff being here to assist him in answering questions, and I look forward to those questions being answered.

So I guess we'll start with a few technical-type questions, if you will, upfront.

Can the minister undertake, or tell us today, a list of all technical appointments in his department, including names and titles?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Under technical officers, we have acting deputy minister Ryan Klos, we have special assistant Colin Robinson and my executive assistant, Cameron Wood.

**MLA Lindsey:** I thank the minister for that.

Does the minister have an organizational chart that lists all employees and program areas that he can share with us?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, the MLA for Flin Flon presumably has the Supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure in front of him, just take him to page 3—page 3. It says page 3, but it might be a little deeper in. There's a page in there that says, organization structure as of April 1st.

Would you like me to read through all that for you?

**MLA Lindsey:** I thank the minister for pointing that out in the book. I guess, is there anything missing from that chart, or does it break down any further into the operational ends of things that we need to be aware of?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** No, I believe this chart reflects our current organizational structure.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, somewhere throughout the Estimates book, does it list or show all the employees and program areas that the minister's responsible for? Just as an example, I see there's a box that says parks, but is there a more comprehensive showing for who all works as part of that division? Is there different divisions within the parks thing itself? And that would hold true for some of the other departments, as well, then?

\* (15:20)

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I don't have a breakdown of employee names. I do have a breakdown of full-time equivalent employees by department. Under Parks and Trails we have 156.15 full time; Manitoba Wildfire Service has 15—or 58.2 full-time equivalents; Resource Management and Protection, 207; Stewardship and Resource Development, we have 90; and in Finance and Shared Services we have 22, for a total of 533.35 full-time equivalent employees.

**MLA Lindsey:** I thank the minister for that.

So, I guess, I'm looking at a chart that's provided earlier on in the book, page 9 it's shown as. It talks about core staffing 2023-24; looks like 533.35 full-time equivalents and the previous year was 518.25 full-time equivalents.

So can the minister tell us where those positions have been added?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** As the member will see there, we had an increase of 15.1 full-time equivalent employees for '23-24, and they're all in the Parks and Trails division.

**MLA Lindsey:** Thank you for that.

So they're all in the Parks and Trails division, so can you give us some kind of breakdown as to what

those positions exactly are—that is it, like, conservation officers or is it people that are out chopping firewood, just so we have an idea of where exactly it is that you've added staff?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Not reflective in the 15.1 increase in Parks and Trails is, we have 7.5 full-time equivalent seasonal positions, too, to staff yurts at Childs Lake and the Nutimik museum and to be park ambassadors

We have six full-time FTEs in—to implement the new park strategy. Two of those are for help with the capital projects over our planned capital expansion here, and in our endowment fund project.

And we also have a couple for creation of strategic leadership positions for the division. We have a few more doing marketing on branding, data analytics and statistical analyzing.

We have two for park host and Indigenous partnership relations. We have a standards and training co-ordinator. We have a senior park interpreter for Indigenous programming, and we have a head of recreation that's going to lead strategic planning and policy development for directing outdoor recreation programming in our parks.

**MLA Lindsey:** I thank the minister for that.

So, some of the titles that he's given were—there's no people hired. There was numbers associated with them, others there was not.

So, can the minister give us that information as to how many of each position that he's listed have—are new hires?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I just want to reiterate that these are new positions—15.1 new full-time equivalent positions.

\* (15:30)

You wanted numbers for each particular position. Well, in the parks strategy capital and co-ordinating permissions in parks, there's six new full-time FTEs in there; 2.1 for strategic leadership positions to enhance our—to lead projects, basically, from start to finish and work with our stakeholders, Indigenous communities and other levels of government; we have one that's the marketing and brand lead for promoting provincial parks' brand, to liaise with Travel Manitoba, regional destination marketing organizations, conduct market research; we have one to take a look at all of our data and gain new insights into client behaviour, better forecast demand for services and potential impacts to revenues and help us measure all that; two full-time equivalents as park hosts and Indigenous

partnership relations, like I said; one for park standard and training co-ordinator; one for senior park interpreter for Indigenous programming; and one head of recreation.

Those positions are all in the process of being classified infill.

**MLA Lindsey:** Unfortunately, I can't quite write that fast, so I'll have to go back and review Hansard to grill the minister further on these positions.

So a lot of these positions are not in-the-field type; they're more the management end of things that is dealing with different things. It's not people actually in the park.

The minister did talk about some 7.5 seasonal positions. Is that new positions or is that positions that come up every summer type of thing, or every season, depending on what the season is?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Yes, I'm pleased to confirm that the 7.5 seasonal positions are new, on top of what we've had in the past.

Again, they are to, you know, staff yurts up at Childs Lake and work at the Nutimik museum and also as park ambassadors to focus on customer service for our park clients at some of our busiest parks.

As far as the other positions, I think that, you know, we're still in the process of determining where those positions will be in Manitoba. I don't want you to get the opinion that they're all going to be at the head office here in Winnipeg. As I said for some of them, I mean, they're going to be out and about.

For example, an interpreter for Indigenous programming may be out throughout Manitoba at parks, visiting parks and working on programming in parks. Our head of recreation, I mean, they're going to plan outdoor recreation in parks, so it would lead me to believe that they're going to be out and about in the parks, liaising with staff in parks to help them make the parks a more attractive and better place to be.

**MLA Lindsey:** So the minister's indicated that there's 15.1 new positions, given as kind of a breakdown of what they are.

So, have these positions been filled yet? Have those people been hired or are those positions yet to be filled and are presently sitting vacant?

It would appear that the minister's not quite sure where some of them are going to be stationed, or specifically what, maybe, their roles were going to be.

So if the 'mina' could—minister could expand on that a little bit so that we have a better understanding of just where these positions are going to be and what they're going to be, that would be greatly appreciated.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** As the member will appreciate, the new fiscal year started April 1st. These are 15.1 new positions for this year; we're currently in the process of classifying them, getting these positions ready to put out there for applications.

We're going to undertake recruitment and, you know, work is still under way, like I said, as to the best use of these positions in terms of location and where we get the best bang for the buck with the positions we have, to ensure that the—that we create the best possible visitor experience for Manitobans when they're visiting provincial parks. That's the No. 1 goal of these new positions, is to help with visitor experience and to help us with our capital expansion plans in terms of more facilities in parks—modernized facilities.

And so, I just ask the member to—just to understand that, you know, in government you have to classify these positions, you have to advertise them, of course, and then there's a selection process. So, that's all under way now; we hope to have them in place—obviously our park season is predominantly in the summertime, so we need to have these positions filled here in the next short order.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, I'm not sure—all the parks may not be the same, but I believe a goodly portion of them, May long weekend is kind of like opening season.

And the minister hopes to have some of these positions in place to assist with parks this season, and yet none of the positions have been filled. The minister hasn't even determined for sure what these positions are going to be, doesn't know exactly what they're going to get paid at yet and has to go through the entire hiring process before anybody actually shows up on the job.

So, any thoughts the minister might have on when all of this that he's just explained will be accomplished? Will any of these positions actually be in place this year?

\* (15:40)

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Well, I certainly want to assure the member that we're doing our best to get these positions filled. They were just approved in the budget, like I said. We have to classify them, we have to advertise and we're recruiting. Obviously, we want the seasonal positions in place as quickly as possible.

They're the ones that are out in the field immediately. A lot of the other positions will interact with stakeholders and things like that.

So, I mean, we're doing the best we can on them. I would certainly hope that the member would be excited that we've added 15.1 positions to our staffing, rather than cutting staff. You know, we're adding staff to create a better experience in the parks.

So, just ask his patience, in terms of hiring. I think he understands the labour shortage in the world, not just in Manitoba here. We're competing against a lot of other entities looking for employees and we need to go through the proper procedures of government to get our employees and just want to, you know, to tell the member my department's certainly doing the best they can to fill these positions.

**MLA Lindsey:** I appreciate that the minister may be doing the best he can. I just wanted to make sure that we understood that these 15 positions don't presently exist with human bodies doing the work, that that's somewhere down the road and it—some of them may happen soon; others, who knows when—if by the time you go through the hiring process and all the rest of that stuff, it could be in time for park season this year, it might be sometime this fall, it might be next year.

So, I just wanted to be very clear that when I look at the Estimates book and it shows that there's 15.1 more full-time equivalent positions, those positions are on paper only at this point in time. There's nobody in those positions. There's no extra people been hired. The rates of pay haven't been established. The duties for those positions may or may not be established yet.

And, certainly, the hiring process, I understand, does take some time to accomplish that. I just want the minister and anybody who may be listening or following along understand that those positions are not actual new hires at this point in time. They're proposed new hires.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Yes, I just—I think I want to be clear to everybody here today, and people listening, that these positions were improved in Budget 2023; 15.1 new positions. We're currently looking to fill these positions as quickly as possible. Like you say, we're going through the process, you understand the process of government. And, you know, my hope is we'll fill all of these as quickly as possible.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, can the minister give us a complete list of all the current vacancies and include in that list which departments are responsible for those vacancies?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, I can go through the five different departments here and give you the number of vacancies as compared to, you know, our full-time equivalents.

The Finance and Shared Services division: there's 22 full-time equivalent positions. We have six vacancies;

The Stewardship and Resource Development division: we have 90 full-time equivalents and we have 32.4 vacancies;

The Resource Management and Protection division: we have 207 full-time equivalents and we have 42.45 vacancies;

The Manitoba Wildfire Service: we have 58.2 full-time equivalents and we have 12.55 vacancies; and

In the Parks and Trails division: we have a 156.15 full-time equivalents and we have 15.9 vacancies.

**MLA Lindsey:** I thank the minister for that information.

So, some of these numbers are reasonably high, like 42.5—or, 42.45, excuse me—vacancies in a department. Is it the minister's intention to fill all of these vacancies, or they plan to leave a certain percentage empty?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Well, certainly, you know, in order to—you know, to fully implement all of our resource management and things like that, we need these full-time equivalents or we wouldn't have them. So certainly we're trying to fill all these positions as quickly as possible.

You know, at any give time, there's likely a few vacant and we're trying to actively fill them. Work is under way all the time with human resources to—you know, to advertise, interview and try to fill these positions.

\* (15:50)

But, like I said before, there is a, you know, worldwide shortage of employees and, you know, some of these positions are specialized positions, either in the wildlife area, fisheries area, you know, the finance and shared services area. We're competing with a lot of different entities for employees, and, you know, so, again, like I say, our department certainly wants to see all these positions filled, and we're working with human resources to do that.

**MLA Lindsey:** I appreciate what the minister's saying. Can he tell us, then, how long these vacancies have been in place? How many years? Can he give us the number for the last couple of years for

comparison's sake? Has it gone up? Has it gone down? Has his efforts since he's been the minister to get these positions filled actually accomplished what he said he's trying to do?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Yes, I've been told that about half of the employees have become—half of the positions have become vacant in the last year. Like I say, work is always under way to fill positions as they become vacant, but, you know, and we're doing the best we can. So that's—

**MLA Lindsey:** Well, thanks for that. I find that answer somewhat troubling that the majority of the vacancies that the minister is talking about have occurred in the last year. Seems that there's—must be a reason why that's happening. Is it everybody all of a sudden reached retirement age and left or is there something else going on? Is it shifting the department around that caused upset? There has to be some reason. Has the minister identified the reason why some pretty large vacancies, in some key positions, by the looks of it, within his department?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I don't think that government is any different from major companies that always have attritions with employees coming and leaving—or coming and going. You know, some of them may be to retirement. Some may be losses to private industry. Like I say, we're actively trying to recruit, and, you know, there's certainly no intent on our part to leave these positions vacant. We encourage people to apply for these positions, and, you know, we run competitions all the time, looking for these positions—looking to fill these positions.

So there's no big secret here as to why people are leaving or anything. I mean, we are—baby boomers are retiring, so I would assume that that would be a large portion of people retiring. And, again, with the worldwide labour shortage, it's just not as easy to recruit people. Sometimes you can run competitions and not get anybody applying, and you've got to run them all over again.

So, I think that to try to put a finger on why we had, you know, 50 vacancies over the past year, it's just not possible to put our finger on why we have those vacancies.

But we're actively recruiting to fill those positions.

**MLA Lindsey:** So then, perhaps the minister could give us a breakdown of the last few years of how many vacancies were year by year, going back, I don't know, five years or something.

If what he said earlier was that most of these positions became vacant this year, does that mean every year prior to that there was less vacancies, less attrition? If, as the minister suggested, that it's got to do with baby boomers, perhaps, that we know they were getting towards retirement age.

So, what steps were taken, as far as succession planning, if you will, to ensure that we had people in the employment pipeline getting trained, getting qualified, ready to assume positions when we knew that potentially we were going to have a lot of openings, if that's what the minister's suggesting?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Certainly, the staff we have, we're investing in training our staff, you know, and ensuring they're the best—can be the best possible people in the roles that they have to perform here in the province.

We don't operate a training academy. I think the member was suggesting we should have people in the pipeline ready to jump in and fill positions. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. I mean, we don't have people sitting on the sidelines ready to come into government when we need them. Thus, the ongoing recruiting aspect, you know.

I think that the member will recognize that we went through a couple years of COVID. I mean, that was an issue, too, in terms of recruiting. You know, people were hunkering down instead of going out and having jobs. They were leaving jobs, things like that.

So, you know, we appreciate all the employees we have in our department and we're certainly—work with the employees we have to ensure that they have great working conditions and are well taken care of.

And, like I say, we're certainly trying to run competitions and recruit people as quickly as possible to become staffed as fully as we can.

**MLA Lindsey:** While I thank the minister for that, he's referred it to being similar to a private industry that may have recruitment issues.

But most—although I shouldn't say—a lot of private industries would recognize that they need to start the hiring process and start training people, even at the entry level, so that people can keep moving up. But that doesn't seem to be what's taking place here with all these vacancies.

\* (16:00)

The other thing I asked the minister about was what—kind of, the vacancy look like going back for five years or so, even prior to the pandemic, where

there—these large vacancies, the minister said that most of them just became vacant in the last year. The other question, I guess, that comes out of that is, has the actual budgeted number of full-time equivalent positions in each of those areas been reduced?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I think that you will note by the budget documents that there's been no decrease in full-time equivalent employees year over year. In fact, there's been a 15.1 full-time equivalent increase in employees.

We continue to recruit all the time, whether they're entry-level positions or senior positions, within our departments. The recruitment effort continues. We encourage people to apply. It's—again, we want our department staffed up as fully as possible. There's no intent to leave positions open on our part at all. It's fill as many as we can; get the people working in all our departments to ensure Manitobans have a great experience.

**MLA Lindsey:** Something that the minister said at some point earlier in time about conservation officers, that there was a number of them that were hired, were—hired maybe isn't the right word, but were somewhere getting trained so that they could be hired. Perhaps maybe the minister could talk about that a little bit. Is there people actually getting trained so that they can become conservation officers, or is that a number like this 15.1 that's going to be someday?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I'm certainly glad to see the member's newfound interest in conservation officers here in Manitoba because, for the longest time, they were, I don't know what to say, treated as second-class citizens, but they certainly weren't put up as the true active third largest law enforcement agency in Manitoba that they are.

So, I appreciate his interest in conservation officers because I have a real passion for increasing our conservation officers here in Manitoba and ensure that a lot of the offices that had to be closed because lack of staffing perhaps can be opened here in the near future once we—once our training and recruitment ramps up even more.

We currently have nine conservation officers hired. They are—they were hired at the beginning of April. They're heading out to the Western Canadian Law Enforcement Academy in Lac La Biche, Alberta, for training in mid-May. It's a six- to eight-week course, which we then expect that these nine will be back here in Manitoba and posted to various positions around the province.

**MLA Lindsey:** I'm sorry that my line of questioning seems to be upsetting the minister a little bit.

Certainly, I've never had anything but the utmost respect for conservation officers.

I had a brother-in-law that was a conservation officer, who actually died in the service being a conservation officer, so I kind of take exception to the minister implying that I have some sort of lack of respect for conservation officers.

Nine positions have been hired. How many positions will still remain vacant after these nine come into being?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** It certainly wasn't my intention to get under the skin of my friend from Flin Flon there.

I know perhaps he wasn't part of the previous government, but under the previous government, the conservation officers service experienced a real decline, with many offices being closed across Manitoba and, you know, no one out there protecting our great natural resources.

But you know, I don't want to lump him in perhaps with that, but I think his previous government, he might admit, didn't pay as much 'attention' to the conservation officers as they should.

I just want to clarify my earlier remarks. I'd said six to eight weeks; it's 16 weeks of training at Lac La Biche, Alberta. So, in four months, we hope to have them back here in the field and out posted to district offices.

Now, we still have more work to do. We have 13 positions that are still vacant, and recruiting is under way at this point, and we hope to be successful in recruiting more people from across Manitoba, from the south, from the North, people who are looking for jobs in-working in the great outdoors here.

And, like I say, it's continuing. We hope to have a full staff compliment of 125.65 when we're done with our recruitment efforts to get up to that level.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, the minister's talked a little bit about the efforts they're putting into recruiting, particularly conservation officers.

\* (16:10)

A conservation officer in the province of Manitoba gets paid dramatically less than a conservation officer even next door in Saskatchewan. And I suspect that there may be some draw for people once they get trained, even, to take off and go to Saskatchewan.

Does the minister have any plan to actually have wages that are competitive with other jurisdictions so that we can hire and retain conservation officers?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I'm sure the member has budget documents in front of him that will show that the conservation officer service has received a \$7.4-million increase for '23-24.

We are certainly modernizing our conservation officer service. They've been lacking a lot of safety equipment, which includes, you know, many things that you would expect law enforcement officers to have in today's day and age. They've lacked a modern dispatch system for communications. We have a communications system but had nobody to talk to.

We've invested in, like I say, a lot of safety equipment for officers. We've invested in new trucks, unmarked vehicles, things like that to help them out on the field. We've invested in, you know, infrared helicopter surveillance in high-areas where there's high prevalence of poaching.

And so I just want to say that our conservation officer is very-conservation officer service is very important to this government, and I think you can see that by our commitment of \$7.4 million that includes staffing, safety equipment, dispatch and new equipment.

**MLA Lindsey:** Well, the minister talked about a lot of equipment that they're planning to spend money on, which, certainly, I appreciate that equipment has to be updated from time to time, and sometimes the world changes and, certainly, more safety equipment may be required than it used to be, and I appreciate that.

The question was specifically about attracting people by paying them competitive salaries.

Now, the minister and the union, I believe, had signed a memorandum of understanding that gave conservation officers, particularly, a small increase in pay. But it still doesn't leave them anywhere close to being competitive with other jurisdictions.

Does the minister think that if we paid competitive wages, we may have a better chance of attracting and keeping, particularly, conservation officers?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I think-to the member's point there, I think there's no doubt that, you know, salaries in any profession have to be competitive to attract people and retain people.

And, you know, the member's party, when they were in government, they had 17 years to-you know, to-he mentions Saskatchewan here. I'm certain Saskatchewan was here over the past 17 years, too, that he could've compared wages and got 'contervation' officers up to, perhaps, closer to where Saskatchewan numbers should be.

Our government's committed to—you know, to enhancing our conservation officers' service, but we also respect collective bargaining. You know, I think the member obviously knows that this particular unit is in collective—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please.

This section of Committee of Supply will now recess to allow the House to consider a leave request.

Committee recessed.

*The committee recessed at 4:18 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 4:19 p.m.*

**Mr. Chairperson:** I will now be calling this section of Committee of Supply back to order.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I think I basically answered the member for Flin Flon's (MLA Lindsey) question, just that, you know, we respect the collective bargaining process.

\* (16:20)

Conservation officers are represented by a union, and my understanding is their contract is up and they're currently working on a new agreement. They're one of, I think, 96 bargaining units within the union, and we'll respect the bargaining between the union and our government.

**MLA Lindsey:** I thank the minister for that, and I certainly do respect the collective bargaining process. And I understand the minister and the union came to an understanding to allow some kind of memorandum of understanding that allowed the payment of a small increase in wages, so I suspect the union wouldn't have said no to a bigger increase in wages in the interim, while collective bargaining was taking place. I'd be shocked if they'd have said no.

Having gone through processes similar to that, back in the days when I was part of negotiating committees, I know that unions did accept interim increases in pay, recognizing that workers needed to be attracted and kept.

So I think the minister could have done more with that 'memoranding' of understanding. And having spoken to the union, obviously, they'll take whatever they can get at this point in time to try and help members keep food on the table. But more could have been done, I believe, in the interim, if the minister was truly serious about making sure that the members—particularly conservation officers—were shown the respect they deserve, and were the minister serious

about making sure that he was doing everything within his powers possible to attract and keep conservation officers here.

So I think we'll move on a little bit from those discussions; we may come back to them again, because I believe I have some more questions about some of these other positions within this department that are, perhaps, lacking. So we can get more clarity at some point on those.

But in the interim, let's talk a little bit about fishing. The minister's also responsible for the department of Fisheries in Manitoba and commercial fishing, sport fishing, all those kind of things

So, can the minister tell me when the last time an actual—what's the term I'm looking for here—a survey was done, particularly on Lake Winnipeg, looking at the sport fishing seasons, in particular for walleye?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I guess I'd just ask the member to be a little more specific. Are you talking stock assessments? Are you talking length of season, start dates of season, end dates of season? What are you asking us?

**MLA Lindsey:** Well, I would assume that somewhere throughout the course of time, there's various surveys that are done that do address a lot of those issues or attempt to at least identify if they are issues, as far as when the season should start, when it should end, the number of fish in a limit.

The reason I ask that question is I've been getting some—particularly related to sport fishing—that some people have seemed to notice that, of late, in the early part of the season, they're seeing a lot more walleye that are full of eggs, and maybe suggesting that maybe the season should be different—closed longer, whatever. So they were wondering, particularly, when the last time a survey was done.

And again, it's specific to Lake Winnipeg, but there may be other lakes that have similar issues. Maybe these things are related to global warming or any number of other issues.

So just when was the last time any kind of survey that looked at those issues, when was that done for Lake Winnipeg?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, the member's question was about the walleye in Lake Winnipeg. So, we've been monitoring the spawning over the last 15 years, the department has, and the average date of spawning is May 25th. Later springs—and you get a year with a late spring like this—it delays spawning.

So the—our—we have a 2020 estimate of the Lake Winnipeg walleye stock at 8,906 tons, and indications at that time were that the stock is increasing.

**MLA Lindsey:** Could you get the minister to just repeat the last part of the answer that he gave just so I can make note of it, that last 15 years, there's a time frame where the spawning has been noticed. There may be a delay because of late springs. And then?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** As the member says, we've been monitoring spawning for the last 15 years, and the average date of spawning is May 25th. But we're noticing with later springs that there can be a bit of a delay on that; 2020 estimate of Lake Winnipeg, the total stock was 8,906 tons, and all indications are that the stock is increasing.

**MLA Lindsey:** I thank the minister for that.

Hopefully, that will clear up any issues, and it may just be that somebody's noticed in the last couple of years, because the last couple years, spring seemed to forget to come, so.

\* (16:30)

So, looking at fisheries, still, can the minister provide the number of tickets issued to Manitoba fishers over the last year?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Does—is the member looking for recreational angler tickets? *[interjection]* Okay.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Three hundred and fifty-four violations under The Fisheries Act in the last fiscal year.

**MLA Lindsey:** Is that just for Manitoba residents, or is it broken down so that we know it's Manitoba residents, other Canadian residents, residents from other countries?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** No, it's a total number of violations; it's not broken down to where the violator came from.

**MLA Lindsey:** Would that be a useful piece of information so that we know if particularly people coming fishing from other jurisdictions are likely the ones that are more prone to be overfishing, breaking the rules type of thing, so that specific rules, then, could be developed for foreign fishers as opposed to a blanket policy that may affect Manitoba fishers?

I'm just curious as to the minister's thoughts on more information as opposed to less. Would that be useful?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I certainly appreciate all the hard work done by our department and by RCOs and enforcement across Manitoba here.

And I think that, you know, we have started, since—under my tenure here as minister, to create biweekly reports that go out to the media across Manitoba that detail any major poaching, angling infractions and things like that.

We certainly want the public to know that, you know, illegal fishing or illegal hunting is not good, and we've endeavoured to, you know, follow some of these people through the court system and report back to Manitobans to show the good work our conservation officers are doing.

I mean, they're out there educating people, too, on fishing. And, like I say, when a ticket is warranted—there was 354 violations reported last year, and I think that's a testament to the work our officers are doing, and I certainly think that, you know, they'll continue their good work of monitoring the fish stocks here in Manitoba.

**MLA Lindsey:** I thank the minister for that interesting answer, if nothing else.

So, on page 10 of your departmental Estimates, it states one of your goals is to increase the number of eco-certified fisheries.

Can the minister break that down and tell us exactly what that means in practice, to become an eco-certified fishery? And how many do we have, how many are in the works or all that kind of good information.

\* (16:40)

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Eco-certification is certainly going to be very important for our commercial fishing industry. It's important today; it's going to be even more important tomorrow.

The buyers—the worldwide buyers out there—are looking for the stamp to make sure that, you know, the product that restaurants are buying and the public's buying out there, there's certainly more people discerning they want eco-certified fish.

So, to the member's question: The Waterhen Lake is eco-certified. And I was pleased this year since I became minister to congratulate Cedar Lake on becoming eco-certified in the North.

We're currently working with commercial fishers on Lake Manitoba, Lake Winnipeg and Lake Winnipegosis to, you know, to go through the steps



and the procedures involved in having those lakes eco-certified, which in the end will put more money back in the fishers' pockets, which is our goal, to ensure our commercial fishing industry is sustainable for fish stocks and for fishers, now and into the future.

**MLA Lindsey:** So the minister talked about some of the lakes that he's hoping to become eco-certified. Can the minister give me a sense of what that would mean, particularly for the commercial fishers on some of those lakes?

Will it affect their catches, their abilities to earn a living? Does it change any of those limits or anything like that, or is there other criteria that—

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Certainly, our department is always monitoring the stocks and the health of lakes and things like that and, you know, just because a lake is eco-certified, that work is not going to change.

I have no reason to believe that there's going to be any changes to quotas or to anything like that moving forward. Our two eco-certified lakes right now—Cedar Lake and the Waterhen—there's been no changes up there.

The goal of eco-certification is to let the industry and the public know that, you know, these fish are—fish and our stocks are sustainable moving forward and that fishers are using the proper practices when catching these fish and, you know, in the end, will provide more dollars back into fishers' pockets to create a better livelihood for fishers on our Manitoba lakes.

**MLA Lindsey:** Will there be changes in fishing equipment required by some of these commercial fishers in order to get that eco-certification for the lake? Is there specific things that will cost them money in order for that lake to get certified? And if so, is there any thought being given to how those costs will be recouped or covered or looked after?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I think the member will note that a few years back we had some changes to net sizes here in Manitoba. And I mean, net sizes are used to manage fish populations here in the province.

And, you know, there's been no changes since that initial change to net sizes. Fishers have adapted to that and, like I said before, our fish stocks are strong based on the 2020 survey and then the estimates moving forward here.

\* (16:50)

We certainly don't want fishers to bear the brunt of eco-certification. That's why we grant money to the International Institute of Sustainable Development that manages a sustainable fishers fund—fisheries fund—every year. Now, that fund can be access by commercial fishing groups, I guess individual fishers, if they're not part of groups, and it allows them to liaise, then, with the eco-certification body, work with them, do their own stock assessments, if they like, to determine the stocks in their particular area that they fish and to collect data that's going to be needed, you know, as part of the eco-certification process.

So, apparently we're one of the only provinces in Canada that provides funding like this to fishers to, you know, to participate in eco-certification, which, again, in the end, is going to put more money in their pockets.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, can the minister tell us how many consultation meetings he's had with each different fishing group from the commercial fishing end? Because I'm learning more about this file as I go because it's relatively new to me, but I know there is several different groups that have potentially different wants, needs and desires, depending on where they are on, particularly Lake Winnipeg.

And so, I would assume that you will have to meet with all of them and try and figure out the right answer and make sure you've heard what they've had to say and all those kind of things.

So, can the minister tell us how many of those have taken place?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I can't give the member an actual number of groups I've met with.

I think the member will appreciate, maybe, as he's learning this file, is that there's a number of groups of fishers out there representing different areas. There's smaller groups; there's bigger groups. What I can tell the member is I haven't turned down a meeting yet with any fisher group that wants to meet with me. We've had some introductory discussions.

A lot of the heavy lifting on this eco-certification is done by our fishery staff out in the field, liaising with these groups, you know, on a day-to-day basis, weekly basis, or whatever. These groups are well-known to our staff and vice versa.

I'm always open to meet with these groups, so if they have any concerns—I think, you know, any of the concerns I did hear from them was in terms of, you know, what it would cost them for eco-certification.

And, again, I addressed that in a previous question about how we have the sustainable fisheries fund that we work with these entities to ensure that, you know, finances is not a barrier to eco-certification.

**MLA Lindsey:** I thank the minister for that.

I look forward, as I go along here, talking to some of these different groups and just making sure that they have the sense that they've been heard, listened to. And, ideally, it would be nice if they talked to each other, too, and I'm not sure if that always happens the way it should either.

But, hopefully, as we go, we can make some of that happen.

Is there any—from what you've learned so far, what your department has learned so far—are there any groups in particular that are dead-set against equal certification, or are there some specific issues that they want addressed so that they feel comfortable with the eco-certification?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I certainly don't want to speak for the fishing groups here in Manitoba.

What I can tell you is I met with these groups and we shared information. I think that a lot of it is—lot of it involves communication, making sure that they're aware of, you know, what eco-certification means, what it will mean to them in terms of their day-to-day operations, what it will mean to them in terms of value for their product.

So, we're constantly sharing information with them and, you know, working alongside them to try to push this process along.

You know, in talking to our partners, the companies that they sell their fish to, like Freshwater Fish Marketing Corp. and Presteve Foods, I mean, they're also impressing upon fishers the value of 'ecor'-certification. Because the demand is there for that type of product now, and if we don't move at this on a fairly rapid pace here, we're going to be left behind on the world markets.

**MLA Lindsey:** I appreciate that. I just think it will go much smoother for everyone if everybody feels like they've been properly listened to and any issues that get identified are addressed. Maybe not a hundred per cent the way people would like them, but at least that they feel that they've been heard and that there's been some movement to make sure that—and education, obviously, is going to be a large part of it to make sure that all the different fisher groups understand the importance

of it and how it's going to affect them and what their role is in it and all those kind of things, so.

I think that would be the end of my questions for fisheries for today, at least.

And then, we will move on to forestry, perhaps.

So, having said that, can the minister tell me how many trees were planted last year?

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

## ROOM 255

### TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**An Honourable Member:** Yes I do, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

**Hon. Doyle Pivniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure):** I'm pleased to provide the 2023-2024 Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure supplements for the Estimates for the expenditures, which provides the information of the 2003 budget departmental activities and initiatives.

Manitoba has long been a proud history of the trade and transportation gateway. As you understand, you know, we were nicknamed the keystone province, and then because of the keystone province—we are the gateway when it comes to transportation east and west, from Ontario to the Prairie provinces.

And Manitoba—our vision is that—for Manitoba, over the next 10 years, to be recognized as a national and international transportation hub, linking east to west, north to south, to enable long economic activities within and across our borders.

Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure's budget of 2023 introduces, for the first time in Manitoba history, a five-year capital plan with key priorities to strengthen our investments and build the province's infrastructure to help realize our vision. Over the next five years, Manitoba plans strategic investments in

roads, highways, bridges, northern airports and flood protection will total \$4.1 billion, reflecting our government's commitment to building our economy, investing in Manitoba's future.

For the 2023, our public-facing, five-year strategic strategy expands beyond highway capital to include water infrastructure and northern airport capital. The plan reflects our four investment pillars: infrastructure renewal, climate resiliency, innovation and connectivity and economic development. It includes a minimum of investment of \$500 million per year on highway capital infrastructure, a total of \$2.5 billion over the next five-years, and plans to invest more than \$668 million in our water-related capital infrastructure, including and propose lake saint-Manitoba and Lake St. Martin's outlet channel projects to support climate resiliency and 'abitation.'

We have made significant progress in advancing through the environmental assessment process for the channels. We remain committed to fulfilling our obligation and working with-collaborating with Indigenous communities. This includes and estimating of an environmental advisory committee and committing of \$15 million to funds that will enhance Indigenous economic participation in the project.

Budget 2023 has increased funding for to maintain-maintenance of Manitoba's existing highways and water infrastructure by more than \$11.5 million. This is the largest increase in maintenance in the past decades. Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure includes to develop key initiatives to move us closer to our vision of Manitoba as the national and international transportation hub, with strategies to ensure that Manitoba receives the best possible value for their money.

One of the strategies is the Winnipeg One Million Perimeter Freeway Initiative. We have already implemented many immediate safety improvements, with ongoing improvements as Winnipeg continues to grow.

These investments are creating a modern freeway for a safer and more efficient Perimeter Highway, which would include the construction of new interchanges in St. Mary's Road, the McGillivray Boulevard, and to-and at St. Anne's Road.

The national trade corridor strategy aims to improve the fundamental safety and flow of Manitoba's most critical trade and travel corridors. The initial focus on the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway from Falcon Lake to the Ontario border, and

completing with the high-upgrades to Highway 75, south of Morris, and additional future improvements under the-this strategy.

In October 2022, Manitoba announced a critical, \$40-million investment for the expansion and future development of CentrePort south. We are pleased to see that Canada followed the-we look-we-correction here. We're pleased to see Canada follow the provincial commitment of another \$18 million under the national trade and corridor fund towards priority rail park infrastructure at CentrePort.

We recently signed a memorandum of understanding with my colleagues and governments from Saskatchewan and Alberta. Manitoba's unique gateway and hub initiatives cannot develop with-in isolation. External co-operation partnerships with our prairie neighbours will leverage our initiatives for success.

\* (15:10)

As we continue to improve our infrastructures within the province, ensuring the interconnectedivity and the co-ordination of across the-provincial borders are critical ensure-enabling our access to Canadian international markets.

Just today, we announced that a new Manitoba strategic corridors advisory council to be-advance Manitoba's economic growth and strengthen the province's position within today's shifting supply chains and trade corridors. This is the first initiative since signing the MOU. The new Manitoba strategic corridors advisory council will provide strategic advance to enhance and-the performance and resiliency of the province's transportation network, strengthening our transportation sector's contributions to the regional economy and improve provincial and supply-chain opportunities.

Another one-Manitoba's strategies is to invest in northern economic trade routes to forge a more prosperous future for northern communities and all Manitobans.

For example, we are investing \$74 million to existing railway line in Churchill. The Hudson Bay Railway line is important to northern economic development and provides access to Indigenous communities. In collaboration with the federal government, investments with the railway line to the Port of Churchill will-total of \$147.6 million.

The Trade and Commerce Grid Initiative will further advance Manitoba's highway network.

Once completed, the grid of strategic routes that support the heaviest highway loading will represent 36.5 per cent, or 7,112 kilometres of Manitoba's all-weather provincial road network, which 6,000 kilometres will be on the grid, already completed.

The three-year strategic route plan includes projects of the provincial truck highways 5, 21, 59 and 83.

Manitoba transportation, infrastructure will continue its efforts to build 'strategics'—strategies to foster innovations with work—smarter, deliver services and improve outcomes for Manitobans while ensuring the best value for money for all our investments.

That concludes my comments, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Now, does the critic for the official opposition have an opening statement?

**Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook):** Thank the minister for the opening comments, and I look forward to the robust discussion to be able to answer some of the questions that we have and Manitobans have.

And my understanding—some of the questions are going to kind of focus around some of the staff vacancies, as it's an issue here in the province and in the department, the inability to fill the vacancies; the channels project, as well; the crumbling road system and the major routes and not just—well, not just on the major routes, but also on the northern roads.

So I'm looking forward to this discussion and to hear from the minister some of the engagement strategies that he is implementing to further along some of the announcements that have been made over the last little while. Because I think most Manitobans want to see those announcements become reality and not just announcements for the sake of announcements in the election year that we've in.

So I'm looking forward to being able to put some questions and put some information on the record for all of Manitoba.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for the department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 15.1(a), contained in resolution 15.1.

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

**Mr. Piwniuk:** I'm so honoured to actually introduce my staff that have done a very good job in the last year since I became Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

First, I have my deputy minister, Sarah Thiele, beside me, and then I have deputy minister Blair McTavish beside her—assistant deputy minister, sorry.

And then I also have my chief of staff Tyler Slobogian, who is with us over here. And then we also have an assistant deputy minister Kristine Seier, and then we have assistant deputy minister Cynthia Ritchie on the side there. And then we have the assistant deputy minister Johanu Bota. Everybody knows him through—during the task force when it came to the vaccine.

And then we also have, beside him, is Russ Andrushuk is the assistant deputy minister. And then we also have Amber Zhang who is with Kristine Seier's region. So, we want to welcome them all here, right now. And I know I'm going to get good support from all of them.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the member for those introductions and we welcome all of the members, are all in attendance here today.

According to rule 78(16) during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceeding in a global manner, with questions put separately on all resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning is concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Bushie:** Just for—to expedite the process and get right into the questions, I only brought one staff member, Rylan Ramnarace, so, will introduce him, behind me. So that's—we'll compact that time and we'll get started right away. Very efficient.

I'd like to begin by asking the minister if he could provide us with a list of all the technical appointments in his department, including their names and titles?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Before we get—before I recognize the minister, I will welcome the opposition critic's staff to this meeting as well.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** I want to thank the member for the question.

I do have two technical appointments. They're on the list. They're still my previous ones that I had: Andrew Clark and Jeff Chochikov [*phonetic*], but now I've—now since—Andrew is now working with the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), I now have Tyler Slobogian, who is my chief of staff, and then Jory Nychuk has just joined us a couple weeks ago.

So we have two of them in my office.

**Mr. Bushie:** Can the minister provide us with an organizational chart that lists all the employees in the program areas?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Yes, for the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie), if you look on page 12 on the organizational structure chart for the Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure, 2023, you'll have all the members that—all my senior staff that were mentioned here, today.

Amber is just—actually would be underneath Kristine Seier as corporate and strategy and planning—or Finance and Administration. Right, Amber? Yes.

And so, these are this organizational charts with the different divisions within our department. So, we have Corporate Services division; Infrastructure Capital Projects, and then we have engineering and techno services; Transportation Operations; and Emergency Management.

\* (15:20)

**Mr. Bushie:** Can the minister tell us the current vacancies in each department?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** What we have right now, currently with the department in—as an entire department—is a 30 per cent vacancy rate.

**Mr. Bushie:** Can the minister then put a number to that 30 per cent vacancy rate in terms of what that number actually is?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Yes. When it comes to our full department, the amount of full-time equivalents—of FTEs—is about 1,825.3, is what's—is considered a full—amount of full-time-equivalent staff. And right now we have 589.4 FTEs that we're looking for to fill those positions.

**Mr. Bushie:** So just to be clear, then: the vacancy number is 589?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Yes it is. And the thing is, what we have done—this is January 31st, 2023.

We've actually—are now in a recruitment; we're doing recruitments for the last couple years, totally,

and making sure we do have—when it comes to our baby-boom generation—we have a lot of retirees that are retiring from the department, much like across government, and also in every industry in North America.

We have an aging population, and the fact is that the challenge, now, is finding human resources. And right now our department's going to different areas of trying to recruit new individuals. We are starting with the—when it comes to governments, like, when it comes to Corporate Services, with Kristine Seier's division, we are looking at STEP students; we're bringing STEP students in. We're bringing in, when it comes to co-op students from universities. That's kind of how we're trying to recruit them from a young age.

We're also working at engineering, making sure that we work with universities for recruitment. We've actually—I've actually sent—I think Blair actually has gone to the Ukrainian welcoming centre, because we have a lot of opportunity to hire Ukrainian refugees coming from Ukraine. A lot of them have, like, their certification when it comes to certification within—when it comes to equipment, heavy equipment operators, they're actually the same standards here in Canada as they're in Ukraine. So, we've actually hired a number of individuals there, from Ukraine.

So, we are actively recruiting. And when it came to staff from, you know, retired staff when it came to snow clearing, we had, probably, the third worst snowfall in Manitoba history last winter. We realized that with so many retirees happening, we've actually asked a number of them to be on standby on weekends. And also we've actually hired about 40 of them back to do snow clearing for us.

It's a challenge even with the private sectors when it comes to snow-clearing companies. They're having challenges of finding staff. It's happening like that all over, and—but our—we have actually, probably, initiated a lot of recruitment that other departments are actually copying us on how well we are recruiting in our department.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, the minister referenced 589 vacancies of FTE, and I'm just wondering what's the percentage, then, of part time and seasonal. What's that number?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** I just want to also put on the record here that when I give you the numbers for the vacancies of full-time FTEs, it was 589.4. February 28th, we got statistics, and it's actually improved by 547.4. So we're 'activry' recruiting, we're actually making headway when it comes to getting staff.

And at the same time, when it comes to seasonal part time, those—we hire them based on what is required, because we do have a number of employees that are seasonal who work for us for snow clearing, but then they may go to work in their own business during the summer to do their own work of other—if they are landscaping or if they have other options there.

But these are people that we hire continuously on a seasonal basis. And so, they're not included in the full-time E-F-T—FTEs.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, what is the number, not necessarily of vacancies then, of part-time and seasonal employees. What is the number?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** It really depends on what time of year it is too. It's basically we hire as we need them. So if we have, like, other projects that we need part time, let's say snow clearing or when it comes to special projects, we will hire them as needed.

But the ones that we have here, they're listed of 1,825, are full-time, regular employees.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, with that explanation, then, are you saying, then, there is zero vacancies in part time and seasonal?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** The—with the explanation when it comes to seasonal and part-time, like, workers, we hire them as we need them, and the fact is right now, when it came to snow clearing, we're in a transition right now when it becomes—between seasons of snow clearing versus summer employment, when it comes to students.

\* (15:30)

We do go to different areas of the province to hire students to work in our transportation infrastructure for additional staffing. And we've always done that throughout many, many years of summer recruitment when it comes to students who are either finishing—are in university between years or when it comes to, if they're old enough to work, from high school.

**Mr. Bushie:** I'm wondering if the minister could then provide us with the number of part-times and seasonals that were employed this last winter season.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** When it comes to tracking our regular full-time-equivalent staff in the department, again, that 508—like, 547 vacancies is basically the full-time of our staff and—our maintenance staff is included in that, that amount of vacancies.

And when it comes to part-time or seasonal, again, we don't really track that number because it's—it varies from—when it comes to snow clearing to transitioning into the summer season.

So, these are numbers that, again, we—when we talked about each month we have statistics of our full-time, that's where we track our full-time staff is—in the department, is the full-time employment. And when it comes to our seasonal, those are just hired and sometimes they're contracted out within department when it comes to snow clearing. Some of these people come back every year for snow clearing.

So, we don't have the actual numbers at this point in time.

**Mr. Bushie:** I must say that's a little disheartening that you don't know the figure that you're spending on snow removal last year for part-time and seasonal, as you referenced the number of FTEs you have, and you can track that number. But you're also have the part-time number, and obviously that's an expenditure, but you're not able to track that? Or you're not able to share that?

Or is that information that you can then provide with this committee?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** It is an ongoing revolving, when it comes to the—when it comes to seasonal work because, again, some people come and they work for a period of time, and then next time we might get a new group when it comes to, you know, summer students.

And so, these are very—like, when it comes to tracking, our focus right now is to make sure that we recruit for full-time employment. And we are actively recruiting. Like I said, with all these different venues that I talked about, is to make sure that, even when it came to our administration, our staffing for—now we're going to be putting prompt payment legislation on the—going forward, making sure that contractors are paid within a 30-day period.

We are—actually staffed up our department, and I can happily say that where we had a number of invoices in the thousands, are now under 100 invoices to be paid.

So, I commend Kristine Seier's division for the recruitment and getting the right—and getting the people in there to do the administration work, and we've actually been very successful in recruitment and we'll—we're continuing to do that same recruitment in all the—all five departments.

And we'll continue, again, we want—we have \$2.5 billion just on highways that we want to invest in, and we are going to make sure that we step up and we basically fill those positions in any way we can because we want to move this province forward, and we want to make sure that the opportunity of now signing an MOU with Saskatchewan and Alberta, we are going to get ready for what's to come, and Manitoba's looking so bright right now with economic development.

Our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) right now is looking at economic development in every corner, not just in our—in constituencies we're held, like the NDP. We want to make sure that western Manitoba is going to have economic development.

I know that—I think there's some of these—I think the leader's going out to Virden right now. But you know what, we were forgotten during the NDP days, the dark days of the NDP.

And the fact is now, we want to make sure that with the sign-up with an MOU with Saskatchewan, we are going to make sure that we have economic development and our highways are going to be busier. As our highways get busier, we're going to need to rebuild those highways and invest in those highways, and we're going to be recruiting people so that we can get our department and have success going forward and into the future.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, there was absolutely no resemblance of an answer there at all.

We were talking about part-time seasonal, and specifically in snow removal; and the minister referred back to the FTE and the vacancy rate there, and the need that they're only tracking—and the department is only tracking the FTE number, not necessarily the part-time and seasonal number.

But yet, there is still vacancies there, and obviously a difficulty in recruitment and retention in not just the FTE but also the seasonal employment, as the minister alluded to when he referred to private contractors and prompt payment and things like that.

But maybe if we can just kind of get back to the question and maybe look at maybe a snapshot then, or a window of time for the costs associated with seasonal and part-time. And let's, for sake of our winter seasons, let's say October the 1st until, well, we'll say April because we're sitting here and it's kind of raining and snowing outside as we speak, so we're not going to say we're out of the snow.

But if we look at what was then the budget for the part-time and seasonal in that window of time from the beginning of October 'til the end of, well we'll say the end of March because we're still into April.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** I wanted to just let the member know that the majority of our maintenance staff are full time, and very few are part time when it—or casual staff.

\* (15:40)

So in 2023, '22-2023 fiscal year, we actually had a salary of \$49 million point—\$49.6 million of total salary for the—for our maintenance. And, again, majority of it is—almost all of it is, except for a few part-time and casual workers, makes up for that amount of money that we've actually paid in salaries to our staff.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, the minister mentions that the majority of the staffing and the make-up then is FTEs and full-time positions. But yet the vacancy rate is 30 per cent, or 540-plus vacancies. So, obviously it's—the complement is nowhere near where it should be.

I'm wondering if the minister can then share with us, is there, then—if the rate is, I think he said 547—is there then 547 job postings out there?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** I just want to give, you know—when we came to recruitment just in between 2019 to 2022, in those few years, we've actually filled 1,100 positions.

So, the fact is right now, actively, we're—actually have 93 positions that are open for recruitment, and we're continuing to make sure that, once those positions are filled, we continue circulating for other positions when it comes to making sure—because those are priority ones that need to be filled very quickly here and—but we're looking at different perspectives of—when it comes to different qualifications, especially when it comes to engineering.

And, of course, we have five different divisions here. So, we're recruiting in every—all five of these divisions. Some of the divisions—I think EMO actually has—we're still looking for some staffing. We have actually increased the staffing so that we can actually provide more services when it comes to flooding and making sure that we work closely with all municipalities and working closer with Indigenous Services Canada along with First Nations communities.

So, we are recruiting all the time, and we want to continue recruiting, because, again, we have a lot of highways to rebuild and to invest in, and so we'll continue looking at recruitment.

Again, I have a lot of my colleagues who are ministers in other departments are having the same issues, especially with health care. And when it comes to other—you know, when it comes to education, it's getting harder and harder to find staff now because our—when I was in the financial service side, I remember reading a book called—Dr. David Foot, who wrote about demographics. And when the most people were born, in the peak in North America, especially in Canada, was between 1960 to 1964. That peak is actually going into the—into their 60s, and there's a lot of retirement happening right now. And the thing is, that is why we need to look at recruitment. That's why we also have to do when it comes to investing, like—and looking at immigration is important.

We also—one thing that we did was we did a lot of consultation with First Nation communities and had some really great discussions. But one thing that I always say during these discussions is that, look, you know, we're—in the North, especially, there's a lot of competition when it comes to mining right now. Lot of jobs are being provided, especially in the Snow Lake area. And there's a lot of taking of staff, especially in the maintenance areas of between—some of them go into the mines are—the municipalities are taking some of our staff. It's a challenge right now in the North.

And that is why it's important every time we meet with First Nation communities to say that—you know, there's a number of them, when we went to Nelson House, sat at their council meeting talking about their highway that we just announced that we're going to rebuild after 20 years that never—had been asking for. And we're finally get—we're delivering this year. And the thing was, we had actually a number of—in their community that actually were—are staff that are about to retire.

And every time I meet with the First Nation communities, I obviously say, look, we are hiring, we have careers for MTI staff. And we—what—we would love to see more opportunities for First Nations, especially in the North, to apply for a job within MTI.

**Mr. Bushie:** Again, nowhere near the answer at all that—from the question.

So, the question was about the 547 FTE positions and if there was a posting, then, for those 540-plus positions. And the minister made reference to, in the past, leading up to whatever point in time, that they had filled 1,100 positions and there was currently 93 open. So, earlier, the 540 vacancies, and now the minister is saying there is only 93 open.

So, does that mean, then, that the 400-plus vacancies are going to be, then, eliminated?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Yes, when it comes to the positions—the 93 positions—it actually, when these positions are posted, it actually, you know, assigns more just in—when it comes to more recruitment within those positions.

So, when 93 positions are posted, there could be—when it comes to one position, there could be four members who've applied for it and all four of them can be hired to making sure that—if they're qualified and they have some experience or they're able to fill those positions, we will fill four of those recruitments into the 93 positions.

Because again, when we get posted one position, there—might be able to hire four of them for that one position. So then, if it's a maintenance snow-clearing operator, we can—we put a position up there, we might have 10 people applying for it, but then we can have—we can actually have—employ four out of the 10, because they qualify, and then they fill four positions, not just one position.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, again, Mr. Chair, I'm looking for clarification, then.

So, there is only currently 93 positions being posted out of the 540-plus vacancies?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** There's—thanks, Mr. Chair—there's 93 positions on right now, being advertised for. But at the same time, out of those 93 positions, there could be four individuals who can qualify for one of those positions, and we hire four of those individuals to fill that position.

So, when it gets posted, there can be multiple opportunities for that one position. So that's why, right now, the stat shows there's 93 positions. There could be that—when it comes to an engineer, there could be three people that we're looking for under that one position.

So, when you advertise, you don't have three same positions. We advertise for one position, but there might be—we might be hiring for three people that have the same qualifications to fill three equivalent—three of those positions equivalently.

And that's—so, I've been—Kristine was just informing me that's how we do that, so that we're not advertising duplicate for the same position.

\* (15:50)



**Mr. Bushie:** Yes. Then, for clarification's sake, I'm wondering if the minister could then provide the titles of those 540-plus positions.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** When it comes to titles, like, not every one—every position has a title. There's positions that are—when it comes to a person with administration needs, when it comes to—they may be a clerk 1, or classified that way, but not a title.

But—we can do is we can actually get more information on the 500 vacancies and making sure that they come in different categories, and which divisions that these vacancies are at, and we can get more detailed information on the breakdown of the positions that are needed in our department.

And, like I said, not all of them have titles. They have—may have classifications, but not titles.

**Mr. Bushie:** Okay, then just to confirm, then, that the minister will undertake for the committee, then, to provide the listing of the 540-plus, whether it be by title or whether it be by department or wherever they go, but he's going to break down the 540-plus positions, rather than just the 93 positions.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Yes, that's correct. We will have a breakdown of when it comes to some titles, but we'll also—breakdown of the qualifications, the classifications of those positions and we'll bring down—be able to report at a later date when it comes to those statistics.

**Mr. Bushie:** I thank the minister for that undertaking.

I do have another follow-up question: When it comes time to—the snow-clearing part of that, I'm just wondering if the minister can provide the committee with the total value of the private snow-clearing contracts from this past season?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Mr. Chair, I just want to clarify with the member, it's the contracts that were for the snow removal for private—or what—is that what you were asking?

**Mr. Bushie:** Yes, for private contractors that would have taken on or assisted in terms of the various maintenance yards in Manitoba, so what—but the value of the private contractors that were hired to do that work.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** I just wanted to let the member know that when it comes to our snow removal, there's different levels of clearing and—level 1 and 2.

Level 1 is going to be the ones that are major routes, when it comes to, you know, when it comes to

the policy that we have—there is we do clearing within four hours after it's okay for our—safe enough for our staff to go out on the road and clear—be able to clear.

So, these are all done, levels 1 and 2 are done by our own staff and our own equipment. And we have over 350 pieces of equipment for clearing of—snow clearing, and we added another 17 pieces of equipment. When I say 17 pieces of equipment, it is machines that are much bigger, much more powerful, that we could get more area done with those machines.

So, we—our government has invested in equipment, and we'll continue investing in equipment so that we have—more efficient when it comes to snow clearing and we get more roadways done with that same equipment, Mr. Chair.

And so, when it comes to those levels, we do provide with our own department.

But when it comes to level 3, and is only level 3, we do have some—and we do do a lot of it our own—with our own equipment, especially if it's within the area where we can actually get through it once we do levels 1 and 2, we go and do—continue with level 3 so that there's secondary roads. But we also have—we have good relationships with our municipalities. And a lot of times—I come from a small town, and a lot of times municipalities have their equipment out there, too, and some of the secondary roads, it just warrants that, you know, if we can have an agreement with them, then they can get that—those—the third level done a lot quicker than, say, if it went by the time that we do our first and second levels.

So, this gives us an opportunity to actually work with municipalities, and we've actually—with municipalities, we actually—during these agreements, because of the gas prices and fuel prices, and—we've actually indexed, made sure that we were able to increase that, for that extra cost.

So, we work really well with municipalities. And we know the importance of working together because, at the end of the day, it's Manitobans that need to get to work, need to get—for emergency issues. We want to make sure our highways are ploughed and maintained.

And the thing is, we operate within our budget. Very little that we actually do with supplementing with the private sector. And so, we do—occasionally, we do actually have the private sector that sometimes helps us out, but I know the City of Winnipeg quite often gets private sectors to do a lot of their snow clearing duties.

And so, again, we—I feel that if we invest in human resources and equipment, we can get a lot more highways done on a more efficient way.

\* (16:00)

**Mr. Bushie:** So I'm wondering, then, can the minister, then, break down, I mean, not interested, totally, in the level 1, 2 number that the minister referred to and that the Province is taking on the level 1, level 2. We can have that—a discussion on that at a different time. But when you refer to other levels, levels 3 and 4, and 'parturing' with the municipalities, and further to that, it went on to talk about, you know, private.

So is there, then, a breakdown of the snow-clearing contract dollar amount value with the municipalities and also a separate breakdown with a private contractor?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Just wanted to give the information to the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) that our total amount that we've actually—we have with the 32 agreements that we have with municipalities is \$417,000.

And it's very small compared to the rest of their budget. Like I said, a majority of—like, again, levels 1 and 2 are all done by our own equipment and snow-plow operators and maintenance operators, and the other—we only have level 3. So, that's level 3 that we do have some work with the municipalities, and, again, it's the total up to 1,400—\$417,000.

But when it came to last year's third worst winter in history when it comes to snow amounts, especially in the Winnipeg area—the region—we probably would've only really hired—because the challenge was every time you actually plowed, and I saw the City, too. Their—the challenges were—I remember a lot of cars going around the city of Winnipeg with smashed-in fenders—front fenders—because they couldn't see the visibility when it came to intersections. I remember seeing many situations where people came—close calls. I remember, you know, you had to roll into an intersection.

And those are the challenges that we saw with municipalities last year. And lot of times there was never time for some of those intersections to be even cleared because one snowfall after another came, and it's within days of each other.

So the only way I—when it came to our—working with the private sector, it was only just to remove big snowbanks that we couldn't get to right away because the fact is, again, we're on a—continuously of plowing

snow, on almost on a daily basis. So, we actually provided opportunities to use the private sector just to help us with that extra amount.

I know there's—if you go down Trans-Canada Highway, there was times where there was actually when they—it's nice to put trees and shelterbelts, but when you have a winter like we had last winter, that snow gets piled up in that shelterbelt, and that would actually—the piles got really high. Once we plow it, accumulation of plowing and snowblowing—we had to remove some of those piles.

And so, we would have used the private sector to do those types of operations. But, like I said, last year was the third worst winter on history, and we had to use the private sector for those special arrangements.

But when it came to this coming winter, we didn't have a harsh winter. We—like I said before in question period, we were always prepared for the worst, but hoping for the best. And we actually had a half decent winter. We had a below normal snowfall, even—especially in the southwest corner, throughout the Red River.

I think—thank God we dodged a bullet when it came to North Dakota. I think they had some major challenges. I've actually went to a funeral in Omaha—a family member—and I remember driving through there and there was—they—I went between snowstorms, and they—that was in February, and they kept on getting snowstorms. So, we were fortunate. We did—we were preparing for it, but we never had those snowstorms.

So, the thing is we really didn't really use the private sector much this year because we never had to because we had better equipment. We bought that 17 new pieces of equipment that got more of our—clearing of our snow.

And we also went back to recruiting back some retired employees that, you know, they retire, they feel that—sometimes people retire and they realize that hey, you know, I'm kind of bored now. And we had the opportunity to pay them standby and have opportunities to have them drive our snowplows.

Sometimes you always have—there's crisis, but there's also opportunities within those crises.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, we came awfully close to an answer there, anyhow. We got half of it with the 417 K for municipal, and the minister had made reference then to the private sector and the need and the use that they had done this past year.

So, now I want to expand on that question a little bit when I talk about the private sector, then. Can the minister then provide us with the private sector snow removal contract's value for this year, as well as last year?

\* (16:10)

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Yes, when it comes—this past year we actually had a, like, a historical snowfalls, and when it came to the budget, you know, lot of times when it comes to our budget, we do—most of the budget is spent on our current staff, our equipment, and so we basically spent our operation budget.

And this past year, because of such an unusual year historically, we actually spent an extra \$20 million just to make sure that the roads were clear, and a lot of that \$20 million was our own staff and our own equipment. And all of it was to do with overtime from our staff. Also it was casual workers that came back, like I said, retired workers, who had the opportunity to come back to help us with our maintenance snow clearing.

And so, the thing is we have now, knowing that are we in a cycle of snow, we actually increased our operation budget to \$10 million. Actually that's an \$11.3 million of an increase, because we know that it's—we hear from the Manitoba Trucking Association; we met with them many times; we have a great rapport with them. They like the ideas that we're investing \$2.5 million just on highways alone, the announcement and the actual tendering right now and the reward that's going to go out there soon for highway 75.

We are—like, we're investing historical amounts of money, and the thing is, at the same time, we know the maintenance. We listen to the supply chain issues that we have with trucking industry and we want to make sure that we go back to a 24-7 operations.

And that is why we spent more money this past year to make sure that—I know, understanding that the NDP actually reduced weekends when they were in power, and now we are making sure that we are standby when it comes to weekend coverage, when it comes to our retirements. They're coming back to help us, or some casual workers.

Again, we are making sure that our highways are clear and we want to make sure that any way we can do it, is that if we have emergencies like we have during the flood—we had the second-worst flood on history this past spring—and the thing is, we do have an operation budget that making sure that we have,

when it comes to unforeseeable situations, that we're prepared for those.

And that's kind of like our motto when it comes to our department: we're preparing for the worst but hoping for the best. And hoping for the best now is when I give my report today that, you know what? I want to make sure that we don't have to worry about this flood as much as like we did last year, and we can actually focus on repairing and rebuilding our high-way infrastructure.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, I was also hoping for the best and hoping for some pretty clear and decisive answers.

So, the minister had mentioned that the overall snow clearing budget then increased by \$20 million; then also made reference to the fact that the municipalities were \$417,000.

But the question was about during the snow removal process, the amount that went to the private sector and understanding that the minister had again made reference to the fact that current staff had done overtime, over and above, extra time and albeit the—I really have to say my appreciation to those employees that did that.

I know a lot personally from my area that took that on, but, at the same time, in certain circumstances it was—no matter what they do it wasn't enough. You can only work so many hours in a day; you still have to go home and spend time with your families and rest and things like that.

So, there was a private sector that was brought in to do some of this work, and the question was, how much of those dollars was actually spent to the private sector.

So, I'm thinking that's a pretty straightforward question to ask. Obviously, the minister was able to provide the number to the municipalities—and a very specific number—\$417,000.

So, I'm just wondering, then, can he provide, then, that specific dollar amount that was used in the private sector to take on the snow-clearing process?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** And when it comes to the question that the member gave us—asked me—is that, you know, when it comes to maintenance contracts that we have with everyone, when it comes to our operations, is basically we don't—we're not—we can't predict what kind of weather-related events we're going to have, what kind of winters we're going to have.

We have an operation budget that is set out. We've increased it by \$11 million this past year, and the thing is we have contracts. We have employees, we have staff, we have equipment ready to go. But, at the same time, we're not quite sure what's coming at us all the time.

And so, what we do, then, is we make sure that we have some side contracts with municipalities—municipalities on an ongoing basis. We know that because there's a contract that we have an idea what the cost could be when it comes to budgeting.

But when it comes to the type of winter, we could have no snow, and we had winters where we had no snow. The thing is, then we have other situations where when it comes to our operations, where we might have, when it comes to rain events in the summertime that didn't really have this—it wasn't caused—the floods didn't cause—by the snowfall, but it was caused by excessive amounts of rain.

So, we always have to prepare ourselves. Manitoba is a very—it's not like certain parts of Saskatchewan, and I saw the comparison. We were compared to Saskatchewan, and when it came to last winter, they hardly had any snow. If you go beyond the Saskatchewan border—there was no snow here, but as soon as you came past Brandon, we had a winter that never ended in the Red River Valley.

So, you never know where the situation's coming from. We had a winter like—again, we had a spring; it wasn't so much the winter. We were spared by the last winter's snowfall. Thank God they were Alberta clippers that came our way, and that was very dry precipitation that comes, and it comes into our waterways and melted. We were spared when it came to the spring thaw of last year, of 2022.

But I said to my department: I come from a farm. My concern, and my dad always told me, is when those Colorado lows come; those are the concerns that I have. And the thing was we had one coming one after another in the month of April. It started the weekend of Easter, and every weekend—I think we had six weekends in a row—of Colorado lows. Who can predict that?

And so, this is where, when it came to our flooding situation, our operations out there is for trying to foresee what's coming at us. And we probably had one of the worst case scenarios when it comes to—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please.

I would like to advise the committee that the House will be briefly reconvening to consider a leave request.

As such, this section of the Committee of Supply will now briefly recess and reconvene once the leave request in the House has been considered.

Committee recess.

*The committee recessed at 4:18 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 4:20 p.m.*

**Mr. Chairperson:** We will now resume this Committee of Supply.

\* (16:20)

The honourable member for—or, the honourable minister, I will let you finish your answer about Colorado lows.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Okay, I'll start [*inaudible*] with that.

Well, the thing is, we ended up having about six of them and—six Colorado lows—and the fact is, that's where we had to use our operating budget when it comes to the flood situation. And so, this is where we—like, when it comes to having people on standby—we do have, like, staff. We do have, you know, what—maintenance equipment and stuff like that.

But there's some times we have to hire more, because we might have an emergency that—we may have two weeks of—in the case of last spring, we had almost, like, two months of emergency—our staff working full—extra hours trying to 'fut'—fight the flood, and—I'd better watch all these F words here—and then be able to maintain, so that people had safety, people were evacuated if they needed to be and our staff were out there on a continuous basis.

So, these are circumstances that we have when it comes to weather events, and so this is what our maintenance budget is all about. And sometimes you have to have some contracts out there, if it's either private or whatever it is, to making sure that we can act on them when we have emergencies.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, the minister made reference to—just in his last few seconds there—was you have to have private contracts. He referred to having side contracts. So, again, I'm looking for that dollar amount. And the minister had referenced, you know, it's hard to predict the future and I agree on that point. But we're talking about expenditures that have already happened.

So, the question specifically was what dollar amount was spent on private snow-clearing contracts. And I'm not talking about the future, because we don't know what that's going to be, but I am talking about expenditures that have already happened over the last two years.

And the minister made reference in his last response to having those side contracts—having to have them, for that matter—but also side contracts and contracting municipalities. And he did break down a municipal number of \$417,000.

But again, how much of that was private contract dollar-amount value?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Well, you know, Mr. Chair, when it comes to—these are Estimates for the upcoming year of the budget of 2023-2024, and the thing is these are Estimates that we're supposed—we're talking about here.

And, the fact is, we're talking about the Estimates because, when it comes to if and when we need contracts—it could be pieces of equipment, it can be services by private contractors—we just can't put a figure amount on there. It's in our overall operations budget, and so, the fact is, there is not a set amount or even a consistency. It is only when needed.

And you know, the member has to realize that if he goes back into the days of the—when the former NDP government was on—doing the same thing, they had the same standby offers when it comes to private contractors. Because, again, you can't all of a sudden build up a—you know, just in case and have all these operations just sitting there. We sometimes have to go to the private sector to get some of those services.

But we're hoping, like I said, we do—majority of our operations are with our own equipment and our own staffing. So, to give an amount like that—again, this is a budget that we're focusing on, and the fact is, we have to have an operations budget here and—but at the same time, we are increasing our equipment.

You know, this is one thing I have to say about the NDP—from the dark days of the NDP—they didn't do anything about—when it came to deferred maintenance. We inherited a billion-dollar deficit from them, but we also inherited bad highways, we also inherited bad—when it came to infrastructure of schools and hospitals, I remember we had to make a number of announcements to put new roofs on schools.

And I remember also this Legislature. Not one thing was done in this Legislature, and since we came

into this government here, we are putting close to a hundred—was it 10 years of \$15 million, or is it 10 years of \$50 million, but we're putting this money into this Legislature because it's almost like, when the NDP were in power, they never did anything when it came to rebuilding. They focused on—they overspent in every department, and but they never invested into infrastructure and maintenance.

And so, this is why we are going to—we are listening to industry. We are making sure that we are—our goal is to have 24-7 when it comes to snow clearing, and we are spending record amounts of money on rebuilding our highways, because we feel that—right now, that Manitoba is in a very good position to grow.

We just send—signed an MOU with Alberta, Saskatchewan, and one thing I said—one of my cousins who's a truck driver said to me, from Russell, who drives in both Saskatchewan and Manitoba, he said one time when the NDP were in power, the highways were in really bad shape.

And he said Saskatchewan had far better highways. And now he said the other—like, when I was meeting with him last November, and he said that our highways are starting to compete and actually surpass Saskatchewan highways.

So, the seven years that we've been in government, we've actually improved our highways, rebuilt our highways, and we're going to continue doing that because the fact is, we know that highways and infrastructure is the best investment to grow the economy.

And, right now, the excitement of the opportunities that we have in the North now, we've actually invested \$15 million in the Thompson airport to help with them to rebuild their terminal. Again, this is the second-largest cargo and activity of any airport besides the Winnipeg International Airport—Richardson International Airport.

So, this is an opportunity to look at the North to have opportunities working with First Nations to have a trade corridor up in the North, and I'm excited about that. I am excited that we can work with Saskatchewan and Alberta, and working with First Nations, because there is opportunities in the North. There's opportunities in the south.

We just now built our first potash mine. I was partly involved with that, with the—making sure that our government actually, you know, continues to allow economic development to happen in every corner of this province, and we'll continue. And this is

also investing in our highways and investing in our maintenance of our highways.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well again, no answer there, but I must say, I feel for your family member who's a truck driver. That must have been a very uncomfortable conversation to have when you let him know that you voted against legislation that would have allowed him to use the bathroom when he was going about his business at work.

So, that must have been a very awkward conversation to have when you talk about support for truck driving and that—and you actually go against that and talk out that legislation.

So, again, the minister is refusing to answer the question, and the question was about private sector contracting for snow removal, and again, the minister talks around the answer, admits that they have side contracts, admits that they have to have contracts, and those are his words, have to have those contracts.

Well, it's a simple matter; sometimes those contracts have to exist because of the 30 per cent vacancy rate, because of the 540-plus vacancies in that—in his department, which the minister conveniently wants to talk about the past, but doesn't want to talk about the future and vice versa. Some—whenever it's convenient. But the fact of the matter is that those vacancies are under his department today, and under his government's department for the last number of years.

But again, refusing to acknowledge and answer the question about the privatization of his very own department, which is very unfortunate. Rather take us down memory lane as to, you know, the Colorado lows and all the expectations. We can't predict the future. We can learn from the past.

Well, it's clear that's not happening here, and I must say the questions that I have should have taken just a matter of minutes. You know, it would be no issue whatsoever. Just simply I'm asking about vacancy rates, asking about budgets, I'm asking about dollar amounts spent in various areas, and the minister has refused to answer that on a number of different occasions.

\* (16:30)

So, it's clear there's some kind of—the private sector-dollar amount secrecy in this department that is very unfortunate.

And for the 540-plus vacancies that are there, those are Manitoba jobs that are not going necessarily to Manitobans anymore, but rather being spent on,

again, as the minister puts it, side contracts and things they have to have. And those, again, are the minister's words, and we can look in Hansard and that's exactly what those are: have-to-have contracts.

And I would beg to differ, that those are, in fact, not have to have. We should be investing in our people, in our communities, in our departments and in our public sector. And it's clear that's not happening here, but the minister still is not—is just kind of dancing around that question, and it's unfortunate.

So, just for the record, we will point out that the minister has—on a number of different occasions now, over the last number of questions—refused to answer the fact about how much dollars were spent on private snow-clearing contractors here Manitoba. When we, time and time again, have had these vacancy rates increase, have had these dollar amounts—and, by the minister's answers, increased his own budget by \$20 million, but still has a vacancy rate of 30 per cent.

Of which, that 30 per cent, those 540-plus positions, he's only posting for 93, 'hopening' that there'll be a big pool of people to draw for—or draw from, when the fact is Manitobans would like to know what they're applying for, not—knowing there's 93 positions, let's hope for the best. You know, if I'm the best of—I'm the top 93 out of those 540, then maybe I'll get a job, maybe I won't. Manitobans want to know what they have and what they're capable of doing, because we have great confidence in Manitobans.

And I know the minister has referred to, time and time again, the past and those things like that, but the fact of the matter is those kind of terms of, you know, the previous government, this minister is part of the previous government, you know, going on six-plus, seven years now. And these are accumulations of all of those decisions.

And, again, the minister's refusal to answer a simple question—and it is a very simple question, and I'm sure it's just a line item in his department that he doesn't want necessarily everybody to see—that, why not show us? Why not show us exactly what that private contractor dollar amount is?

So, I, again, with—I'll give the minister one last opportunity to kind of put on the record, what exactly was that dollar amount for private snow-removal contractors?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Well, Mr. Chair, you know, that's—you know, coming from the member from Keewatinook, when it comes to, you know, when it comes to even

private jobs that—from snow removal, these are also Manitoba jobs, too, for his information.

And if the member wants to find out that in 2023–'22 and '23 year, which we had historical snowfall—historical snowfall—which we spent over 20 more extra million dollars on maintenance, only \$1.2 million, less than 1 per cent, was—went to private sector contracts—hourly clearing rate.

So, the thing is, if the member can take those words back. But the thing is, again, less than 1 per cent of a year that we had of—historical rate of snowfall with an increased \$20 million, this shows you that a lot of that cost went into our existing staff, our equipment and for working with municipalities. It was only 14 points—417,000—\$471,000—or \$417,000 when it came to municipalities. So, it is still within our department.

And so, the thing is, with \$20 million extra snowfall—maintenance—this also included the flood. Again, you really don't know what's coming at us, but historically, we had the worst snowfall and we've—spared that, but we had the worst flood situation.

And not only did we have floods that happened just in the Red River Valley like we're having this year, we had water coming from the Whiteshell. We had to do some maintenance by the roads by adding extra fill so that people can get off their properties in the Whiteshell area.

We also had, you know, water coming from every direction in the Porcupine mountains. I'm no—quite sure if a lot of those members know where all of these geographic locations are in rural Manitoba.

We also went to—you know, we had water coming from the Riding Mountain, which—we were in Minnedosa for that flood. We were in—we had a helicopter from—going to the Duck Mountain and the porcupine mountains. We had the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and even your leader at—going down the Red River and—to Peguis. We had a tour in the Whiteshell.

So, we had water coming out of all directions. And, like I said, these were—private sectors was only \$1.2 million of the extra costs that we had to have for this coming year.

So, if that—the member—I've answered that question. And, like I said, we always need private sector contracts to make sure that—we use them when we need them.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, I thank the minister for finally answering that question. That really took some time to get a number that was probably right in one of the

front pages of the documents that he has in front of him.

So, the minister made reference many times to flooding and we've had historical flooding here in Manitoba. We've had floods of the century, storm of the century we've been calling it, but it's almost become the norm and not the exception anymore.

So, we've had a number of devastating kind of weather events that have happened, whether it be snowfall or whether it be excessive rain over periods of time. And, again, one of the projects that's been sitting dormant here in Manitoba for quite some time, is the Lake St. Mark [*phonetic*]-Lake Manitoba project.

And, as the minister alluded to many times in his—in some of his previous answers, you don't know the future and you don't know what's coming. We've come off—in the last couple of years now—historical snowfalls and record snowfalls, which, of course, leads to a lot of flooding in areas that may—some areas, maybe, are used to that flooding and have made kind of infrastructure investments over time to help alleviate any kind of impacts that may have.

And then, we have others that don't, and others that have been promised time and time again to actually have that work done and have that work completed, so that in the case of an extreme weather event—flooding, excessive snow fall, et cetera—that they are prepared.

So, the channel project is a large, historical project for the province of Manitoba, and a large project for the Interlake and the First Nation and not-First Nation communities that reside in and around the area.

So, I'm just wondering if the minister can then tell us what's the timeline for the Lake St. Martin-Lake Manitoba project, and when will construction start and when will it be completed.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Well, the project should have been started 2021, I believe.

The thing is, we were ready for it, and it's basically under licence review. And the fact is I would ask the member, you know, he—his federal counterparts are part of the Trudeau-Singh coalition government, and if he would only, you know, say that—how important this licensing is for this province.

You basically said it yourself. It is so important for these First Nation communities. You know, it was the NDP who put the emergency channel through that

devastated the environment. And the thing is, we don't want to use that emergency channel anymore. And the thing is, we are consulting with our First Nations—to making sure that we've consult with many—and our team, along with Cynthia Ritchie here, has gone out and gone to many, many meetings with First Nations to—making sure that there's consultations and that we actually get approval for the environmental licence—licensing.

I know it took years for—and it's been approved for the Deltaport in BC. Finally the federal government has basically approved it, just in the last week, and now we'd like to see the approval of this licensing because we're ready for the construction.

We have—always have been ready for the construction. We'd loved to put the tenders out there, and we're ready for it. And we've actually had it in our budget many years—a couple years now, I think. How many? Three years? Four fiscal years that we've had it in our budget. We're just waiting for the federal government.

So, if you can help us and to get your coalition government in Ottawa to approve this licence, it would save a lot of communities in Manitoba.

\* (16:40)

**Mr. Bushie:** Just to clarify, the only coalition government is with Brian Pallister, this government here in Manitoba. That's the only coalition that ever existed and still exists to this day here in Manitoba.

But, again, that's just a talking point for a government here to be able to try to deflect that away.

And the member had mentioned—the minister had mentioned the fact that this should have been started in 2021. So, I will ask for clarification, and from the minister, specifically, what are you waiting for on the federal government to do on the environmental process?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Before I recognize the honourable minister, I would just remind the committee and those posing questions and answers to direct them through the Chair.

Thank you for that, and the honourable minister.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Mr. Chair, like, when it comes to—it's—I'm not quite sure how more I can explain it. We need a licence approved, and we're waiting for the federal government to approve this licence. And we've actually submitted all our requests at the federal government. We've actually had two different times that we've

actually submitted the licensing, and they want more information.

They—we've done everything possible to—how important this is to Manitobans. I know a lot of communities, especially when it came to First Nation communities, were very impacted, like the St. Martin First Nation community, Lake Manitoba First Nation community. They were all impacted by this, by this devastation of the 2011, 2014 flood. I know that for myself because a lot of that water came from the western region,

The thing is, you know, one thing we've actually saved, and even when I've been co-chairing the EMO FPT, which is federal-provincial-territorial meeting, with the Minister Bill Blair, and I've been having a number of conversations with him to say how important his environmental minister has to—Guilbeault, I think was his—is the Minister of Environment—to prove this because the fact is, even Bill Blair has said that, for every month, every dollar we spend in infrastructure mitigation, flood mitigation, we probably get it back 27 times more of saving property.

And when I—when he and I were talking because of all the—and he's been keeping an eye on what was happening with us when in these—the devastation of these Colorado lows that were coming in in the month of April-May, our conversation was, like I said, you know, you're lucky that we're not getting as much in the western region because this could be devastating to Lake Manitoba. And I kept on telling him that we need to get this licence approved so that we can actually start this project.

We don't want to be having emergency channels that the former NDP government did to cause more environmental issues. So the thing is, let's do it right. Let's get it done. It's get it—it's get approved because we have a design. We have it all set up. We're ready to go. Our contractors are ready to go.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, the minister made reference to the fact that now the federal government is asking for more information.

Can he be more specific: Exactly what information is being requested by the federal government?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** So, the member's question was about where we're at right now with the environmental. So, we have an Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, which is IAAC, is right now doing, they—assessment of, when it comes to the actual approving the licensing.



So, right now, we have had 34 information requests from the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. And so, we submitted our first round of requests in May of 2022, and there was 11,000 pages and 134 information requests. So, there was subcategories of those 34 information requests.

So, we've done our due diligence to work with communities, and—because when it comes to IAAC public—again, if you wanted more information, there is actually a registry with IAAC public registry. So, a lot of that information is actually online with IAAC; again, Impact Assessment Agency of Canada.

And so, what this—all this information that they required is from different areas of perspective of this project. And one will be considered is groundwater, when it comes to the, you know, aquifers in the area. They want more—they needed information on that. Heritage sites.

Also, fisheries; examples, what happens—is there fish ladders involved in certain situations? Like, that could be some of the things that they're requesting.

\* (16:50)

Resources, you know, vegetation—I know a lot of—when—a lot of times when we've met with a lot of First Nation communities, a lot of the vegetation is sometimes their medicine.

So, we wanted to make sure that all those impacts are being answered here. And then the social-economic impact studies for—we actually created a—some funding for socio-economic impact studies for Indigenous communities so that there was some money, funding for them to be able to collect information from their impacts of how it's going to affect their communities.

So, we've been really working with First Nations, making sure that they're at the table so that the federal government can see that this is—we're all in this together. Because at the same time, when we can complete this project, we're also wanting to work with Indigenous Services Canada to work on opportunities to—doing this project to help Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin so that they never flood again.

Because we had all—it seemed like every structure that we put out there was—Red River Floodway to the Portage Diversion or the Shellmouth Dam, we saved billions and billions of dollars. I don't know if—quite sure if we have any—even have any statistics of how many billions of dollars we saved over those years of these investments. And now we just want to invest

into those two channels so that we can save billions of dollars there.

But we also want to start working on and meeting with Peguis First Nation to talk about their possibilities, that we need the federal government to lead on this. But we're willing to work together to making sure that our highway that goes through the community, that we can also use it between—when it comes to diking opportunities, to water flows. We've got to look at the whole area, the whole region of Fisher River to make sure that the opportunities—that we can continue investing so that we eliminate flood damages.

And, again, I was talking with Bill Blair, the federal government's on board to say look, we understand that by investing in these infrastructures, the flood-mitigation infrastructures, we do save a lot of money. But we just need the federal government to approve this licensing so we can go ahead with the channels.

**Mr. Bushie:** The minister had made reference to the info requests that were asked for and that they had made their first submission in May of 2022.

I'm just wondering, can the minister, then, let the committee know what's the timeline to address all the info requests and when would he have all those completed and submitted?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** So, when it comes to the time frame of—when it comes to the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, the IAAC application, the thing was they came back for more questions about—from the first time we did a submission. And now we're also with the social economic—socially economic impact studies with Indigenous communities, we want to make sure that we incorporate their studies, their findings to do round two.

So our goal, our target set date is May 31st of this year to submit round two. And we want to make sure that it can be a moving target here—a few days here and there, but we want to make sure that we give the communities, First Nations communities and the Métis communities too, in the area, an opportunity to do their socio-economic impact studies so that we can incorporate them in the application so that when the federal government has all that information they can base their—make their decision.

And so, we're—our goal is to have a round two submitted by—of May 31st, 2023, and hoping that we can—and then once it is submitted it's up to the federal government at that point in time to either approve it, or they may come around and ask for more questions.

But we're hoping that we gave them so much information that they don't have to come back and they can actually approve the project. And we would like to see that happen because we're ready to go.

We've action in our budget, and we're wanting contractors, or the heavy—Manitoba heavy construction industry association is—would love to have opportunities and we also want to make sure that when we do this project, we do have \$15 million for First Nations opportunities to apply once the project's approved, so that they can have an opportunity to bid on, and have some opportunities to invest in their own kind of businesses, so that they can actually be able to compete with some of the tendering opportunities. Because there's going to be a lot of opportunities in that region for the next number—probably three years of the construction of this major channel.

It's going to be very good economic opportunities and—especially for First Nations to have an opportunity to have that on their résumé when they have the opportunity to grow their business—their opportunities of having, you know, having been working on the channels. We'd like to see that participation.

**Mr. Bushie:** I thank the minister for clarifying the date and understanding that the process sometimes, you have the back and forth between different levels of government, different questions, different potential hoops to jump through and sometimes it gets to be frustrating in that regard, so I'm glad to see there's some progress being made on that front.

As the minister had mentioned there was the—initially, the 34 info requests that—and I think he also mentioned, basically, 134, almost, submissions or other requests that kind of just amplifies the process—that came in the—or, was submitted in May of last year, and here we are, May of this year having the potential submission to go in.

So, some of the things that I'm wondering about then, is if the fact the—everything has been done to this point, and understanding the minister had talked about some due diligence that was maybe done in regards to the environmental assessment and the info request that came forward and—but there's also the environmental part of that, but there's also—and as the minister had referenced—the Indigenous component, the Indigenous reference to those environmental impacts as well.

And—very familiar with the fact that any kind of flood issues that may arise in traditional territory for First Nation communities is devastating on food, plant, medicine, those kind of things. But in the

minister's—in the Estimates booklet on page 19, it refers to that there are six steps to the channel project's environmental approval. And it says in there that the target to have that done is actually in 2023-2024.

But it specifically says there are six steps for the channel project's environmental approval, and I'm wondering if the minister can then explain—probably not before we wrap up today—and I'll re-ask the question again tomorrow—if the minister can explain how many steps have been completed, broken out by year? For example, in year 1, what was completed? Last year, was any completed? Those types of things.

And what's the timeline and what step are we on now?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

**CHAMBER**

*(Continued)*

**JUSTICE**

*(Continued)*

\* (16:30)

**Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Justice.

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

Could the minister and critic please introduce their staff in attendance.

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** To my left, we have the very capable and efficient assistant deputy minister of Justice, Maria Campos; immediately in front of me is the extraordinarily talented chief of staff to the Minister of Justice, Mardi McNicholl; and to my right is the always hard-working, diligent Deputy Minister of Justice, Jeremy Akerstream. *[interjection]* Did I get that right, 'ayker', 'acker'?

**Mr. Chairperson:** As previously noted, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia):** I believe the minister has an update for the committee.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Okay, I have some information to provide the member, as I committed to yesterday.

He had asked for the vacancies of Crown attorneys in the various offices, so I'm advised that in Winnipeg there are 10 vacancies; in Brandon there are no vacancies; in The Pas there is one vacancy; in Thompson there is one vacancy. So in total there are 12 vacancies. There are 187 FTEs for our Crowns, which means the vacancy rate is 6.42 per cent.

I can advise the member that we had 14 new hires for Crown attorneys in 2022-2023, and there were eight terminations, which doesn't mean they were fired, it just means that they went on. So there was a net gain of six Crown attorneys last year—and I'm just seeing if there is more information.

So we have—and this was also asked by the member yesterday—there are two technical officers in my office: the executive assistant to the minister is Hunter Christensen *[phonetic]* and the aforementioned Mardi McNicholl is the chief of staff or special assistant.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable minister.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, and then there was a question regarding staffing at correctional facilities.

In the total of the correctional facilities, so Brandon, Headingley, Milner, The Pas, Winnipeg correctional centre, Remand, and the Youth Centre, there are, in total, 1,508.75 approved FTEs and there are 2,069 actual staff working.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Okay, just a couple quick notes on—or questions, follow-up questions to those two of many pieces of information that we asked for yesterday.

If the minister could clarify, with regards to vacancies among Crown attorneys, if—can he indicate any leaves of absences or maternity leaves, any other reason why somebody is not currently working in addition to the vacancies that he listed?

And, if I'm understanding the minister, he gave us the information with regards to staffing at the correctional institutions in aggregate, but I think we were looking for a breakdown, individual—by individual centre.

And likewise, in addition to that, we also asked about the number of beds at each of those corrections institutions broken down by each individual centre.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, thank the member for the question.

I think he indicated that we hadn't provided all the information that was undertaken. I know we get a—he might as well, I'm not sure, but I know that we get a list of the undertakings from the previous section of Supply. So, we received that list, there were two

undertakings, and we've provided the information. So, that's not a list that I create or that I vet, it's created by officers of the Assembly. So, if he's suspicious about me, I know he doesn't have those same feelings about officers of the Assembly.

But having committed to those and fulfilled those, I do want to answer the question that he's just asked on the issue of leaves. And whether it's because of maternity or otherwise, we don't have that information. I understand that those are, you know, decisions that are made at—on a personal basis and then we wouldn't inquire about why somebody might be on a leave.

But in terms of the breakdown for the individual facilities, because he's right, I provided the information in aggregate, I can provide more detail.

So, in the Brandon Correctional Centre, there are 153.8 approved FTEs and there are 217 actual staff working; at the Headingley Correctional Centre, there are 353.9 approved FTEs and there are—or sorry, 548 actual folks working; at the Manitoba Remand Centre, there are 257.95 FTEs and there are 369 people actually working. At The Pas Correctional Centre, there are 104.5 approved FTEs and there are 115 actual staff working. At the Winnipeg correctional—sorry, Women's Correctional Centre, there are 173 approved FTEs and 229 actual staff working. At the Winnipeg Remand Centre, there are 214 actual—or, approved FTEs and 326 staff working. And then at the Manitoba Youth Centre, there are 251.6—*[interjection]*

I think I'm going to have to correct myself, but I'm going to go back—finish this thought. On the Manitoba Youth Centre, there are 251.6 staff—or, approved FTEs, and there are 265 actual staff working.

So just to make a correction: So, at the Winnipeg Remand Centre, there are 214 approved FTEs and 326 actual staff. And then I think I incorrectly labelled Milner Ridge—I left that one out. So at Milner Ridge Correctional Centre, there are 257.95 approved FTEs and 369 staff.

So then, just to repeat, there are throughout the correctional centres 1,508.75 approved FTEs and 2,069 actual staff working.

**Mr. Wiebe:** So, just to be clear for the record—because I know the minister understands this, and knows this—the list that was created by the clerks to indicate questions that required follow-up was based on the words of the minister.

So, of course, the minister, in the beginning of Estimates, had said of—yes, of course I'm going to answer all the questions, I'll get the member all the information. And then as we went through the day, it devolved to the point where the minister says, I won't get you any information, I won't answer any questions.

So, maybe the minister can just be more clear. Maybe he can start with I am going to answer the question the member has asked, and whether that's happening now or whether it's happening in the future. Then we have that on the official record: he is going to answer the questions as they come in.

And I thought we had an understanding yesterday that the minister wasn't always able to get the information immediately, but that we could ask a number of questions and that he would undertake to answer them. But, as he rightly pointed out, he didn't answer them and he didn't commit to answering them.

So by my count there was 32 questions yesterday that the minister should've answered, and I think we're up to maybe four, and that's maybe—or, five, maybe. That's maybe being generous on three of them.

And maybe I'll just even, to the member's—the information that the minister's put on the record today, I think he's conflating two things, if I'm understanding him correctly. He—in one case he's talking about FTEs, and in another case he's talking about individuals working. So of course that isn't helpful for purposes of understanding vacancy rates, right.

So I mean, it's pretty clear how the minister's trying to spin instead of just answering the question, because I think it's, you know, pretty straightforward information that people would expect that the minister should be able to—he could spin the politics of it, but certainly not the facts. And that's what we're asking for.

So again, what we're asking for is the FTEs allotted for each correctional centre, but then also how many of those FTEs are fulfilled—not the individuals that are working there.

Likewise, I did ask about the number of beds at each facility. So if the minister can undertake to get that information to the committee, that would be helpful as well.

And then we can move on, of course. I have another 40 questions here that, you know, time is ticking on.

**Mr. Goertzen:** You know, we were off to such a good start and I was so optimistic about the way this afternoon would go. And I don't want to say that I'm disappointed now, but you know, I really was hoping

for better when providing the information that was given.

Now, I think it's important—because there might be, like yesterday, another 20 people watching—and for those people to know how this process works.

\* (16:40)

And so, in Estimates, critic asks questions, minister, if they have the information there, they can answer it there. If not, they commit to an undertaking, which I did yesterday on a couple of items. It's not a—I don't write it down in terms of the undertaking. The good folks who work at the Legislative Assembly—and I mean that in the most heartfelt way, they are good folks—then, very quickly, provide me and staff in the department a list of what was undertaken.

So, that's a non-political process. I'm disappointed that my friend from Concordia would try to politicize the individuals doing that work, because they're not political and I've never known them to act in a political way.

They simply, you know, go through Hansard, I guess, or maybe they're, you know, monitoring it in real time, and they then provide to me and to the department the items that were undertaken. And then there's a certain time frame by which they have to report it back to—and not, by the way, the next day; I think it's—might be 30 days or 60 days, I'm not sure what it is, but it's some amount of time. We, though, wanted to provide the information the very next day and did, and somehow the member is aggrieved by that.

Now, just to recap yesterday, you know, he sort of—he bounced around a bit there. He said that I had agreed to take all these things as advisement and get to him, and then he said that I refused to answer questions. So, that's not exactly a consistent position. But, just to recap, because it was some time ago now and so the member may have forgotten, he asked a particular question. I told him that we could take that under advisement and get back to him today. He said no, that's not good enough, I'll just wait. I said it could be 10 or 15 minutes, and he said he was patient, he had all the time in the world. So, I said fine, then we'll wait that 10 or 15 minutes. And then, when I said that, then he rattled off about 15 different questions while we were waiting to get the answer that he said he was going to be patiently waiting for. And so, I indicated to him that he was willing to wait for the answer to the question, and so we would do that and that all the 15 questions he rattled off in between were not part of that arrangement.

So, you know, I'm happy to continue on with this process in the amiable way that we started. So, I'm hopeful that the member will also feel that way and will allow us to answer questions in that sort of a reasonable way and not to try to politicize Legislative Assembly staff or—in a derogatory way because that doesn't—it doesn't shine a good light on him or me. I mean, really, it doesn't shine a good light on the institution, and I really value the Legislative Assembly and how people feel about it. And I value the Estimates process, which is why we brought back the information.

Now, the member seems to think that, you know, this is somehow political to provide the information. But I know—like, I've—I know what it's like to be a critic, and sometimes you ask a question thinking you're going to get a certain kind of answer, and when it doesn't come back that way and it doesn't come back the way you hoped it would from a political perspective, you feel disappointed and you think, well, there must be something up about that and maybe sometimes feel a little bit embarrassed. I've been there; I know what that's like.

In a situation like that—not here to give advice to the member—but I would suggest just moving on then. If the answer isn't what you'd hoped, if the answer isn't what your pre-prescribed narrative in your mind was, just moving on to the next question. That's actually good advice for question period, too. My friend for Fort Garry would know this. You know, sometimes you ask a question and the answer isn't what you thought it might be, just pivoting, moving on to another question isn't a bad way to go.

So, the member asked how many FTEs there were in the correctional centres. I told him just over 1,500 and then indicated there just over 2,000 people working there. Well, that's probably not what he thought, because he has his other narrative that positions aren't being filled and that there's cuts and all sorts of other things. So, yes, there are more people working than there are actually FTEs approved. That doesn't fit into the opposition's narrative, that's fine. Just move on to another question. Maybe you'll find a nugget somewhere that does fit into your narrative.

So, that's my one and only, hopefully, bit of advice to give to the member opposite today as we go through the rest of this Estimates process.

**Mr. Wiebe:** That's disappointing. I think the minister needs to be clear about the information that he's putting on the record here, and I think it's pretty straightforward stuff.

We're asking about the number of FTEs within each of those centres and the number of FTEs that are currently being filled right now.

We would like to get a little bit of information with regards to the Dauphin Court House project. Of course, the Dauphin jail was closed with no consultation from the community. The member for Dauphin (Mr. Michaleski) said he was fine with it. The people in Dauphin are not fine with it.

But as a, sort of, their, you know—tried to buy their way out of this, they've said, well, now we're going to build the—we're going to upgrade the courthouse.

So, we're—what we're looking for is an update on that project and any information the minister can give us in terms of the overall costs and expenditure so far.

**Mr. Goertzen:** You know, I won't spend a lot of time getting political about the issue of the jail. I mean, obviously there's—the member opposite sat on a government that had an opportunity, if they wanted to do something in terms of building a new jail, they could've.

In fact, I don't remember all the details, but I think it was Minister Swan, or former Minister Swan who conducted—maybe it was Mackintosh—who conducted a review of jails in the province. And there were a variety of different recommendations that came out of that particular review, and—I'm not sure why, if there was a recommendation in there for a new jail in Dauphin, why the former NDP government didn't act upon that. But, clearly, the—it was either not recommended, or they didn't act upon it. I'd have to go back and pull that review because it was some time ago.

But the member, you know, is trying to go back into that sort of political narrative. But he is right about the upgrades of the Dauphin courthouse—a beautiful-looking courthouse, but that needed significant upgrades. Also something the NDP chose not to do; I remember touring there as critic at one point, when I was in the role that the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) holds now, and both being, you know, impressed at how beautiful the building is but also how it needed some upgrading to function in what would be expected in today's modern court world.

And for whatever reason, the NDP just chose never to do that. I'm not sure if they didn't value the courthouse. Maybe they were planning to decommission it or close it if they would've won government in 2016. That might likely be the case, actually; they were probably going to close it. But we did invest to upgrade it.

In terms of the actual construction process, though—because I don't want to belabour this point—in terms of the actual construction process, that is under the Minister of Labour—Government Services, Labour and a few other things. The MLA for Radisson, minister—I won't name him—his department, where they centrally do a lot of the construction for a lot of the different capital in government.

So, I know that the member, I think at one point, had a—done a FIPPA, and that, of course, went to that department because they're responsible for the construction. So he could either FIPPA again or he could bring that up at the Estimates for that department, would—I don't think have happened yet.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Okay, so again, we're just—we're getting away from the original questions. And, you know, the minister reminds me that if he doesn't commit to answering questions, then our staff here in the building won't record it.

So, is he still working on those FTEs? Is that—like, I don't know what's going on here, again. He's refusing to answer questions, and we're talking about—we were talking about beds in our correctional facilities. Is he committing to get those numbers? Like, this is—this should be the most basic stuff available to the minister, but he seems—he looks confused once again.

**Mr. Goertzen:** There are times, as the famous group Genesis said, it is a land of confusion. And he knows what a fan I am of Genesis and Phil Collins.

But, I think I did actually provide the FTEs at each facility, but I'm happy to do them again for the member. In Brandon there are 153.8 approved FTEs; at the Headingley Correctional Centre there are 353.9 approved FTEs; at Milner Ridge Correctional Centre there are 257.95 FTEs; at The Pas there are 104.5 FTEs; Women's Correctional Centre, there are 173 approved FTEs; and at the Manitoba Youth Centre there are 251.6 FTEs.

\* (16:50)

And then in terms of the rated bed capacity in the correctional centres, in the Brandon Correctional Centre, the rated bed capacity is 252; at the Headingley Correctional Centre, it's 549; at Milner Ridge Correctional Centre, it's 524; at the Women's Correctional Centre it's 196; at the Winnipeg Remand Centre, it's 289; and at The Pas, it's 114.

**Mr. Wiebe:** So you know, again, I'm not sure why the minister won't answer the question.

You know, he makes it seem like maybe he's trying to hide something, right. Like—and that's, I think, the point I was trying to make yesterday as well.

This is information that is—the information itself is non-partisan, right. This is just the facts. The reason we have this process is so the facts come forward, then we go to other venues and we have arguments about what those facts mean and what larger story they tell. That's kind of what we do in this place.

And so I'm happy to defer all of those kinds of conversations to another venue, but unfortunately the minister refuses to answer the question as to how many FTEs are filled in each of those facilities.

And so what—you know, begs the question: Why is the minister scared to tell Manitobans that? What—why is he refusing to tell people what the real situation is?

Is there—I mean, you know, I didn't actually come in here with any kind of, you know, pre-supposed narrative. Actually, I was just trying to get the information. The narrative comes later. Today's about the facts.

And you know, the minister doesn't serve democracy well when he doesn't tell the—all the facts here in the Chamber. This is very worrisome stuff. So, you know, I think that there is some serious questions that need to be asked about why the minister isn't providing that information.

Moving on to another, slightly different topic with regards to this minister's task forces that have been established by the government. The question is: Can the minister confirm whether their newly announced police task forces, the integrated missing persons response task force and the integrated child abuse response task force, are these entirely new units or are they previously existing structures that are being, you know, altered or re-profiled with staff taken from other files and re-engaged in these new task forces?

**Mr. Goertzen:** So, I will answer the member's question, as I've endeavoured to answer all of his questions. I will take some exception. *[interjection]*

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I think maybe part of the challenge is—and I actually take—I'll take some blame for this, I'll take responsibility, because I asked that this be held in the Chamber.

I actually like having Estimates in the Chamber, but I think maybe the member opposite, because of the echo effect in here, isn't hearing the answers. So, I sometimes use the, you know, the earpiece, right,

particularly when there's not a lot of folks in here, because you get that echo.

And he might want to do the same, because I think what's happening is he's not hearing the answers, or he's presupposing they're not being answered. So I have some sympathy for him and maybe I should have had this in room 254, room 255; I might consider that next time.

So, just to repeat for the member, I did indicate that there are two hundred—or, 1,508 FTEs collectively in our centres, and I gave him the breakdown. And there are 2,069 staff—which, I know he doesn't like that. It doesn't fit his narrative, and he said he didn't come in with a narrative; maybe he should've. Maybe he would've—you know, it might've been a good idea if he came in with a narrative instead of where he went. So I provided him that, I provided him the rated bed capacity for the facilities.

Now, on to—again, I don't see him pulling out the earpiece yet; nope, doesn't have the earpiece. But I'll speak—I'll try to speak clearly to minimize the echo effect in the Chamber.

In terms of the integrated union, which—units, which I'm very excited to speak about, when it comes to the missing persons integrated unit, the Winnipeg Police Service does have some officers assigned to missing persons. This will be an addition of officers for the RCMP. So there are new positions, not pulling from any other—I mean, I'm not there, you know, moving around RCMP officers, but there are new positions created for the RCMP to make it an integrated unit. So it is new that it's integrated. It's now across the province, and I know that both the Winnipeg Police Service and RCMP were very excited by that.

In terms of the—you know, we sometimes call it the high-risk warrant unit, the—that is an integrated unit that is being created and is necessary because—partly because of changes to bail. And I know if—the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) might not agree with this because he doesn't agree with reforming bail, but we believe it's important.

And because there were more individuals who are—have been released that are then breaching and we consider them to be high risk, the new integrated warrant unit—which will involve Winnipeg Police Service, RCMP and potentially Brandon and maybe

others in the future—are new positions and funded positions, my understanding.

And then in terms of the child exploitation unit, which will be housed at the new Toba Centre, which is near Assiniboine Park—and if the member hasn't had the opportunity to tour it, I would encourage him to do so. The new positions will allow for both RCMP and the Winnipeg Police Service to be integrated into the Toba Centre and to allow for—and to—just had a video dropped on—and to allow for there to be a province-wide response when there's child exploitation. And the member will know that that is among the most heinous crimes that there are.

So, again, this might not fit the narrative, although the member said he didn't have a narrative coming into Estimates—maybe he should've brought one. These are new positions, funded positions and either new or enhanced units because they're becoming integrated.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Well, the level of doublespeak is pretty phenomenal from this minister, and his reputation with that regard is certainly being lived up to here.

What I will just say is that, I mean, what I heard him say is that, you know, for the—for our wonderful staff who are listening along, he has now indicated all 32 questions we asked yesterday he is going to commit to getting me an answer on, because that's what he now says he's going to do. So, that's great; that is exactly right.

In one side of his mouth he says, you know, don't politicize this process, how dare you politicize this process; well, the member should've come with a—more of a politicized narrative to further the questions.

I simply want to get the facts on the record, and the minister continues to not give those facts. This is common, common stuff. An FTE is comparable to an FTE, not a body in a facility, so that is where the minister is trying to—trying—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please.

The time being 5 p.m., committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

#### IN SESSION

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield):** The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 26, 2023

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