

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

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 31, 2024

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Please be seated.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business?

The Speaker: Oh, sorry—the honourable Government House Leader.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Could you please canvass the House to see if there is lead-leave to expedite consideration of Bill 41, The Provincial Court Amendment Act, as follows:

1. At the top of orders of the day today, the House will consider second reading of Bill 41, with the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in room 254 considering departmental Estimates to sit concurrently with the House.

The following limited debate provisions will apply to Bill 41 debate:

- (a) First, the Minister of Justice may speak up to five minutes;
- (b) Then a question period may be held in accordance with subrule 137(5);
- (c) Next, a member from the official opposition may speak up to five minutes; and
- (d) Lastly, each independent member may speak up to five minutes; and
- (e) the Speaker shall then put the question.

Once Bill 41 passes second reading, it shall then be referred to the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development, which will meet at 3 p.m. this afternoon in room 255.

3. The House shall then resolve into the Chamber section of the Committee of Supply to consider departmental Estimates.
4. On November 7, 2024, the House will consider concurrence and third reading of Bill 41 during orders of the day, government business, with the following limited debate provisions to apply:
 - (a) First, the Minister of Justice may speak up to five minutes;

- (b) Next, a member from the official opposition may speak up to five minutes;
- (c) Lastly, each independent member may speak up to five minutes; and
- (d) the Speaker shall put the question.

The Speaker: Is there leave for the House to expedite consideration of Bill 41, The Provincial Court Amendment Act, as described by the Government House Leader?

Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Johnson: On House business?

The Speaker: The honourable Opposition House Leader, on House business.

Mr. Johnson: Could you please canvass the House to see if there is leave to expediate consideration of Bill 41, The Provincial Court Amendment Act, and Bill 221, The Earlier Screening for Breast Cancer Act, on November 5, 2024, as follows:

At the top of orders of the day, the House will consider second reading of Bill 41, with the following limited debate provisions to apply:

- (a) First, the Minister of Justice may speak up to five minutes;
- (b) Then a question period may be held in accordance with subrule 137(5);
- (c) Next, a member from the official opposition may speak for up to five minutes;
- (d) Lastly, each independent member may speak up to five minutes; and
- (e) the Speaker shall then put the question.

Once Bill 41 passes second reading, bills 41 and 221 shall be immediately referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Once the Committee of the Whole rises and the Chairperson reports, the House will consider concurrence and third reading of bills 41 and 221.

The following limited debate provisions will apply to Bill 41:

First, the bill sponsor may speak for up to five minutes;

Next, a member from the official opposition may speak for up to five minutes;

Lastly, each independent member may speak for up to five minutes; and

the Speaker shall then put the question.

The following limited debate provisions will apply to Bill 221:

First, the bill sponsor may speak for up to five minutes;

Next, a member from the government may speak for up to five minutes; and

Lastly, each independent member may speak for up to five minutes; and

the Speaker shall then put the question with the House not to recognize the clock as 5 until all provisions are completed.

The Speaker: Is there leave for the House to consider bills 41 and 221 as described by the Opposition House Leader?

Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

The Speaker: I hear a no.

Leave has been denied.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: Introduction of bills? [interjection] Order, please.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Ninth Report

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

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

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on October 30, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 38)** – *An Act Respecting Child and Family Services (Indigenous Jurisdiction and Other Amendments) / Loi concernant les services à l'enfant et à la famille (champ de compétence autochtone et autres modifications)*
- **Bill (No. 39)** – *The Long-Bladed Weapon Control Act / Loi sur la réglementation des armes à lame longue*
- **Bill (No. 217)** – *The Men's Mental Health Awareness Week Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation à la santé mentale des hommes (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)*

Committee Membership

- MLA DELA CRUZ
- Hon. Min. FONTAINE
- Mrs. HIEBERT
- MLA LAGASSÉ
- MLA MOROZ
- MLA SANDHU

Your Committee elected MLA DELA CRUZ as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected MLA SANDHU as the Vice-Chairperson.

Substitutions received during Committee proceedings:

- Hon. Min. WIEBE for Hon. Min. FONTAINE
- Mr. BALCAEN for MLA LAGASSÉ

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following presentation on Bill (No. 39) – The Long-Bladed Weapon Control Act / Loi sur la réglementation des armes à lame longue:

Sel Burrows, Point Powerline

Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 217) – The Men's Mental Health Awareness Week Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation à la santé mentale des hommes (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)**:

Lisa Dyck, Private Citizen
Jeremy Wiens, Private Citizen

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following written submission on **Bill (No. 39) – The Long-Bladed Weapon Control Act / Loi sur la réglementation des armes à lame longue**:

Scot Halley, Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police

Your Committee received the following two written submissions on **Bill (No. 217) – The Men's Mental Health Awareness Week Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation à la santé mentale des hommes (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)**:

Marcel Hacault, Manitoba Farmer Wellness Program
Gerry Goertzen, Riverbend Counselling

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 38) – An Act Respecting Child and Family Services (Indigenous Jurisdiction and Other Amendments) / Loi concernant les services à l'enfant et à la famille (champ de compétence autochtone et autres modifications)**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 39) – The Long-Bladed Weapon Control Act / Loi sur la réglementation des armes à lame longue**

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

THAT Clause 1(1) of the Bill be amended in clause (a) of the definition "long-bladed weapon" by striking out "metal blade" and substituting "blade made of metal or other prescribed material".

THAT Clause 12(a) of the Bill be replaced with the following:

(a) prescribing blade materials or blade length, or both, for the purpose of clause (a) of the definition "long-bladed weapon" in subsection 1(1);

- **Bill (No. 217) – The Men's Mental Health Awareness Week Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation à la santé mentale des hommes (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

MLA Dela Cruz: I move, seconded by the honourable member for The Maples (MLA Sandhu), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Honourable Speaker, in accordance with rule 78(9), I am tabling a revised sequence for the consideration of departmental Estimates for today only.

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'm pleased to table the '23-24 annual report for Legal Aid Manitoba.

The Speaker: Any other reports?

Seeing none.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

November

Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations): I am honoured today to rise in recognition of Movember. Tomorrow, November 1, marks the first day of Movember, an annual campaign dedicated to raising awareness about men's mental and physical health.

Since 2003, Movember has grown to be a global movement, changing the face of men's mental health and promoting awareness of prostate and testicular cancer in men.

I want to thank all health-care professionals and researchers for the important work that they do every day in the areas of mental–men's mental health and physical health. It is thanks to your ongoing contribution to men's health that early detection and treatment exists. Health-care professionals and researchers work diligently to reduce the stigma that has historically created barriers for us to access the health care men may need.

I also want to recognize the important work of the Movember Foundation. The foundation encourages supporters to grow a moustache during the month of

November to help raise awareness of men's mental health and well-being. For over 20 years now, the foundation has kept up the conversation for men to know it's okay to reach out and talk about our mental and physical health.

This month is also a reminder for all of us to financially support the Movember organization so they can continue to fund important programming in areas of mental health, suicide prevention, as well as 'prospate'-prostate and testicular cancer.

We have all been touched by someone who had this—who has had this experience, and I encourage everyone to reach out. I want everyone to know that we are here for you. Our government is committed to increasing the accessibility of mental and physical health support across all regions of our province.

In the last year alone, we've hired ten new psychologists and nine new psychiatrists in Winnipeg and Selkirk, and invested over \$10 million in province-wide mental health promotion and early intervention programs.

I want to recognize the Minister for Housing, Addictions and Homelessness and the Minister responsible for Mental Health (Ms. Smith) for her leadership in this area and lift her up in her ongoing work to develop a province-wide suicide prevention strategy in collaboration with folks from across the entire province. She comes from a place of experience, and we are thankful for the important role she plays in Manitoba today.

With one in eight Canadians receiving a prostate cancer diagnosis in their lifetime, and testicular cancer being the most common cancer in young Canadian men, we must continue to promote early and routine testing for all men across our province.

* (13:40)

Our government is proud of our progress in hiring 873 new health-care workers since we formed government. These new health-care professionals are joining the sector across every region of the province, including at CancerCare Manitoba.

I also want to recognize and thank the Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care (MLA Asagwara) for their unwavering dedication to work collaboratively with health-care professionals to achieve this important milestone in our first year of being in government.

I want to, once again, thank all front-line health-care professionals for supporting men, to access

essential health-care supports that can possibly change the trajectory of our lives.

I strongly encourage all men across Manitoba, this month and always, to know that we are here for you and to reach out to those that are close to you, your friends and your family. We must continue to love one another, encourage each other to access health-care services and reduce the stigma surrounding men's mental health and physical health.

I wear mine all year round, Honourable Speaker, but I'd like to encourage everyone to proudly wear a moustache for Movember.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge the annual global campaign Movember. This campaign originated in Australia and is now observed around the world; serves to raise money and awareness for prostate cancer, testicular cancer, mental health and suicide prevention.

During Movember, men will grow out their facial hair, specifically their moustache, to raise awareness and funds for research on men's physical and mental health.

The campaign includes many great initiatives to raise funds and awareness. This includes the challenge of running 60 kilometres during the month of November. This number is not random. It symbolizes the 60 men, fathers, brothers and sons we lose to suicide each hour globally.

Being the only charity solely focused on men's health, it is an important cause to recognize. In Canada, three out of four suicide deaths are by men. Suicide also is the second leading cause of death in males aged 15 to 44. We know that more work must be done to reduce stigma and ensure men receive the support they may need.

I want to take a moment and recognize my colleague from Dawson Trail who has brought forward a men's mental health awareness bill. This bill serves to raise awareness and reduce stigma on the mental health challenges men face.

The facts are sobering: men die on average six years earlier than women. It's very likely that all of us in the Chamber know someone, or are related to someone, who has been affected, and we all have a role to play to raise awareness and reduce stigma.

I call on the government to ensure there is increased funding to mental health and suicide prevention and

greater awareness and treatment of both prostate and testicular cancer.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Peter Martin

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson): Honourable Speaker, there are many privileges that come with being the MLA for Radisson, and one of the many is getting to know my constituent Peter Martin, who joins us in the gallery today.

Peter is the son of the late Paul Martin, a D-Day veteran who landed on the beaches of Normandy during the first wave. Keeping his father's legacy alive, Peter has become Transcona's unofficial veterans' advocate, founding a Winnipeg-wide discounts for veterans program, serving as a speaker with the Canadian memory project and successfully lobbying the City of Winnipeg to offer free plots for veterans in the Transcona and Brookside Fields of Honour.

Among many moving initiatives led by our friend, he now also serves as the Manitoba organizer of the No Stone Left Alone ceremony, bringing the stories of veterans to the next generation.

On Monday and Wednesday next week, Peter will gather nearly 1,000 school children at the Transcona and Brookside Fields of Honour to lay poppies on gravesites, pay tribute and appreciation and silently salute our veterans along with those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

As the granddaughter of a World War II prisoner of war and now the youngest member of this Legislature, I am indebted to our armed forces, past and present, and recognize the responsibility of our generation to keep their stories alive. It's because of their courage, their selflessness and their sacrifice that we all proudly call this great country of Canada home and enjoy the freedoms that we do today.

So, Honourable Speaker, I invite our colleagues to join us next week and to extend a hearty thanks today for the work that Peter pours into supporting our Transcona troops.

Lest we forget.

Swan River Farming and Logging Industries

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Today I rise to recognize two industries that are the lifeblood of our Swan River constituency: the farming industry and the logging industry.

With the fields harvested and grain in the bins, the Parkland area prepares to move into full gear on a winter forestry harvest. These two industries have more in common besides being economic catalysts of the province than one realizes.

Many of our hard-working farmers whose products put food on the kitchen table for so many families park their grain trailers and hook up the logging trailers to their semis for the winter months.

Both these industries have driven the local economy in our towns and villages and continue to be the driving force behind our communities flourishing. It is common knowledge if the industries struggle, many business people struggle. Many of these workers are the supporters of our local arenas, sports teams, community centres, health facilities, community foundations, and the list goes on. They are part of our community volunteers, our community champions and our community leaders.

These two industries help ensure that our businesses exist and are able to hire employees who live, work and play in the local area, and for that I thank them.

In James Wesley's song, Thank a Farmer, the lyrics say it all. And when—we can easily add thank a logger to these lyrics.

Thank you.

Winnipeg West Pickleball Club

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): It's my pleasure to rise today to recognize the Winnipeg West Pickleball club and to highlight their hard work and commitment to building community.

This dedicated group of volunteers have built a thriving club, starting out with seven founders and 35 members, which has quickly grown to over 500 members today. The club is now in its fifth year of bringing people of all ages and backgrounds together for healthy, active fun.

The Winnipeg West Pickleball club organized their community to advocate for a new outdoor pickleball complex at St. James Memorial Sports Park, and their hard work was rewarded with eight courts opening in 2022. I was proud to help support their initiative, which has revitalized the park and is providing much needed recreational opportunities in our community.

They've continued to grow the club by creating recreational and competitive programs, growing the

sport and developing players and their skills to the highest level. This year, their practice paid dividends in the competitive scene. In August, club members went to Nova Scotia to compete in the National Pickleball Championships, and three members brought an impressive seven medals back to Manitoba. This is a fantastic accomplishment and a testament to the club and athletes' hard work and dedication to their sport.

Pickleball is a sport for everyone, and Winnipeg West Pickleball club continues to show their dedication to inclusion and creating a welcoming and fun atmosphere for all. Thank you to the board, volunteers and players involved with WWPB for bringing so much fun and joy to our community.

I couldn't be prouder that St. James is home to the pickleball belt of Winnipeg and home to the west-Winnipeg West Pickleball club. Today we have members of the club's volunteer board in the gallery. I ask that they stand to be recognized, and that the House join me in celebrating their achievements. And on behalf of the community and this Assembly, I'd like to thank them for their hard work and dedication.

Thank you so much for your work.

Highlighting Lac du Bonnet Organizations

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, today I am pleased to pay tribute to a variety of organizations in the Lac du Bonnet constituency, some that are celebrating milestone anniversaries in 2024. I had the privilege of participating in these special events to commemorate their achievements.

The Royal Canadian Legion Branch 132 in Beausejour hosted a celebration gala commemorating the Royal Canadian Air Force 100 years of service, paying tribute to past and present aviators for their commitment and courage. The RCAF contribute to the lives of Canadians every day and we thank them for their service.

A community event was held at the Beaches Community Centre to celebrate 100 years of police service in Victoria Beach. Community members, dignitaries, police and community safety officers were all in attendance to meet and greet the permanent and seasonal residents who rely on their services to help keep their community safe. I want to thank Victoria Beach Police for their service to their community and congratulate them on 100 years.

* (13:50)

The Winnipeg River lions charter celebration was another successful event held at Great Falls community centre, with an induction ceremony with many local and international members present. And as a lion myself, I was honoured to attend.

Lions are always lending a helping hand through their fundraising efforts and support for local initiatives. Their goal is to make a difference.

I would also like to congratulate the Beau-head senior centre in Beausejour and the Whitemouth Municipal Museum on their 50th anniversaries this year.

The key to all community organizations is volunteerism. Volunteers are not often recognized, yet they are the backbone of every community, and many of them are watching this afternoon with us today.

Lastly, for all those enjoying Halloween festivities this evening, remember to stay visible and alert so we can all celebrate safely and create fun, lasting memories together.

I would like to wish everyone a safe and happy Halloween.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Clean Energy Initiatives

MLA Mike Moroz (River Heights): Honourable Speaker, I rise today to talk about the work our government is doing to bring Manitobans together to address the ever-growing climate crisis.

From the devastating wildfires that force families to evacuate their homes to the wildly fluctuating weather patterns to the broad effects of climate change on our health, neighbourhoods and ecosystems, the impacts are all around us and, frankly, are undeniable.

Yet amidst these challenges lies pivotal opportunities if we work together. Our government, under the strong leadership of our Ministers of Finance (MLA Sala) and Environment and Climate Change (MLA Schmidt) is committed to making clean energy accessible and eco-friendly choices available at a price that all Manitobans can afford.

Our recently announced Manitoba Affordable Energy Plan is a significant step towards achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The Affordable Energy Plan will lower costs for households by enhancing energy codes for homes and buildings.

We'll also expand supports for clean heating options in homes by prioritizing electric heat pumps

and geothermal technology, reducing both costs and overall greenhouse gas emissions.

Honourable Speaker, to make eco-conscious choices even more accessible, we're providing rebates for both new and used electric vehicles and working towards installing new public Manitoba Hydro electric vehicle chargers. This expansion will lower families' energy costs and put countless Manitobans to work.

Additionally, our plan emphasizes close collaboration with First Nation and Métis governments in wind generation as well as providing capital support to help the transition to clean energy. Indigenous communities in Canada have been advocates for the environment for centuries, while also being the most impacted by the crisis.

Honourable Speaker, future generations in Manitoba deserve to breathe clean air. They deserve to grow up knowing that the land they walk on and the water they drink—

The Speaker: The member's time is expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

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

MLA Moroz: Through the Manitoba Affordable Energy Plan, we're turning hope into reality and paving the way for a sustainable future for all Manitobans.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Before we move on to question period, I have some guests that I'd like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us today, from the Manitoba Lung Cancer Support: Carole Vivier, Rick Vivier, Kelly Graham-Miele, Steve Miele, Coreen Haslbeck, Lalaine Alfaro, Irene Johansson, Don Barrett, Janina Barrett, Gina Somers, Darlene Somers, Alyson Haiart, Dominique Delisle and Don Petkau, who are the guests of the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara).

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

Further, I would like to introduce to the House a very special guest in the public gallery: Jake Lesquereux is visiting Winnipeg from Sydney, Australia, as he travels around the world after graduating school. And as it turns out, Jake is the cousin and godson of our very capable Deputy Clerk, Tim Abbott.

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Interlake Region Flood Protection

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): In oral questions and in Estimates, we have asked about infrastructure cuts made by this NDP cover-government so far.

We know the NDP cut schools, they cut highways, they cut the Parks budgets, and we have learned they cut one of the biggest projects on the books and one of the most important to so many Manitobans: the Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin outlet channels project. We have yet to get an answer to this question despite having asked previously.

Now that the Premier has cancelled his very important outlet channels project, what is the updated timeline for flood protection in the Interlake?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Oh, timeline is we're going to beat the seven and a half years of doing absolutely nothing that the PCs delivered over their failed time in office.

I want to take this opportunity to say happy Halloween to all of the kids who are heading out trick-or-treating. Course, a lot of Manitobans are going to be celebrating Diwali tomorrow, as well as Bandi Chhor Divas, and so I want to wish those celebrations go superbly.

And to the new chief of the Brandon Police Service, Tyler Bates, I want to congratulate you on the new role and on being sworn in this week. We look forward to working together to make the Westman and all of Manitoba safer. Thank you so much for your service.

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

Mr. Ewasko: The federal government was contemplating necessary approvals to advance the outlet channels project until the Manitoba NDP, under this Premier, got elected and told them to stop.

The Premier's inaction has cancelled work that was ongoing. The minister now says the work that has been done might have been wasted since she's open to changes in scope and design. In Executive Council Estimates, October 17, 2024, the Premier said, and I quote: I am personally involved and we will get it done. End quote.

Can he please provide an updated timeline for flood protection in the Interlake?

Mr. Kinew: Well, I appreciate the friendly question today to talk about our government's commitment to delivering on flood mitigation for people in the Interlake region.

We know that this is a major priority for folks around Lake Manitoba, for folks around—you know, downstream from the Fairford Dam, for many communities that were affected by not only the flood of 2011, but many other significant flood seasons.

That's why it was so disappointing that for two years, even though this was called Brian Pallister's legacy project, nothing got done. There is not one millilitre of water that has been drained or diverted because of the inaction of the PC government.

We, on the other hand, are getting to work for you, the people of Manitoba. We have people at the table. We're charting a path forward that is going to bring everyone along and protect more Manitobans from the threat of future floods.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Speaker, in Estimates, October 17, 2024, the Premier said, and I quote: The channels project has not been cancelled.

But that's conflicting with his minister that said earlier that it was actually cut, and the—delay flood protection in the Interlake.

In terms of consultation over years, our government professionally engaged in good faith to advance the channels project: more than 252 meetings; more than 5,500 emails and phone calls; more than 1,100 letters with all affected Indigenous groups. Last week in Estimates, the Premier said, in French, but I caught it, in quote: There were meetings and gatherings.

I'll give the Premier one more chance to explain, whether he calls it a cancellation, a cut or a delay: How much longer will the Interlake be waiting for flood protection because of his inaction?

* (14:00)

Mr. Kinew: Bien, je dis « bienvenue » au membre opposé, au Manitoba où tout le monde est supposé d'être capable d'engager dans le métier public dans une façon bilingue. *[Well, I say, you're welcome, to the member opposite, as we are in Manitoba where everyone is able to engage in public office activities in a bilingual way.]*

Et puis, au sujet de ce projet pour lutter contre les inondations *[And about this flood protection project]*—I would say this: For all the emails, for all the meetings that the PCs supposedly had on this topic over years, was one millilitre of water moved? Was one microlitre of water moved? Was one picolitre of water moved? No, not a single droplet of water. Complete failure on that side.

We, on the other hand, have a mature approach. We're working with First Nations. We're working with rural Manitobans. We're working with the federal government to be able to deliver on the necessary flood protection to keep you safe.

Highway Budget Funding Concerns

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): As today is Halloween, many children are wrapping up spirit week, a time for make-believe. Unfortunately, this minister of Infrastructure seems to be stuck on opposite day, and it's affecting all drivers in Manitoba.

It's only under the NDP where a \$57-million cut to the highways budget is not a cut, or so this minister claims. Luckily, Manitobans are not tricked.

Will the minister acknowledge what her own budgetary documents confirm, that the NDP are spending less on our infrastructure and Manitobans are getting less when it comes to highways?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): You know, Manitobans elected our team to build the future of this province in conjunction with you, the hard-working people who go to work each and every day across this great land.

Now, our wonderful minister of Infrastructure has outlined a really important and ambitious agenda. Let's review for a second, of course, what the PCs got done during their time in office.

Now, did they build the North End Water Pollution Control Centre? Did they build the channels project in the Interlake? Did they build a single unit of social housing? Did they build a single personal-care-home bed?

Where they failed, we are going to build. We are going to be working with you, the people of Manitoba, from Red River North right through the Interlake to the north, to the south, the east, the Westman region. We have so much optimism to be able to deliver on this ambitious agenda for you, the great people of this province.

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

Mr. Narth: My question is specific to highways investment. Each of my colleagues across the province are seeing the cuts, so we've done the math together. A \$57-million cut equals an 11 per cent reduction. That's 11 per cent less paving, 11 per cent less repairs, 11 per cent less preventative maintenance.

But it's worse than that, Honourable Speaker. This means less work for heavy construction companies and less jobs for Manitobans. This budget has been a direct cut to the key economic driver of our economy.

Instead of kicking the can down the road for her successor to deal with the mess, will she commit to reinstating an investment budget?

Mr. Kinew: One of the great things about the job that our team has been asked to perform is that we get to meet Manitobans right across this great province.

And whether we're in Brandon or Winnipeg, we're travelling through the north or the south, the Interlake, the Westman, Eastman, along the way, I always like to stop and talk to the folks in the hard hats, the people wearing the high-vis gear, the people who are building our economy.

I always take the opportunity to shake their hands and say thank you for being the driving force to keep our economy moving each and every day. And what they say in response is: We're so glad to have a government that's working with us to put people to work, to ensure that there is actual negotiating power for the hard-working Manitoban out there.

The years of cuts under the PCs and Heather Stefanson over. The good times are back in Manitoba. The building trade is no longer an endangered species and there are jobs in all regions of the province.

Highway 2 Repair Timeline

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): Highway 2 from Souris to Deleau continues to deteriorate under this minister's cuts.

When I last raised it, the minister responded by bragging about a trip that she had taken to Gillam. Only in an NDP geography class is Gillam close to Highway No. 2, and only in an NDP math class is a \$57-million cut an increase.

So when is this minister going to get serious and rebuild this stretch of Highway No. 2?

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): It's very exciting to see that the opposition has woken up and remembered there's an Infrastructure department in this government, and so I'm grateful for the chance to stand up and speak.

I am very proud of the work we're doing in our department. I continue to be proud of that work. I'm happy to have travelled many parts of the province.

You know, whether we're in Brandon or Churchill, Ste. Agathe, Wasagamack, we are making investments in this province's infrastructure every single day.

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

Mr. Jackson: I'd be very interested to know if the minister understands that you can't actually drive to Churchill, so I'm not sure how she got there if she thought she drove there.

But in any case, we're talking about Highway No. 2 that is in the southwest corner of the province.

So again, I will ask, I've had hundreds of constituents sign a petition saying that her timeline of 2029 to fix that stretch of road is unacceptable. It's a real stretch of road that exists.

When will she move up the timeline and get that stretch of road fixed?

MLA Naylor: I will definitely not do what the opposition did when they were in office.

In 2018, they cut the budget down to \$347 million; in 2019, they only spent \$336 million; in 2020, they only spent \$333 million, and in 2021, they spent only \$397 million. We have budgeted \$500 million for highway infrastructure, and we are getting the job done that they could not do.

Many of the projects we're completing now were barely a twinkle in the eye of that government when they were in government, but we're getting the job done.

Grace Hospital Timeline for New Beds

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): In November of last year, as one of this government's very first announcements, the NDP told the media that new beds would be fully operational at Grace Hospital by the end of March.

I'll table the media article where the Minister of Health made this claim, as well as relevant sections

from the WRHA's most recent annual report showing not a single new bed was added.

Once again, as is typical with this NDP government, a splashy news conference followed by an absolute failure to follow through.

Honourable Speaker, where are the beds at Grace Hospital?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I was really proud to visit Grace Hospital and make—actually been there several times to make several really important announcements.

However, you might be shocked to know that when we first went there and we visited with the front-line staff and the health leadership and patients, they reported to me that they had never actually received a visit from the Health minister by the previous administration. They had never been engaged in planning. They had never ever been engaged on front-line health care.

Now it's sad, Honourable Speaker, that on that side of the House, they continue to share information that is wrong. On this side of the House, we're going to continue to add beds, add front-line staff and work with front-line health experts to make health care better, not only in west Winnipeg but across Manitoba.

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

Mrs. Cook: Perhaps, these promised beds could have helped alleviate rising ER wait times in Winnipeg. Instead, Grace Hospital's ER wait times have only gotten worse, now at a median of 4.92 hours as of August, an increase from 4.28 hours in August the year before. Even the president of the Manitoba Nurses Union told the media on Tuesday, quote, wait times are definitely rising in our emergency departments, unquote.

So with no additional staffed beds at the Grace and now with rising ER wait times, does the NDP actually have a plan to address ER wait times, or is it all just about news conferences and lip service to the media?

*(14:10)

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, on this side of the House we recognized right away the serious damage that was done to our health-care system by the

previous Heather Stefanson administration and members opposite.

We got to work right away, adding beds to the health-care system and adding people to staff those beds. And we're going to continue to do that work. But what are we cleaning up, what mess are we fixing? Well, seven and a half years and a net loss of over 200 beds from across our health-care system.

We are proud to be adding back capacity and working with the front lines to make health care better. We will take absolutely no lessons from members opposite, who have zero credibility when it comes to health care.

Highways 8 and 67 Repair Timeline

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): Honourable Speaker, I'd like to wake up and remind the Minister of Infrastructure about the letter recently written by the RM of St. Andrews and its council about the intersection of provincial highways 8 and 67, and further remind the minister that I have previously spoken to them about this intersection.

Manitobans expect safe roads.

When will the minister give my constituents a timeline as to when safety improvements will be made at this intersection?

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): For the record, I'm fully awake and fully alert and ready to answer questions.

I think perhaps member opposite might be sleepwalking, but I'm happy to remind him that highway safety is one of the most important, most critical parts of our government and what I am working towards.

You know, we've stood up a new road safety team, creating a specialized team of experts to focus on data-driven improvements to highway safety, and I'm very excited about the projects that will come out of that work we've done this year.

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

Mr. Perchotte: Honourable Speaker, I would hope that we could all agree the local experts know what their communities need most. The area fire department is often first on the scene when accidents occur, and the fire chief has some specific recommendations, which I will table for the House: adding a turning lane to PTH No. 8; warning signs indicating an intersection ahead; stop signs with flashing light on top.

And I'll remind the minister, these are the exact same things I said when we had our meeting. So if she's not sleepwalking, she's not listening.

MLA Naylor: I'm hoping that the members opposite get some coaching on not straying from their notes, because the jokes are falling flat.

I would like to say that it is absolutely accurate that local residents do know their communities best. I'm so pleased with the work that's emerging from our blue ribbon panel made up of local experts across the province. I'm also really pleased to report that I've met with over 100 First Nations and municipalities in this short year on the job so that I can hear directly from them day after day in my office, most of whom had never had the chance—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Infrastructure Investment Strategy Implementation Request

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): I'd like to thank the member from Turtle Mountain for his hard work building and implementing the Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure's 2023 multi-year infrastructure investment strategy.

But what is required now is for his—this current minister to carry out that plan, which includes a project that goes through the constituency of Lakeside and Portage la Prairie.

Honourable Speaker, will the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure commit to fully implementing MTI's multi-year infrastructure investment strategy?

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I thank the member opposite for asking about the multi-year investment strategy. This is an incredible piece of work that my department's been—let me rephrase that: our government's multi-year infrastructure strategy.

It's an incredible piece of work and I can't wait 'til all Manitobans get to see it when we're able to launch it very soon.

Mr. King: Honourable Speaker, one of the projects that's important to the constituents of Lakeside and Portage la Prairie and is included in that multi-year plan is the upgrading of PR 227 from a mixed gravel and bituminous surface to RTAC loading standards. So, according to the multi-year plan, work should already be under way.

Can this minister commit today that this work will be carried out according to the scope and timelines set out in this plan for the project of 227?

MLA Naylor: You know, we have so many projects to be excited about and maybe I'll just take a moment to share a couple of them.

The \$18 million we've invested into the PR 234 improvements; the \$8 million we've invested into scoping out a new airport for Wasagamack, something that community has been asking about for many years; \$12 million into safety upgrades to intersection 1 and 5.

We have been working really hard to reset relationships with First Nations, and as I mentioned, municipalities. And I have previously met with both municipalities, that the member referred to, to discuss in detail the upcoming project that he's referencing.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park.

We can't hear you.

We still can't hear you, the honourable member for Tyndall Park.

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): How about now?

The Speaker: Now we can hear you.

Serious Injury and Death for Children and Youth Request for Government Plan to Address

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth have published their annual report. New legislation has required MACY to report on serious injuries for children and youth, and through this we have learned that the majority of the serious injuries were results of sexual assaults, stabbings and shootings.

What is this government doing to address these new findings?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Miigwech to the member for a really important question here today.

Let me just say this first. I want to acknowledge the really, really important work that MACY does, including the advocate and her phenomenal team. Since I've assumed this role as Minister of Families and minister responsible, we've had many, many meetings with MACY, with the advocate and her team, and have indicated our full support of working together in partnership to address the concerns that are

brought forward by MACY, including some of the concerns that we've seen in their annual report.

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

Children and Youth—Mental Health Services Support for Families and Caregivers

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): It has been made clear that there is an ongoing number of children who are dying at the hands of caregivers. MACY's requested for more services for families and caregivers, specifically access support services for mental health.

Honourable Speaker, will this government, yes or no, be providing more mental health support services for families and caregivers, and if so, when?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Certainly that MACY report alluded to mental health supports, and our team, including under the leadership of our Minister for Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith), is doing phenomenal work at looking at those supports for youth.

I do want to just highlight a couple of things that our government is doing. We've got addiction treatments facilities in Norway House, Southport in Winnipeg. We've also invested \$1.5 million for crisis stabilization beds and services with Marymount and Neecheewam. We've invested \$2 million for the 24-hour mobile crisis team at The Link. We also have invested \$2.9 million for specialized treatment program for youth with complex trauma.

We know that there's a lot more work to be done, and we're actively engaged in that process to be able to have those wraparound supports for some of our most vulnerable children.

* (14:20)

Serious Injury and Death for Children and Youth Request for Government to Plan to Address

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): There have been many horrifying tragedies over the last year where children in the province did not make it to their 18th birthday.

We're glad that the Families Minister said that they are listening, however it's been over a year and our Advocate for Children and Youth is still waiting to see a whole-of-government response and strategy.

Honourable Speaker, what is this government waiting for, and what are they doing for the time being?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): I want to remind the House and Manitobans that our Premier (Mr. Kinew) has made a commitment to Manitoba children that we would see more Manitoba children reach their 18th birthday.

That is our basic tenet. It is the principle of our government and it is the principle of our Cabinet in the work that we are doing. We are taking a government—a whole-of-government approach.

I do want to remind members opposite that MACY's 2022-23 annual report said, and I quote, the time for action is now. The Province must act quickly. Children cannot keep waiting. End quote.

That's the record of members opposite, who, when they were in their failed government, did not care about Manitoba's most vulnerable—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Free Prescription Birth Control Update on Program Uptake

MLA Nellie Kennedy (Assiniboia): Honourable Speaker, our government knows prescription birth control is a right and not a luxury. It's why we were pleased to announce free birth control taking effect at the beginning of this month. Because money should never be a barrier to accessing reproductive health.

Since October 1, Manitobans have been able to access some of the most common and effective birth control without having to worry about cost.

Can the Minister of Health update the House about the success and uptake we have seen in the first month of this program?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I thank my colleague for that excellent question.

In Budget 2024, our government announced a plan to make birth control free for all Manitobans, and on October 1, we delivered on that promise. I am so proud to share that in one month, 12,436 Manitobans signed up for free birth control with many more accessing it each and every day. This investment gives folks the freedom to make the reproductive health choices that are best for them.

Honourable Speaker, on this side of the House, we are proud to invest in women's health, to make reproductive freedom a priority, all while saving Manitobans hundreds of dollars every single month and year.

Honourable Speaker, it's a new day in Manitoba.

**Population Increase for Morden-Winkler
Wastewater Capacity Needs**

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): Honourable Speaker, the population boom in Morden and Winkler has outpaced the capacity for their wastewater systems. The lack of wastewater capacity will limit residential and commercial growth for both communities and will have a negative impact on economic growth for the region.

Will the minister commit today to expedite funding and regulatory approval to ensure that the community has the wastewater capacity that it desperately needs?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): We know that every time we visit the Pembina Valley, we hear about the water and wastewater needs. And we keep showing up for the communities there because there's a huge amount of our province's GDP that is generated in the region. Because the cultural and social contributions of the region are so important to Manitoba's overall vitality. Because every time we visit, every time we spend time with the good people in that part of the province, we're welcomed with open arms.

The era of division and darkness of the PCs is over.

A time of working together to bring all Manitobans, to invest in a bright future for our shared destiny together is here. We're so very humbled to be able to work with the people of the Pembina Valley and every region of Manitoba to deliver on that promise.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Morden-Winkler, on a supplementary question.

Mrs. Hiebert: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

For nearly a decade now, the community of Morden has faced many challenges and setbacks to their wastewater project. Subdivisions have been put on hold. Agriculture and manufacturing sectors have been constrained.

All levels of government must be willing to engage in order to advance the needs of this water project.

Will the minister commit today to take urgent action for the city of Morden and ensure the necessary wastewater capacity is built?

Mr. Kinew: One of the first meetings that I took after assuming office was on the important priority of trying to address both the water and waste water infra-

structure needs in the Pembina Valley region. This is, of course, one of the region—reasons why we brought on a former Morden mayor, Brandon Burley, to help us with this important priority.

Now, the bottom line is this: the member opposite is new to the House, but in her preamble, she lists the PC government's failure to deliver for the people of the Pembina Valley on this issue. They had two terms in government, and none of the municipalities in the region would agree on anything. The only thing, in fact, that Morden and Winkler would agree on, is that the PCs failed to get things built for that region. That is a Pembina Valley joke, by the way, Honourable Speaker.

And what I would say is that that era of failing to get things done is over. The Pembina Valley has a government that is willing to invest and deliver for—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

**Provincial Park Budget
Funding Concerns**

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Honourable Speaker, the NDP government of Manitoba has significantly reduced the budget for the Province's park infrastructure. This is the perspective of modern campground, calling out the NDP's \$100-million funding cut for new park developments.

The minister's funding cut is a direct threat to the long-term viability of our parks.

Will this minister restore the Park's budget and ensure that our parks are available to be enjoyed both today and tomorrow?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Thank you to the member opposite. I am always thrilled to get up in this House and speak about our beautiful provincial parks. I want to start, because I haven't yet had a question yet this session on parks, I'd like to start by thanking our incredible provincial park staff for an amazing 2024 season.

Our public servants do incredible work maintaining our parks, keeping them clean and accessible for Manitobans. This summer, my family and I were able to visit many parks across our great province, and I just want to start by thanking the people that work in our parks for, again, an incredible 2024 Manitoba park season.

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

Mr. Wowchuk: Honourable Speaker, we are required to spend money on nature. Right now, to secure our future, every delay will cost future generations more. This is what the wilderness committee said in relation to the NDP cuts to our parks. Manitoba parks generate significant tourism dollars for this government and are a source of pride for many.

Why is this minister unable to have her voice heard at the Cabinet table to properly fund parks, or possibly was the funding cut her idea?

MLA Schmidt: The protection of Manitoba parks and spaces is of top priority for our government, for our Premier (Mr. Kinew) and for me as minister. I am so very proud of the work we've done already, not the least of which is the Seal River Watershed Alliance MOU that we signed that the previous government could not get off the ground.

We have many more projects that we completed this summer. The West Hawk sea wall, Nutimik museum, Kennedy House. The truth of the matter is, Honourable Speaker, on the other side of the House, they have absolutely no credibility when it comes to parks and protected spaces. Their record is cut, sell and privatize; on this side of the House, we will always protect and defend our parks and we will always invest in them.

Bus Service in Northern Manitoba New Regulations Announced

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): For seven years, Heather Stefanson and members opposite left Manitobans out in the cold, but nowhere that was more evident than our northern roads, where PC cuts led to a transit service that was so poor, that Manitoba busing—that Manitobans busing from Winnipeg to Thompson had to sit in freezing temperatures for hours on.

But now, Manitobans are feeling the heat from our new government.

Can the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure please inform the House about what our government is doing to improve bus conditions in northern Manitoba?

* (14:30)

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Well, I thank my wonderful colleague, the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak, for that great question. And it's a really good example of how our government is listening to local people.

Heather Stefanson and members opposite failed northern Manitobans in so many ways, but we are working to fix the damage they did. That's why I joined northern Manitobans for a two-day transportation symposium in Thompson this fall, and I was so pleased to recently announce new regulations that require all buses operating in Manitoba to be equipped with working heaters. And we have regulations to ensure compliance.

Honourable Speaker, we will keep investing in transportation programs and infrastructure to enable people right across the province to get where they need to go safely and in comfort.

The Speaker: The honourable leader of the—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Highways 433, 313 and 520 Paving and Upgrade Update

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, I'd like to ask the Infrastructure Minister if she can update the House on the construction and the paving of Highway 433 and the upgrades to 313 and also the 520?

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

That's in eastern Manitoba, by the way, Honourable Speaker.

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): It is an absolute pleasure to get up in this House again today to talk about—*[interjection]* Thank you. It's delightful to realize the opposition has rediscovered the importance of infrastructure. They certainly paid no attention to it during the seven and a half years they were in office.

The reason that our costs escalate on repairs and on new infrastructure and fixing infrastructure is because the years of neglect under the previous government.

You know, time and time again, members ask me about specific highways that have fallen into disrepair—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Highway 201 RTAC Expansion Request for Update

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): The Provincial Road 201 connects many of the communities in the southeast corner of our province—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Narth:—and spans across the southern portion, connecting many of the communities in the south.

The RTAC upgrade to Highway 201 connecting Highway 59 to the growing community of Vita and its growing manufacturing industry is important to the southern region.

Can this minister update the House on when the RTAC expansion of Highway 201 is to occur?

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I'm grateful that I get to stand again because I didn't quite get to finish my answer to the last question, which was just reminding the members opposite that the 'disrepair' in infrastructure across this province rests solely on their shoulders.

A year in, we have made incredible investments, both to repair and to new infrastructure. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Naylor: And maybe some of the new members opposite don't understand that every single project of the 1,000 projects that are currently under way can be looked up right on the website.

I want all Manitobans to know that. Just plug in the road number, plug in the community, and you can see what projects—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Phoenix School Renovation and Expansion Government Intention for Project

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Honourable Speaker, Phoenix School in Headingley is bursting at the seams. I brought this to the Minister of Education's attention a couple of weeks ago in QP. Since then, there has been no update.

The renovation and expansion of the school was approved in 2022, then the NDP got elected and they cancelled it. This has been very troubling for residents of Headingley. Continued provision of school-age child care is contingent on this project going ahead.

Will the Minister of Education reassure the residents of Headingley that the expansion and renovation of Phoenix School will go ahead as planned?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Acting Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): The truth of the matter is we inherited a mess. We inherited a plan that was written on the back of a napkin, a plan who the member from Spruce Woods, himself, admits there was no funding for. There was no 'trezzy' board submission before.

They can get up here in this House every day and talk about their imaginary school plan. On this side of the House, we are taking a look at all of the needs across the province. We're here to work with all sorts of communities, from Headingley, northern Manitoba, southern Manitoba, east and west.

But I would be remiss today, Honourable Speaker, as the Acting Minister of Education, to not talk about the—one of the most exciting days that it is for schoolchildren, and that is for Halloween. So I just want to say happy Halloween to all the kids out there. Thanks to all—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member—*[interjection]*

Order. Order.

Mrs. Cook: This project is the top priority of the St. James-Assiniboia School Division, and contrary to the assertions of the minister, there is nothing imaginary about it. That's an insult to the folks at the St. James-Assiniboia School Division and the residents of Headingley who have been working hard on this project for two years. It was at 99 per cent project design completion stage when the NDP cancelled it.

The minister may think this is hilarious; I assure you, it is no laughing matter to the residents of Headingley whose school is bursting at the seams.

Will the minister take this seriously and assure the residents of Headingley that this project will go ahead, yes or no?

MLA Schmidt: I thank the member opposite for the question, and I would like to remind the member that I am putting truthful facts on the record—that there was no plan to build these schools. You can design schools, you can promise schools, you can build false hope for Manitobans trying—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Schmidt:—to secure a win in the election, which they failed to do under Heather Stefanson's leadership. We all know this to be true.

And I'm going to quote here from the member from Spruce Woods: Money did not need to be set aside last year because this school contract was not set.

They did not have contracts on these schools. On this side of the House, we're not going to give Manitobans false hope. We're going to work with Manitobans. We're going to work with communities

and school divisions to give them a plan that they can count on, Honourable—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The time for oral questions has expired.

Petitions?

Grievances?

Orders of the day. [*interjection*] Oh, sorry. The honourable member for Roblin.

GRIEVANCES

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I rise today on a grievance because this NDP government is all talk and no action. And as we have seen on two occasions now this week, they care only about getting the credit for good ideas, not about collaborating. They talk about working together; they don't mean a word of it.

Unfortunately, this is more than just politics. This approach by the NDP government has serious and life-changing consequences for the people of Manitoba. They've talked a big talk about improving breast cancer screening in Manitoba, but they refuse to back it up by committing, in legislation, to meeting a deadline to reduce the age for breast cancer screening in Manitoba to 40. Manitoba women are depending on this change being made.

I've introduced a bill that would do just that. We debated this bill at second reading. While we were still in here debating the bill, the minister concluded their remarks and then they went out into the rotunda to what media called a hastily called press conference, and said that the NDP would do exactly what Bill 221 calls for and reduce the age for breast cancer screening to age 40 by the end of 2026. Yet, just two weeks earlier, they had said the best they could do was to get to age 45 by the end of 2025.

The bill passed second reading. It was widely supported by advocates, experts and thousands of ordinary Manitobans who signed a petition calling for these changes. But the NDP refused to call it to committee. They are going to let this bill die on the Order Paper rather than back up their promises by committing to this firm deadline for Manitoba women, which begs the question: What are their words worth?

* (14:40)

Not much, Honourable Speaker. If they're unwilling to legislate the deadline, it really does make one doubt their commitment to lowering the breast cancer

screening age. It shows that their promises are, in fact, empty and meaningless.

We know the facts about breast cancer screening in younger women. One in eight Canadian women will be diagnosed with breast cancer today, 84 Canadian women will be diagnosed, and today, 15 Canadian women will die from it.

Breast cancer in younger women now accounts for nearly 20 per cent of all diagnoses, and younger women when they're diagnosed tend to be diagnosed with more aggressive stages of breast cancer or cancer that hasn't been caught until it's in its later stages and harder to treat.

And the peak incidence of breast cancer for Black, Asian, Hispanic and Indigenous women are all in their 40s. So there's a very important equity angle here that you would think the NDP would care about. They, apparently, do not.

Advocates in the community have been leading the charge on this issue. In response to new scientific evidence, over the last several months, multiple organizations, including the Canadian Cancer Society, Dense Breasts Canada and Breast Cancer Canada, along with medical experts and survivors, have all been calling for a lower screening age.

There is truly no good reason for government not to support this bill. But there are a few bad reasons that they wouldn't support this bill.

One is similar to what we saw earlier this week when the NDP forced the member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux) to recall the bill that she has been fighting for for months simply so that they could introduce their own carbon copy version and take the credit. I can't imagine what it felt like for the member for Tyndall Park to have to withdraw her bill. I will not be withdrawing mine.

The other reasons that the NDP might not want to pass this bill is because it includes an important accountability measure that would require the minister to report annually on the number of screening mammograms that are done. Frankly, Honourable Speaker, what gets measured gets managed. If the NDP aren't tracking the number of screening mammograms done, then we can't know if they're making any progress on it. So perhaps the NDP simply want to avoid the accountability measures in this bill.

But third and most concerning to me and to Manitobans, Honourable Speaker, is the very likely reality that the real reason the NDP won't pass this bill

is that they have no intention of actually lowering the screening age for breast cancer to age 40 by the end of 2026. It says that the minister went out into the Rotunda while we were still debating the bill and made their promise just to put the issue to bed. If they had any intention of keeping their promise, they would pass this bill. That's all there is to it.

I remain extremely disappointed that this government doesn't mean what they say; that ministers in this government have said on the record, off the record, in the hallway, everywhere, oh, we're willing to work with you; we want to work together.

It's not true, Honourable Speaker. We've seen it twice this week. This is a government that is not about collaboration. They are all about getting the credit.

At the end of the day, Honourable Speaker, the most important issue here is that the screening age actually gets lowered. That's why I introduced the bill. By including a firm deadline for Manitoba to lower the age to 40, it provides reassurance to Manitoba women—because let's be clear: this isn't fast enough. Advocates want to see it happen now. But most people understand that capacity takes time to be ramped up, but they want to know that it's going to happen. And the fact that the minister won't commit in legislation to this deadline is deeply, deeply concerning.

So I grieve this today, Honourable Speaker, that Bill 221 will die on the Order Paper and that the NDP government's words aren't worth the paper they are written on.

I will once again—it's not too late—call on this NDP government to back up their words with real action. Call Bill 221 to committee. Allow those advocates and experts and breast cancer survivors and their loved ones to come to the Manitoba Legislature to talk about the importance of lowering the screening age in Manitoba and about other ages to—other changes to breast cancer screening that need to be made in this province. Get it through committee, pass it through third reading. It's the right thing to do for Manitoba women, Honourable Speaker.

I implore the NDP government to come to their senses, to stop worrying about getting the credit, to put aside the politics of the issue for just a moment and to pass the bill.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Could you please resume Committee of Supply.

* (14:50)

The Speaker: It's been announced that we will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

The Deputy Speaker can take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

AGRICULTURE

* (15:00)

The Chairperson (Rachelle Schott): Will the community—Committee of Supply on the—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 Agriculture.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture): I sure do.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to bring opening remarks on the Department of Agriculture's budget for 2024.

The agriculture and agri-food sector are the backbone of provincial economy. They directly contribute 7.2 per cent of the Manitoba GDP and over 5 per cent of provincial jobs. Agriculture and agri-food international exports 9.39 billion in 2023.

Our mission is to foster the sustainability growth of Manitoba producers and ag processors through the innovation—innovative, reliable support and services. Budget 2024 addresses several key components, ensuring a strong and competitive agriculture sector.

Agriculture is key to Manitoba's economy. A strong agriculture sector needs the reliability and responsive tools to assist producers in managing the risks. We want to ensure farmers are competitive and sustainable while navigating the impacts of climate change.

In total, the 2024 budget includes \$146.9 million in support towards business risk management programming. And of that, \$33.8 million is funded for ag

stability and protecting producers from declining margins due to market risks, production losses, as well, higher input cost.

As well, almost \$16 million is for ag invest to help producers manage smaller income declines and make investments in the management risk; 5.2 is for wildlife damage compensation to compensate producers who lost—losses from damage from crops and live-stock 'preditation'.

In addition, almost \$92 million in the budget is allocated for the Province's share of ag insurance premiums. Total premiums including federal producer contributes is estimated at \$385 million. Premiums for ag insurance will be lower in 2024 for most crops, with the average premium for annual crops expected to be \$16.221 per acre compared to \$19.21 per acre in '23. In total, Manitoba Agricultural Services anticipates providing \$4.9 billion of coverage to seven—7,650 producers farming over 9.5 million acres.

To be effective, agricultural 'progrills' must also have accessibility to producers. My mandate letter commits me to ensuring producers have the support they need close to home. That's why the budget includes funding to support Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation open to—two additional centres to be—to better serve producers in Manitoba.

In 2021, a significant amount of MASC offices were closed across Manitoba, and a recent service delivery review determined that western part of Manitoba was underserved for physical locations.

The addition of two service centres demonstrates the commitment to keep MASC offices open and ensure clients have a shorter distance to travel to access the importance of agriculture programs offered through MASC and the department such as ag insurance, hail insurance, wildlife damage compensation and agriculture lending.

The budget also includes funding for other innovation important to the sector, including funding target to address the veterinarian shortages.

The 2024 budget includes \$135,000 to implement the veterinarian medical service strategy, focusing on attending—attracting, attending—retending and increasing the number of practising veterinarians—medical professionals underserved in areas in the province and an emphasis on large-animal vets.

This funding will support tuition rebates for students trained at western college veterinarian medicine and funding for five additional seats in the summer

VetSTEP program for students at the WCVM. Funding for these initiatives recognizes the importance in the reliable network of veterinarians and veterinarian technicians to agriculture sector, enabling economic impact for the commercial animal industry and grow exports. The budget also proposes the realignment of resources with the department to provide a more strategic focus on animal health and welfare, research and innovation.

The creation of the provincial veterinarian position to the head and the team focused on animal welfare will provide for strengthening welfare practices, commercial operations through leadership, partnership with the livestock producer groups and will help build stronger relationships with the northern and remote and Indigenous communities to improve dog control and reduce the risks to residents.

Reorganizing of production divisions will be an important component of achieving mandates set out in a letter from the Premier (Mr. Kinew) to support innovation and research in agriculture.

Our part of reorganizing includes the creation of a branch focused on research, innovation and extensions that will support more focus on applied research and the extensions of knowledge to producers on best management practices and a new technology enhancing sustainability, agro-economic systems at a producer level.

In addition, included in 2024 budget, we have also made commitments to fund several important initiatives under the Canada-Manitoba sustainable Canadian agriculture partnership, a cost-shared agreement that provides up to \$221 million in investments over five years to 'susport' sustainable development of agriculture and agri-food sectors.

Overall, Agriculture's budget for 2024 addresses the priorities of government and recognizes the importance of a strong agriculture sector to the provincial economy.

And I may say off script, being an agriculture producer for 35 years of my life, there is obviously the utmost importance of business-risk insurance programs, innovation, opportunities of further development as we are dealing with climate change; we are dealing with a number—uncontrolled circumstances. The reality of—our agriculture producers are faced with rising costs—input cost—and through our business-risk insurance programs in partnership with the federal, with the producers and our government that we need to fulfill a balanced approach of sustaining the importance of

agriculture in the province of Manitoba and, more importantly, the rural economic development component is very key in our opinion.

So those are my closing comments at this stage of the game.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

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

* (15:10)

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): I'd like to thank the minister and the department officials for being here today. I think this is a great opportunity to get some information on the record about the important work of the Agriculture Department and how it facilitates the entire agriculture and agri-food sector that contributes so much to the Manitoba economy and our GDP.

We, of course, have a very diversified economy here in Manitoba, and our agriculture sector itself is one of the most diversified in Canada and North America. Manitoba is, after all, the gateway to the West and home to the oldest agricultural communities in western Canada, dating back over 200 years.

We now have grown into one of the most mature, modern agriculture regions in the world, innovating and implementing some of the best agricultural practices and producing some of the highest quality agriculture and food products for consumption here in Manitoba but also being exported to the United States and all around the world.

Winnipeg and my home community of Portage la Prairie have been major agricultural centres and built their economies on the grain trade and food processing and agriculture supply business that I worked in myself for over 27 years. We can connect many Manitobans' employment, in one way or other, to the ag sector.

So today, I think I'd like to ask the minister to expand on the importance of agriculture sector here in Manitoba and some of the work Agriculture Department is facilitating, our agricultural trade and exports as well as how they are assisting farmers in implementing those best practices and managing risks, whether they're market risks, weather risks, that farmers and entire agriculture sector have to manage from time to time.

I will also have some specific questions about the operations of the department in the minister's office and staffing, crop insurance farm programs and MASC. I'd like to get as much on the record at—in the time that we have for the sake of the public or anyone that might be listening or looking back at Hansard, whether that be the media, farmers or the general public that has the interest in agriculture.

So I think we can have a good discussion here today. I know the minister has been a farmer, and this is the second stint as Agriculture Minister, so I expect he'll be able to answer questions quickly, directly and put some good information on the record.

I also want to—if I can introduce my team as well too or is that not appropriate at this time?

So with me today is our staff, Duncan Hamilton, that'll be joining us also, the—MLA Jodie Byram, MLA Trevor King and MLA Richard Perchotte. I'd also like to welcome the department as well too, and I look forward to our conversation today.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: I'd like to remind all members, during Committee of Supply, we refer to members by their constituency names or portfolios going forward. *[interjection]* Great. Thank you.

We thank the member for your 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 3.1(a) contained in resolution 3.1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us at the table—come on up, please—and we ask that the minister introduces the staff in attendance.

Mr. Kostyshyn: It's my pleasure to introduce deputy minister, Brenda DeSerranno. I would like to introduce assistant deputy minister, Maurice Bouvier; ADM executive financial officer, Kevin Kroeker; and I like to also introduce assistant deputy minister, Joe Funk—he back there? Also assistant deputy minister, Patti Rothenburger. And last but not least, MASC chief executive officer Jared Munro. Here's my chief of staff, individual, Chris Sanderson.

The Chairperson: According to our rule 78(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner with questions put separately on all resolutions once

the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Bereza: First, I'd like to start with something that's very current.

We've seen China has been threatening trade actions against Canada's agricultural products, so I'd like to give the minister the opportunity to speak to that and how the department is working with the federal government to ensure our ag products, farmers and industry exports are not caught up in these trade disputes.

And I'd like to ask the minister to identify the potential impacts and costs to our producers when tariffs are added to our exports by countries like China.

Thank you.

* (15:20)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for the question and, you know, when we have these circumstances that recently has—China has brought forward a tariff or potential tariff and discussion, it's hard to measure, you know, the length and the impact. But I think in reality, barley, back a number of years ago, Australia went through a very similar situation such as this. And unfortunately, it was over two years before there was a bit of an understanding of a settlement based on world—WTO's judgment.

Being totally honest, you know, this process is quite a lengthy process as far as in discussion moving forward where the impacts, I think, are very, very concerning for our agriculture producers.

And hypothetically speaking, is if this is a prolonged scenario, obviously the impact will be this, is the producers will have to make a judgment, whether they're going to grow canola next year or not unless this is settled sooner than later. And that is a very difficult situation given the complex of this kind of a scenario 'baze' talking about the impact of the trade that China has placed on this.

So the producers will be very concerned; concerned in a number of factions. And I think if I can sum it up, it's going to be a really challenging mental issue for a lot of the agriculture producers because the reality—if we extend this into the early spring, there are always pre-bookings of next year's crop production.

So it's 'base' a tsunami, in my honest opinion, that we can really say that there's a simplified session. I'm going to have to be honest with you: there is no way

that there is no simplified 'messive', because it is a very complex motivation where you have the Canadian council bringing forward a judgment with some producers, then you have the China government making their opinions, and then it eventually comes to the WTO.

And there really isn't—there is a timeline of November the 8th of ruling coming down sooner than later, but beyond that, depending upon the, I guess, the investigation, it could take quite a long time, quite easily into the following year, no problem.

So I'm just going to be repetitious of the fact that the trade challenges will have some real challenges for producers not only this year but in the up—next year's opportune.

And I think we all know that, you know, the commodity prices is X and who knows where it may land up as when the announcement was made that there was going to be a tariff, we noticed the canola prices really took a bit of a dive. No ruling has been brought forward, so the canola prices have come back a bit, but I think it's safe to say that, until the judgment comes down, it's a very uncomfortable ground to be on for producers for next year.

I do want to share also with members opposite that I've had the challenge—or I've—I had the opportunity or the department has been talking to a number of organizations, but just this morning actually, we were on a phone call with the minister from Alberta. And, unfortunately, the ag minister from Saskatchewan—or we assume he's going to remain agricultural minister, but the deputy minister was online.

* (15:30)

Also we had a conversation with the ag minister from Ontario and basically talking about how do we start to move forward of developing an opportunity of discussion with the federal minister.

I do want to share with you that when the announcement was made about the potential WTO or the return of, we had sent a letter to the federal Agriculture Minister just addressing our importance of this subject, and we're definitely going to be in conversation with the department because—federal government department—that we need to somewhat have a constant communication moving forward for the benefit of the canola growers across Canada and on importance of agriculture—crown—or canola trade in the province of Manitoba.

MLA Bereza: Minister, you brought up some very valid points there regarding pre-bookings and things

such as that, with pre-booking of both herbicide, fungicide, seed itself, fertilizer. So what is this government's plan, again, with the price of canola that has plummeted and looks like it is going to continue to plummet?

Because of the amount of canola that is grown in Manitoba, and the size of our marketplace here, is there anything that this government is doing to protect those farmers that have already pre-bought or are looking at pre-buying fertilizer, chemical or seed?

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Just a reminder to all members that questions and answers must come through the Chair.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you so much, again, for the question, MLA from Portage.

You know, this—I guess we can sit back and surmise what do we do next, and I think it's fair to say, in my opinion, we—November 8 is the day that the, you know, decision, I guess, that may take place. I'm very proud of our staff with the Department of Agriculture and our specialists when we talk about certain circumstances.

So I just want to share this with you and the group is that hypothetically, if we're into kind of the worst scenario, we have our extension specialists that can work with producers largely if canola is, you know, going to be a challenge with no timelines established of making a decision. Our specialists are prepared to work with producers and to hopefully help them, assist them in making the best decisions or ideas as we move forward, whether it's the seed or fertilizer purchases.

I want to emphasize the importance—when we spoke to the other agriculture ministers—and obviously, they had said, you know, November 8 is going to be the turning buckle timeline. And I want to assure the MLA from Portage and the committee that we've all agreed to get together as soon as there's a decision made so we can start planning our further discussions with the federal minister. And obviously, you know, we value our conversations with Global Affairs Canada, which is quite involved in the canola in Canada as far as one organization speaking on our half—behalf of the canola producers.

* (15:40)

One of the other things, I think it's very key and—business risk insurance programs. And I stress the

importance of, you know, MASC and business risk because things like these come into play.

So the Business Risk Management program, the ag stability program, you know, has been around and basically does provide a bit of comfortness—and I use that word loosely—of protections to protect margins. You know, just yesterday our staff was out to one of the farm business specialists and did a presentation to some producers. So, you know, I think the producers are well aware of talking to their accountants or moving ahead of preparing for—hopefully, it doesn't exist, but I think that's being proactive to explore options that does exist.

You know, it's been somewhat of a bit of a comfortness to a point; you know, the price of canola, when the announcement was made, took a major dive. And I don't know if the MLA from Portage has checked recently, but the price has recovered basically to what it was prior to the announcement being made. Now, whether that's a comfort level of 'profitability,' you know, given how the harvest went this year, but basically, the price today is almost back to what it was prior to the announcement of the tariff challenge.

So I think, closing off my commentary today, is that I think we've got discussions with the Canadian 'cole' council, Manitoba canola council; we've got ag ministers across the province that—across Canada—western Canada more so than Ontario—that once a decision comes down on November 8, then we'll kick into phase 2 opportunity, and then we start our conversations with them again and with producers of canola councils, which are quite involved, obviously, as being the lead.

We—as the Agriculture Minister, don't want to interfere, but definitely we're there in support. Also, having a very fruitful conversation with the federal minister and trying to examine any opportunities of the business risk component, to build a bit of comfortness for the agriculture producers that will be in challenge of trying to decide what they're going to grow next year, as far as their crops.

So thank you.

MLA Bereza: We saw agriculture exports reach \$8.8 billion—that's on page 17 of the supplement—a 13 per cent increase over 2021 and represents more than a third of all Manitoba's exports, which were—which totalled 20.7 in 2022.

With rising commodity prices, how can the department and government better support our producers in industry and growing these exports through improved production? And could more loans be avail-

able to support growing production investments in technology, grain and feed storage space?

Thank you.

* (15:50)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you so much for the question, and there was so much information that I wanted to make sure I got right and share it with the panel and the people in attendance.

When we're talking about—you know, Manitoba is very unique, along with a number of the western provinces or eastern provinces as well. And when the question is asked, what can we do to enhance opportunities for the agriculture sector—and I've said this numerous times—the best thing we can do is enhance added value.

I guess, to maybe put it in another context, let's take the raw product that we grow in the province here in Manitoba and let's not ship it out in truckloads or trainloads of opportunity. Let's put it in a package. Let's put it together in a finished commodity that we can create more jobs, more opportunities of added value in the province of Manitoba. More jobs, more income and more opportunity to expand, and maybe even into small communities that will increase the populations of our communities, increase our school numbers and maybe revive some of our smaller communities, as we see the importance of rural Manitoba in a big way.

So it's a win-win situation as far as the added value commodity.

And you know what, Manitoba has one of the lowest hydro rates in Canada. And why would people not want to come here and take advantage of the plentiful amount of water and lower hydro rates that we have? And continue to work for the—and actually, at the end of the day, it probably will turn out to be a cheaper cost to our farmers that produce the product and have it processed here, rather than them dealing with maybe large freight cost of moving of the raw product to some other country or other province. It's not going to be all a hundred per cent, but I want to assure, at least we created an opportunity of added value and explore those opportunities. I think there's a great opportunity moving forward.

So staying focused on that subject of added value, we can do it within our province, we can do it within our country. But our neighbours to the south—and I know that yourself have been involved in a number of trips down south and I just recently returned from the

Tri-National Accord and had some really, really important, positive conversations. And, you know, our neighbours to the south and to Mexico has, I think, a world of opportunity of trade of commodities that become.

And adding to that, you know, traditionally, we would be using the ships and docks. Now, with the recent announcement of the Kansas City Rail and CP becoming kind of a corridor of opportunity of movement of rail by the rail system. So now you've got commodities that can be brought out or exported to either Mexico or the US. No difference on the CN side and Burlington North is an opportunity that—I think we've just germinated the seed of opportunities of economic growth of the products we grow in this province, or across Western Canada.

And I think we just need to do a—continuing working relationships, such as attending the Minnesota State Fair recently, and met with the commissioner there. And, you know, that—there was so much in common that we have with the state of Minnesota, and a working relationship that I think just needs to be nurtured in an appropriate fashion. The business partnership relationship that we have in the department of 'agrival.'

And let's be realistic: The fact is that the world population continues to grow and we in Manitoba, in Canada, partnering with the US or Mexico creates that avenue of addressing the world population, of providing food for those countries that need it. And I think we are in a position, just a matter of moving forward in a positive sense.

But I also want to opportune the fact that we got the food development centre in Portage la Prairie, and we talked about new, innovative foods that could be developed. That, to me, is kind of the commercial chef kitchen to experiment with some of the raw product we grow here, put it into a package and it's CFI certified through the food development centre.

So, I stress the importance of—sorry.

MLA Bereza: Thank you for the answer, Minister.

I'm going to refer to page 8 in the supplement on this next question. Your total budget for the fiscal year is \$597 million, which is more than you spent last year but less than was budgeted in '23, which was \$613 million.

Does the minister expect to remain on budget for the fiscal year, or will he finish under budget or over budget this year? And can the minister and department

provide a breakdown of what is all included in the \$597 million?

How much is being spent on core department operations? How much is being spent on MASC and other farm programs and assistance to farmers and industry?

The Chairperson: So just a reminder to the committee that all questions need to be put through the Chair. Yes.

* (16:00)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for the question.

And so I'll read off from the text: Financial and Administrative Services 2024-25 budget is three million nine hundred and thirty-seven; risk management, credit, income support programs is five hundred and forty-two million, six hundred and forty-five thousand—I'll just round them off, if that's okay. Okay.

Industry Advancement is twenty-two million two hundred. Agriculture production, innovation and resilience is thirteen million six hundred and twenty-nine. The strategy planning, policy and programs is \$13,432,000. Costs Related to Capital Assets is \$1,142,000—X-X-X. So—and interfund activity is \$221,000.

The second quarter report: Department is on budget. The summary is slightly under, and budget—*[interjection]* Oh yes, right. So—I'm sorry. The summary is slightly under budget due to unseeded acres. Okay. Excess moisture.

Does that answer your question, then?

MLA Bereza: Switching topics here somewhat, what political staff work out of the minister's office or within their purview? Please provide names, titles and pay scales.

Has there been any change in political staff from between the initial staffing of your office and now? And can the minister describe the duties of the political staff listed?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, thank you for the question. And I'll go right to the questions.

The political staff, director of municipal—or ministerial affairs, is Christopher Sanderson; outreach co-ordinator is Brandon Burley; and executive assistant to the minister is Charlene Gulak.

So I'll give you a little bit more insight. Duties for municipal affairs: Christopher Sanderson acts as a political advisor, manages stakeholder relations, attends

every meeting, has a role in speech writing and editing documents, works across departments with other staff, reviews Treasury Board and Cabinet submissions and works with the ABC committees and works with other political staff in the office.

The duties of the outreach co-ordinator, Brandon Burley: Mr. Burley works as a liaison between families, businesses, community organizations in southern Manitoba and the Manitoba government.

* (16:10)

We've been very clear: no matter what part of province you are from, being in Winnipeg or agri-Manitoba, we're here to represent you.

Brandon works through my office and acts as a liaison between the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) office, Cabinet and stakeholders in the Pembina Valley region. He's an excellent addition to our team. I know Brandon is serving our agriculture communities as well. Pleased to see this ongoing work with the community leaders and agribusinesses.

It is my understanding that the previous PC government had a position of the community liaison with the Agriculture Minister office, and we have continued that approach. Duties of our executive assistant, Charlene Gulak: Charlene works with my director of ministerial affairs and my constituency office. She handles great volumes of casework and is the eyes and ears of department. She also represents me in my absence and Charlene comes with a wealth of experience, having previously served on the economic development officer and a school trustee.

And there are no additional FTEs added.

MLA Bereza: Are there any additional political staff or technical officers that work with the minister, such as communications staff, issues management, other support roles, et cetera? Do these staff work solely with the minister or are they shared among other departments?

Thank you.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, there are additional political staff in the Ministry of Agriculture: Jeanette Silway *[phonetic]* as a policy manager; Kaden Malone *[phonetic]* as a press secretary; and William O'Connor, issues manager. And they do work closely with multiple other departments.

MLA Bereza: The department has many contracts with outside service providers, some tendered, some directly awarded; 27 of 46 contracts disclosed by the

department in 2024 to date were directly awarded or sole-sourced, or approximately 60 per cent.

I'd like to ask about a direct-award contract No. 4501344281, dated July 26, '24–2024 to Nathan Dueck. The rationale listed is that the provider possesses specific and/or unique knowledge and/or abilities.

Can you please explain what Mr. Dueck was contracted to do for the department and what his specific or unique abilities were? Is it ordinary practice for the minister to issue direct-award contracts to political staff employed by other ministers, in this instance, the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala)? And I will table the documents.

Mr. Dueck, Order-in-Council. Nathan Dueck is appointed to the position of issues manager within the classification of professional officer, with—sorry, with a salary range and where applicable. And this is to the Minister of Finance. That was dated June 26, 2024.

Dated on this one is July 25th, when Mr. Dueck was paid another \$15,245 by the Department of Agriculture, and I will table those documents.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for the question.

* (16:20)

So I—just a bit of clarification based on the assumption by member, Nathan served through Agriculture under the contract for a period earlier this year. He supported the work of my office, including research analyzation, policy development elevation, strategic advice and communication.

He is a remarkable young individual, and obviously he made an impression on others in our government and decided to move him on from the contract position into a 'permasotion' role starting in June. His contract ended prior to this employment in Finance on June 21.

And I think it's worth noting is that the website date indicates when it was uploaded to the website, not when his contract ended of service. Right? So I think that's maybe the challenging understanding of when this date was used was when it was uploaded to the website, not his term of contract in the department. So the website shows that the date that information was uploaded is not the date of the contract or the date of the payment of the contract.

MLA Bereza: Thank you for the answer on that, Minister.

I'm going to cede the floor to the MLA from Lakeside.

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): You know, in the minister's opening remarks, he talked about \$225-million budget for sustainability. So—and I'm assuming that would take in the Sustainable Agriculture Manitoba, the SAM program, and the cropland management program. Think that's where the funding come out of; you could probably clarify that for me.

I know I had a constituent that had applied for some money under that program for the NEXAT system, and the NEXAT system was a piece of equipment that you could do all applications with one machine, which meant not as much tracking on the land, you know, not as much packing on the land, which would keep a lot of the soil from being compacted and thought it was a great program and this was something that he was going to maybe try out and bring over into the province and perhaps become a dealer if it became popular.

But it was—I guess what I—my question would be to the minister is, so how—what the amount of money went to the SAM, to the Sustainable Agriculture Manitoba, and what amount is going to the cropland management program, and can you name some of the approved applications and projects that were applied for for that program in the past year, throughout this budget year?

* (16:30)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you so much for the question, MLA for Lakeside.

So, part of the Sustainable CAP, our agriculture program, and its accrument of SAM, which is Sustainable Agriculture Manitoba.

SAM provides funding to farmers to implement cost-shared 'beneficiable' management practices—BMPs—that increases the environmental and economic sustainability of agriculture operations in Manitoba. Priority areas include climate change adaptation and 'migration', air quality, water quality, soil health and biodiversity.

In the intake of No. 1, the depart—or, the program, SAM—provided \$5.4 million in funding Sustainable CAP environmental climate change priority areas and—for 97 beneficial management practices projects.

There are three program streams—cropland management streams, including funding to support adaptation of cropland management practices to 'opinimize' the operations and improve the productivity, providing \$1.4 million funding for 48 projects across seven different beneficial management practices. So that was a definition of what was awarded in the last year.

Manure and livestock management stream includes funding to support adaptation for practices that enhances livestock feed efficiencies, improving manure application and transportation and supporting composting manure, providing \$3.7 million funding through SAM for 29 projects across four different beneficial management practices.

Number three, water management stream, includes funding to support for the adaptation of practices that enhances and supplies efficiency use, quality and management of water, providing \$280,000 funding for 20 projects across five different beneficial management practices.

Sustainable agriculture incentive programs, which is 'acromyn' SAIP, supports objectives under the made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan. Funding for SAIP is a source of sub-appropriation, totalling approximately \$1.5 million.

So I want to give you some examples, and I think maybe—to the MLA from Lakeside referring to this—I think there was a project I remember—I think it's something to do with reduced tillage intensity, I think it was one of them. Or a low disturbance of placement of seed and fertilizer—maybe this is all the same project.

So these are some examples, and reduced pesticide use through these programs and perennial cover for sensitive land—so that sensitive land being lighter land or alkaline type of soils. These are some examples of the various projects that we do with producers or organizations moving forward.

Hopefully I answered your question.

MLA Bereza: I'd like to cede the floor to the member from La Vérendrye.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): My question for the minister is: What has been spent in the last fiscal year on Manitoba clean farms initiative and how many farms that those resources have been able to serve?

*(16:40)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Well, thank you so much for the question and, you know, the value of the importance of the clean farmer—of CleanFarm Manitoba, what they do and how they're involved with the pesticide container removal and stuff.

So basely, I think the, you know, I guess first and foremost, to refer to the fiscal. You're only halfway through our fiscal year as far as expenditure goes, so,

you know, halfway through it, not total expenditure for the year.

I think the question that's been posed, I think it's more suitable through the environment and Minister Smith's department, environmental and climate change department. And—but definitely, I think the—there's value of the clean farms initiative program. And to our knowledge, there has been no, you know, application towards funding support as far as sustainable—S-CAP program.

But I basely just would say that if there's an opportunity of interest, then I think there was an opportunity to have some discussion with the other department as well, the sustainable environmental department. Okay? That's it.

The Chairperson: Just a reminder to all members, in Committee of Supply, we just need to refer to folks by their constituencies or portfolios.

MLA Bereza: I just want to go back to Mr. Dueck here again. During the time Mr. Dueck supposedly worked for the minister, he introduced himself as reporting to the—as reporting directly to the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) chief of staff.

Is this—is the minister here today aware that he's footing the bill for—is the minister aware of footing the bill for any other hidden executive council staff?

And, again, I just want to go back again to the order-in-council. It was dated on July 3, 2024, but saying in No.1 that it was effective on June 26, 2024. And then on July 25, 2024, there was an extra \$15,245 for other professional services for Mr. Dueck.

So is the minister aware of any other council staff that might be working in his department?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes. Thank you for the question, MLA from Portage.

So I just want to ensure the member that Nathan served through Agriculture under the contract period earlier this year. He supported the work of my office, including research, analyzation, policy development and evaluation, strategic advice and communication.

Obviously, he made an impression in the department as our government decided to move on from the contract position into a permanent role starting in June of 2024. His contracted ended prior to his employment in Finance—June the 26th. The website shows that the—date that the information was uploaded, not the date of the contract or the date of the payment of the contract.

So, at this point in time, I think I've been fairly straightforward in my commentary, so that's it.

MLA Bereza: Minister—honourable minister, you have set the goal to promote innovation and research in agriculture sector, including opportunities to expand regenerative agriculture.

Can you identify some of the initiatives and the projects within the department that are investing in innovation and research and the areas where you are partnering with industry or private sector?

* (16:50)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, I'd like to add something for the record regarding a previous subject, MLA from Portage.

So I just want to make a statement regarding Nathan's plan. And so Nathan worked as part of the team in support of any work in 'anty' other years of government. *[interjection]* You want me to repeat that? No. Okay. Right.

I just want to put—add that on and for the record. Okay?

Okay. May I?

The Chairperson: Okay, yes.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Sure, if I may. And thanks, MLA from Portage.

So the Science and Innovation Extension Branch program—and, you know, let me tell you, this is very important for future opportunities as far as the agriculture goes. So let me just start off by saying the 2024-25 budget is \$5.4 million. A total of 41 FTEs are involved in the program.

So let me break down some of the different components of what the money's been invested in and who's all involved in it. The Crop Diversification Centres—and I think you're quite familiar with those, MLA from Portage—so we've got Melita, we've got Roblin, Manitoba, we've got Carberry and Arborg. So those are four of the Crop Diversification Centres in the province of Manitoba. And it's hard to believe 10,266 plots in the year of 2024 and '25.

The regional extensions provide seven crop extension specialists, six livestock and forage extension specialists located across the province, host extended events with specialized focus on relevant local issues. So you know, just given the four geographic areas, they are very unique soils, maybe topographic and soil conditions, I think, is very key. So it's very appropriately placed in these geographic areas.

Working closely with agriculture production on the weekly crops reports and test surveillance activities, the

research and innovation organizes seven unit meetings with the University of Manitoba to identify and address research gaps and ways to collaborate, willing to work with academia, industry on developing an agriculture research framework for Manitoba.

And the research innovation funding is Sustainable CAP funding; intake, when approved, for a total of \$8.4 million and with 47 of—applications. Intake: were two approved for a total of \$7.9 million and a total of 54 applications. The intake: three received, 58 full proposal applications.

Now, another component is Manitoba crop variety elevation trials. So the regional crop variety testing program, the budget was \$46,000 in 2024. So just to give you a better understanding in the crop variety elevation trials, elevation was 23 spring wheat varieties, 16 barley, 13 oat varieties, 20 pea varieties, three flax, 15 forage varieties, six winter wheat varieties, seven fall varieties and 102 soybean varieties—which I think you're quite familiar with—47 dry beans, 12 faba bean varieties and 12 lupin were entries across Manitoba sites, totalling—and I'll repeat this twice—7,230 plots in 2024-25. So let me say that again: 7,230 plots in 2024-25.

So all this work is with commodity associations and various research and innovation projects, and I want to emphasize the importance of the University of Manitoba being involved in their, you know, innovation farms and the Richardson farms as well.

So thank you for my chance.

MLA Bereza: Thank you so much for the answer to that question, Minister.

Although I've got a ton more questions here to ask, with the timing that we have—and I'd just like to put on the record that I think for the next time we do this, we should try and have a little more time for this—but I think it's time now to move on to the resolutions, if that's okay.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Seeing no further questions at the moment—

Resolution 3.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$172,194,000 for Agriculture, Risk Management, Credit and Income Support Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$22,204,000 for Agriculture, Industry Advancement, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$13,629,000 for Agriculture, Agriculture Production, Innovation and Resilience, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$13,432,000 for Agriculture, Strategic Planning, Policy and Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,585,000 for Agriculture, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

* (17:00)

Resolution 3.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$247,430,000 for Agriculture, Loans and Guarantees Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Shall the resolution pass? The resolution is accordingly passed. [*interjection*] Oh. My apologies.

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

The Chairperson: The resolution is accordingly passed.

The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

ROOM 255

EMERGENCY EXPENDITURES

* (14:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of Emergency Expenditures.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): As Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, I'm pleased to be here today to discuss the Manitoba government's Emergency Expenditures projects and priorities for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

This is a fund we wish we did not need to use. Emergencies are always tremendously stressful for both communities and our own staff. However, we know that disasters and emergencies happen, therefore this expenditure is important to maintain.

* (15:00)

Before getting into details, I'm going to take a moment to recognize the often Herculean efforts the Emergency Management Organization team undertakes to respond in a crisis. They work very long hours, co-ordinate with multiple levels of government, organize logistics and provide a great sense of assurance to Manitobans. They remain calm in a storm, quite literally. We all owe the staff at EMO a huge debt of gratitude for their dedication and professionalism.

Manitoba has seen first-hand the severe impacts of the human-caused climate crisis, from wildfires, floods and extreme snowfalls. These events are clear indications that the changing climate is increasing the risk of natural disasters in our province. Anyone watching the news right now can see the devastation severe weather events have, particularly to populated areas.

With this in mind, my department is fully committed to ensuring that our province's infrastructure is sustainable and resilient in the face of climate impacts. That is a key element of design and construction, maintenance and infrastructure improvements being undertaken by my department. Today, I'm here to discuss our government's Emergency Expenditures budget which spans across departments and is administered by EMO, a division of Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure.

This budget enables us to address emerging risks and support Manitobans in times of crisis. At the core of our provincial response to emergencies, EMO plays a critical role in promoting and co-ordinating provincial emergency management. This includes mitigation, preparedness, response and disaster recovery, with the ultimate goal of building resilience, protecting lives and minimizing damage to property and the environment.

EMO supports both provincial government departments and local municipalities, and programming that relates to mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery in relation to large-scale emergencies and disasters, including floods, heavy rains, severe weather events and wildfires.

The organization works closely with all emergency management partners to ensure co-ordinated,

collaborative and effective communications to support the timely rollout of programs and services to assist Manitobans and limit economic impacts during times of crisis. EMO is also responsible for requesting assistance from federal and other partners and issuing public alerts.

The Emergency Expenditures budget, or appropriation 27, is a central budget for the whole of government that provides for expenditures related to forest fires, flooding, evacuations and other natural disasters. It covers emergency—sorry, environmental emergency response expenditures and Disaster Financial Assistance of various provincial departments.

For the 2024-25 fiscal year, we have set aside the Emergency Expenditures budget that provides funding for urgent actions to respond to, manage and recover from emergent events. A significant part of the Emergency Expenditures budget funds the Disaster Financial Assistance program. The DFA program was established to provide relief for large scale, uninsurable disasters that create significant financial burdens and disrupt essential services. EMO delivers the provincial DFA program in alignment with Canada's Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements, ensuring cost sharing and reimbursement with the federal government.

EMO established a Disaster Financial Assistance program for 2023 spring flooding and continued to administer the 2020 heavy rains and 2022 spring flood Disaster Financial Assistance program. Concurrent recovery program is—programming is complex and technical. Both as the minister and at an official's level, our government has also advocated for improvements to the federal Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements to advanced disaster risk reduction, creating the path to build climate resilience and to better support people in Manitoba's communities.

Manitoba's EMO continues to explore additional funding options from municipalities to support preemptive mitigation and climate preparedness. EMO is leading a redesign of the provincial DFA program to align with the revised DFAA and be more flexible and accessible to respond to a changing climate as well as to the needs of Manitobans.

Manitoba's Emergency Management Organization conducted a public survey on EngageMB in 2024, gathering feedback that is being considered as part of the ongoing DFA program review. In addition to DFA, Manitoba Emergency Management Organization also delivers the Shellmouth Dam Compensation Program and the Red River Floodway compensation program,

which provide financial relief in cases of artificial flooding.

As we focus on future risks, our government is committed to supporting communities and identifying and addressing the risks of future disasters. We've been working closely with municipalities to build an understanding of disaster risk and identify disaster risk reduction opportunities.

By investing in proactive disaster mitigation measures, we not only protect lives, but also save future recovery costs. For every dollar investigated in mitigation, we save \$13 to \$15 in future direct and indirect disaster recovery costs, according to data from the Canadian Climate Institute.

Through the Mitigation and Preparedness Program, the Manitoba government supports local disaster risk reduction initiatives. The MPP allows municipalities to receive 100 per cent reimbursement of eligible EMO costs back from Manitoba if they invest their deductible into approved mitigation projects or reserved funds.

In 2023-24, Manitoba EMO furthered initiatives that offered municipalities the opportunity to mitigate future disasters by building local resiliency against natural disasters, extreme weather events and the impact of climate change. Manitoba EMO worked with municipalities to identify proactive mitigation challenges, to better support them in facing more frequent and intense climate change impacts and disasters, and continues to deliver mitigation and preparedness programs, which has provided over \$3 million in support for municipalities since its inception.

Clear communication about disaster risk and mitigation options is key to fostering resilient communities. Part of EMO's mandate is to enhance communication about disaster risk, approaches to reducing risk and available mitigation initiatives and programs.

This past year, EMO delivered five climate adaptation disaster mitigation workshops in partnership with Eco-West Canada and the Department of Environment and Climate Change. The organization also increased disaster risk reduction communication to municipalities and individuals, including redesigning text-based documents into user-friendly infographs, sharing mitigation funding opportunities and creating maps of municipal disaster financial assisted damages to support local risk awareness and identification of mitigation projects.

The organization also expanded the Manitoba EMO portal that provides close to real-time situational

awareness with data, maps and other resources, which enhances co-ordination efforts during emergencies and disasters. There are 307 local authorities and 123 emergency management partners using the portal.

In the face of increasing challenges brought on by climate change, Manitoba is committed to building a future that is resilient and prepared. Through proactive disaster risk reduction, strategic investments in mitigation and strong partnership across all levels of government, we are laying the foundation to protect our infrastructure and Manitobans.

EMO continues to identify opportunities to advance disaster risk reduction, leverage greater federal funding and enhance our capacity to respond to and recover from emergencies. We are not just reacting to disasters; we are actively preparing for the future.

As we move forward, we remain committed to ensuring that communities have resources, support and information they need to face the evolving challenges of climate change. We will continue to build a safer and more resilient Manitoba for generations to come.

I would now like to acknowledge the senior leaders in our department whose expertise and commitment are essential in this work. Oh, I guess you have to invite me to do that, so I won't acknowledge them yet.

Thank you.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister, for those comments.

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

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you to the minister for this opportunity today and her department.

Yes, Emergency Expenditures are one of those items within the provincial budget that we would hope to not have to use, but in a province, especially like Manitoba, that is naturally susceptible to flooding, has widespread natural areas susceptible to wildfires and a large, sprawling prairie landscape, we naturally need to be prepared for emergency measures and the expenditures that come along with them. Along with that, the mitigation of those risks is important.

* (15:10)

We've, as Manitobans, been working the same landscape for hundreds of years now, and some of the troubled areas have been identified, and communities have invested in the sustainability of managing those risks. So it's important for the government, and us as legislators, to be mindful of that; that along with

mitigation and preparedness, the risk is still real and we need to allow Manitobans, whether that be individual landowners or the municipalities that represent them, to feel confident that the government is there for support when it's needed.

As I've said, you know, obviously this is a part of the budget where we would hope that conditions are favourable, but in the event that they aren't, we need to be prepared to be reactive to some of those that are outside of our control.

So I look forward to being able to ask the minister some questions to get a better understanding of not only the department, but the plans for future management of emergency mitigation as well as disaster assistance and emergency management.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): I thank the member for those comments.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us at the table.

Can I ask for leave for the minister to introduce staff? *[Agreed]*

MLA Naylor: I'm delighted to introduce my staff, to invite a few more women up to this table.

I would like to start with Ryan Klos, the deputy minister. Also Amber Zhang, executive financial officer and assistant deputy minister of Finance and Administration; Christine Stevens, assistant deputy minister of Emergency Management; and Ciara Shattuck, director of ministerial affairs.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Before I recognize the member, I just want to share that, for the time management, when there are only 30 seconds left, I would indicate to the speaker, so we can manage the time better.

Mr. Narth: Honourable Chair, my questions are going to start today with getting a good understanding for the committee today on the organizational structure of Emergency Management within the department, and the staff that are included.

MLA Naylor: Thank you for that question. There are two branches to EMO: there's the Preparedness and Response, as well as the Recovery and Mitigation branch, and between the two branches, there are 43 FTEs.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: Would the minister please be able to provide the names of the ADM for Emergency Management and the immediate political staff within her office?

MLA Naylor: Yes, I'm very pleased to provide—again—the name of ADM Christine Stevens, who's joined us today. So Christine is the ADM of Emergency Management.

And this—because this is kind of an all-of-government but managed through MTI, it's a little harder to answer the political staff question. Because we spoke last week during Estimates for MTI; so the political staff that serve me for MTI—like, Emergency Management is one of the departments within the department; it just has its own separate budget, which is why we're here on—again, today.

But I don't have any different political staff for that department.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: Honourable Chair, I'd like to thank the minister for clarifying that. I know some of this is going to be overlapping from Estimates on MTI.

So just to clarify, the 43 staff—would those be the staff under EMO? Just for clarification.

MLA Naylor: To clarify, those 43 FTEs are Emergency Management Organization staff under two areas: Preparedness and Response, and Recovery and Mitigation.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: Honourable Chair, the minister stated in the past and in opening remarks that climate change is creating for more inconsistency in weathering patterns, making harder to plan.

Could the minister please explain for—the cut of \$50 million in Emergency Expenditures from the previous PC government's budget?

* (15:20)

MLA Naylor: Yes, I thank the member for that question. I know that it has come up in question period in the Legislature and I think it's been well answered directly by the Premier (Mr. Kinew), but I'm happy to speak to it again.

It is accurate that in the previous year, the previous government budgeted \$100,000 but spent \$29,000 of that. We budgeted \$50,000 and it's yet to be seen what we will be spending in this year. But the really important thing to understand is that response to emergencies is an all-of-government approach; we will always spend what is required.

So the previous government will know that in bad flood years, when there's extreme fires, government will do what's needed to meet that need, and the money will be there to meet that need. So you can think of that as kind of a placeholder in the budget, predicting that \$50 million based on having spent 29 in the previous year.

Obviously, it will grow if needed.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: I think that many Manitobans, especially municipalities that locally represent these Manitobans during the time of emergencies, would be concerned as to where exactly the department and the government would turn to for fulfilling those financial obligations, if the money isn't annually budgeted in a consistent basis.

If we were to have a large-scale emergency, whether that be wildfires, drought emergencies or large wide-spread flood events, where would the money come from out of the provincial budget?

MLA Naylor: I actually really want to thank the member opposite for that question, because it is an important opportunity to reassure Manitobans that the money will be there if it's needed.

Under the previous government, \$50 million was approximately what was budgeted for several years. When the pandemic hit, that was increased, and we've now returned to pre-pandemic levels in our budget line. And it's better reflective of what's likely to be spent based on historic emergency situations.

This is certainly separate than if a DFA program had to be initiated because of a flood or some big emergency, certainly separate from the federal DFAA dollars. So this is about the immediate response but it is important that Manitobans know and understand

that the money will be there. This is an all-of-government approach.

So again, we hold that line in the budget with an estimate of what we might need to spend in this given year. The number we estimated this year is very reflective of what was being estimated every year in the budget before the pandemic, and we're so glad that we're able to return to pre-pandemic levels.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: Thank you to the minister for that response.

My question—next question to the minister would be if we could get some of that historical data, if they're—if it would be able to be provided—the expenditures for 2019 and then the past two years.

MLA Naylor: Yes, this is—I can answer the budgeted amounts from the previous number of years; this is all on the public record so it's easy to find.

But in 2017-2018, the previous government budgeted \$51.8 million; same again in 2018-2019; \$49.5 million in 2019-2020; and then as we were moving into the pandemic budget year, it was \$100 million budgeted each over the next three years. And again we've now—or, sorry, four years—and we've now returned to that pre-pandemic budget of \$50 million.

Mr. Narth: Would the minister be able to provide with the committee today how many emergency events had occurred within the last fiscal year?

MLA Naylor: We had 291 wildfires burning in the province this season. Those weren't, of course, all emergency situations, but there was emergency response for a number of them. And it was—we were fortunate in the sense that it was a lesser wildfire season than sometimes.

And the Province also responded to the Imperial pipeline situation, the failure in the pipeline that we experienced. It was obviously—could—potential emergency, extremely critical to make sure that we could get oil and gas into the city, so we took immediate action on that.

* (15:30)

And we also—even though it might not fit in the usual response of emergency, we did take an emergency response to the situation at Birchwood Terrace when the government was informed what looked like an impending disaster, and we—the—immediately got involved and supported the City and the tenants in response to the failures at that building's construction.

And there's also been various localized flooding events. I can't speak to those in detail yet because we're still just sifting through applications and starting to connect with communities around their applications.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: It—I would understand that it would be difficult to put a dollar value on this year's expenditures, but is it possible to give a state of Emergency Expenditures for the past fiscal year, and is there an update for Manitobans on this year?

We, I think, all realize that it was quite an uneventful year so far.

MLA Naylor: I think that my critic knows that it's too premature to put a number on the current fiscal year, but as I previously stated, \$29 million was spent in the previous fiscal year.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: Would the minister please be able to provide how much is being invested into flood mitigation with municipalities currently?

MLA Naylor: Okay, so looking at the overall picture in terms of mitigation preparedness for municipalities, so this is a bit of a—it's not a straightforward answer, I can't just give you a number and I'll explain why.

So funding to municipalities happens through MNR, not through my department, so there are mitigation funding grants and other projects that happen through Minister Bushie's department.

In addition to that—I've got lots more to say; don't turn off the mic—in addition to that, there is right now about \$3.7 million in our mitigation preparedness program through the DFA project, but that is—those are multiple projects spanning—and that's spanning over a couple of—a few years; so that's not just this year, because these are long-term projects within DFA.

The other important thing to know is that, you know, everything that we're doing now in government in terms of infrastructure is with a lens to increase resiliency and enhance protections. So within MTI as a whole, for any of our transportation infrastructure, we are, you know, doing that work in a way to be more resilient and to enhance those protections.

And finally, there's a new DFAA program from the federal government that has, you know, some—there's been some changes to that program. We were involved in discussions and negotiations with the federal govern-

ment throughout the fall of this year and into the winter, and one of the things we were strongly advocating for and supporting in that program was a build back better option.

So previously, the DFAA funding from the federal government only allowed to build back structures or roads—or whatever was being built back—at the level that it has previously been, which doesn't help us if old, aging infrastructure has been built in such a way as to not be protective of—for floods. So the beauty in that is that—I mean, that has been built into the new DFAA funding from Canada, and things that—match that in our DFA funding.

So we have to—for projects to get funding from the Province, they have to fit the criteria of the federal government. And so now we have this opportunity to be able to support municipalities to build back better so that they are better protected going forward.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister, for those comments.

A general reminder to all members that when they call other members, they call them by their portfolio or constituency name. Thank you.

Mr. Narth: That leads me to my next question, and I'd like to say that—through you, Chair—that I'm glad that the minister is supportive of a build-back strategy for DFA funding. It's—obviously in my last political life in municipal government, it was a frustrating challenge that—you made improvements during flood events and then needed to put them back to the way the infrastructure was that caused the damage in the first place.

But a concern that many municipalities have—and they look to the Province as their representative in the Disaster Financial Assistance program—a large concern always has been and will continue to be the threshold for accessing Disaster Financial Assistance; especially for some of the smaller municipalities with a low assessment.

* (15:40)

They're affected many times greater by these natural disasters, but the threshold of the access to the program many times creates an additional burden.

Can the minister please update us if there's been any recent changes within the last fiscal year to the threshold for the Disaster Financial Assistance program?

MLA Naylor: There have been no changes to that program since the previous government left office.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: My next question is something hopefully that I can get an answer, is if the minister has any plans—I know that it's hard to predict the future—any plans and changes to the Province's portion of the Disaster Financial Assistance program.

MLA Naylor: Thank you for that question.

So at this time, we are reviewing the DFA program in relation to the changes to the federal program, so we're working closely with municipalities, soliciting feedback and also working closely with the federal government to—you know, as we continue to have some alignment between these programs.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: Honourable Chair, my next question is around evacuees as a result of provincial disasters, and wondering if the minister can tell committee today how many evacuees are currently still displaced as a result of disasters within our province.

MLA Naylor: The good news is that all community members who were evacuated from this year's fire events have been repatriated.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: My next question for the minister would be around flood mitigation for Lake Manitoba. We realize that this is a sitting target right now that carries with it real risk.

Could the minister answer if there's any current ongoing flood mitigation efforts being done for the risk area of Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin?

MLA Naylor: I appreciate the member's interest in that question. I know he asked a similar question when he was—had the opportunity to ask questions of the minister for the—fuller MTI budget. So we are here today to talk about BA27, that part of the budget.

In terms of interests in the channel project, I will take the opportunity to repeat the important work that our department is doing as a whole to—and our government as a whole—to reset the relationship with Indigenous people. The opportunity to work closely with IRTC and with numerous other First Nations that are impacted by the channels project and the channels area, and the flooding that took place in that area; I recently met with a representative from the Métis Federation, and certainly the affected municipality.

So it's been a really important year for doing that work and having those one-on-one personal meetings, having the opportunity to—you know, to really hear the experience of people impacted by the flooding in that area and their concerns about, you know, what the response will be in the future.

So it is very, very important to the department, but I, you know, had the—the member had the opportunity to ask all the questions he wanted to about the budget line regarding that when we were in the MTI budget Estimates. We've closed out that budget, it's been voted on and passed.

And so we're here today to talk about BA27.

* (15:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: Honourable Chair, my question wasn't specific to the infrastructure development of a channel. It was specific to Emergency Measures and Emergency Expenditures around if there are—and that's the question—if there are any current flood mitigation measures for individual landowners or larger scale projects, but—or rehabilitation as a result of emergency measures on those lakes.

MLA Naylor: Again, this question kind of bleeds over a little bit outside of EMO and BA27 into the greater MTI work which, you know, always happy to brag about the incredible work of the people in my department.

But we have already passed that budget, so I—you know, just some examples of some of the work in the greater—in the wider department is the flood risk mapping that we're doing. And there are mitigation efforts, you know, built into the wider project of infrastructure in the province.

Within EMO, within this budget that we're reviewing, there is a mitigation and preparedness funding line that municipalities can apply for. EMO helps municipalities with planning and prioritizing, but within this budget, there's not actual construction of mitigation projects out of the Emergency Management Organization.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: Honourable Chair, something that's important to communities across the province has always been emergency measures, training for communities and municipalities.

Could the minister please tell us how much is being spent on emergency measures training for communities and municipalities?

MLA Naylor: Yes, we—that's a really great question that came from the member opposite.

We—the department is providing quite a lot of online learning, as well as flood and wildfire seminars in communities, working closely with First Nations and with municipalities. We've also—in the last year, we've reallocated three positions within EMO to directly support emergency co-ordinators across the province.

And while I still have the floor, Chair, I'd like to make a correction to some information, because it was the same member asking me questions. So if he will indulge me, last week, I believe, when we were in here, I was asked a question about the bid-hourly rate in maintenance and provided an answer that we had spent about \$5 million. That was inaccurate. That was—that number was only until January. So the correct amount that should have been put on the record during the MTI Estimates was \$7.5 million for the full '23-24 year.

So thank you for letting me correct that on the record.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: I'd like to thank the minister for the response on EMO training as well as the clarification on bid hourly; it was an important question to get an image on where the department is going with maintenance and how they're supporting the sustainability of safe maintenance for our Manitoba infrastructure.

* (16:00)

So nearing the end of what I have, just a quick question on wildfire risk mitigation and if the EMO department through the minister's department is working on any wildfire risk mitigation projects.

It's something that many communities—I know across my constituency, when we get into the wooded districts, are concerned about the improvements that need to be made on wildfire mitigation, and if EMO is working at solving any of those problems.

MLA Naylor: Good question about mitigation supports for municipalities.

So part of the mitigation preparedness funding that I mentioned previously does go to municipalities for the purpose that the member has mentioned in

terms of fire prevention and, you know, FireSmart-type programs. But the primary funding and the actual FireSmart programs are run through EDITNR, so that's actually the responsibility of the MLA for St. Vital.

Our EMO does provide a co-ordination effort to—you know, to the various departments involved in that, but the actual funding and FireSmart programs do not reside with EMO.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Narth: That concludes the questions that I have for Emergency Expenditures.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): I thank the member for those questions.

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

I will now call resolution 27.1: RESOLVED that there be granted—okay.

Resolution 27.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$50,000,000 for Emergency Expenditures, Emergency Expenditures, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of Emergency Expenditures.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for Consumer Protection and Government Services.

Shall we briefly recess for five minutes to allow the minister and critics the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next set of Estimates? *[Agreed]*

The committee recessed at 4:05 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:08 p.m.

**CONSUMER PROTECTION AND
GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): 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 Consumer Protection and Government Services.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): Good afternoon, again, and thank you for the opportunity to provide opening remarks on the 2024-2025 budget for Consumer Protection and Government Services.

Before I provide remarks about the budget, I want to extend a special thanks to my staff and the teams within the CPGS for all of their work during the 2024-2025 budgeting process.

For the department of CPGS, I'm fortunate to have very capable assistant deputy ministers overseeing their respective divisions. It's a very diverse portfolio that includes providing Manitobans with foundational personal identity, to the information technology for all of government. Our office administration—administrative staff have done double duty, covering the ministerial correspondence, fielding phone calls and juggling my calendar for two departments, so I want to thank them for their hard work as well.

I would also like a moment to thank my political team. This year they've been working incredibly hard to cover two full departments and all that goes with that.

As an overview of the department as a whole, CPGS has six divisions: Procurement and Supply Chain; Digital and Technology Solutions; Capital Project Planning and Delivery; Asset Management; and Consumer Protection.

Our 2024-2025 budget reflects items from my mandate letter and departmental issues.

* (16:10)

Some highlights include: the continued bilateral agreement with the federal government on various capital projects via the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, or ICIP; the continued modernization of IT, which includes plastic health cards for Manitoba citizens; program and resource adjustments that strengthen key consumer protection areas, such as the Vital Statistics Branch and the Residential Tenancies Branch; writeoffs of PPE at the Manitoba Emergency Response Warehouse; capital investment in the Dauphin centre for justice; and increases to address inflationary pressures in the maintenance of government-owned and leased assets.

The department continues collaboration with the federal government on capital projects, budgeting an additional \$32.9 million fully offset by equivalent

federal revenue for the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, which advances cost-shared projects between Canada, Manitoba and municipal partners.

Manitoba and Canada's bilateral agreement for ICIP was signed in 2018 and ends in 2033. The funding envelope is \$232.9 million for 2024-2025.

For IT modernization, there is provision for a project envelope which includes major projects such as enterprise resource planning modernization program, courts modernization, plastic Manitoba health cards and the online death registry. These projects will move IT modernization forward as they replace legacy systems that are outdated and difficult to maintain.

The enterprise resource planning modernization program is one of the largest process and technology transformations in Manitoba history, impacting all departments within core government, as well as the broader public sector, including Crowns, special operating agencies and other reporting entities. This SAP ERP software will modernize, digitize and standardize operations and processes across government, enabling streamlined operations and financial reporting, greater collaboration and communication and bring increased buying power and value for money through economies of sale-scale and operational efficiency.

The plastic Manitoba health cards project will deliver an enhanced physical card that can be digitally read by health-care providers, allowing them to streamline patient intake processes, reducing time and errors. The card will also be human readable for situations where a health-care provider is not ready or able to utilize the machine-readable format, both inside and outside of Manitoba. This will be a collaborative project with Manitoba Health—this is a collaborative project.

Another key project within the IT modernization is the online death registry for Vital Statistics. The department is focused on reducing backlogs, improving the throughput and processing times throughout Vital Stats and the online death registration system. Progresses this important area, which was also identified in my mandate letter.

The budget includes provisions to review and confirm what the appropriate funding model will be for the Manitoba Emergency Response Warehouse, or MERW. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the importance of having PPE and adequate supply as they can quickly become scarce, leading to health and safety issues for workers and Manitobans.

The MERW has been set up to be a perpetual emergency-related warehouse that will distribute and rotate these emergency products and supplies through normal channels during non-emergency years. In the event of future emergency events, government of Manitoba requires a 90-day supply of critical items on hand. This is a safety measure for Manitobans should a pandemic-level event occur in the future.

In our budget is a non-cash writeoff of pandemic supplies that were donated to the province by the federal government free of charge during the pandemic but have now expired. These writeoffs are in accordance with proper accounting rules that apply to the public sector.

Consumer Protection and Government Services works closely with the Department of Justice to support courts and corrections infrastructure requirements. The budget has allocated funds in the 2024-2025 fiscal year for a new centre for Justice, which includes consultation, functional programming and concept design to move this project forward.

Additionally, the budget has provision for management of price pressures related to facility costs, leasing costs and maintenance costs, which continue to rise with inflation. The department also plans to internally reallocate FTEs that will improve capacity to deliver programs and functions more effectively.

One key area for these FTEs is the VSB, Vital Statistics Branch. These resources are required to prevent backlogs from returning to levels seen under the previous government but also to ensure that Vital Statistics is able to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action 17 and 71.

My department is excited and looks forward to addressing these needs from within for 2024-2025. And later, I'll be able to invite my staff to the table, but I'm just going to now acknowledge the senior leaders in our department whose expertise and commitment are essential in this work.

With us today will be deputy minister Joseph Dunford; executive financial officer Jason Perez; assistant deputy minister of Consumer Protection, Kathryn Durkin-Chudd; and acting assistant deputy minister of capital project planning and delivering, Prachi Dey; and, of course, Ciara Shattuck, my director of ministerial affairs, will also join us.

Thank you.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): I thank the minister for those comments.

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

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Just a few quick words in the interest of time.

I'd wanted to thank the minister for her opening comments. It is an important portfolio within government—Consumer Protection and Government Services—and, as the minister indicated, covers a number of areas that impact the daily lives of Manitobans.

And so it's—I look forward to asking some questions on a number of the items that the minister talked about in her opening comments, and I thank, as well, her staff—department staff for joining us today.

So, again, in the interest of time, I'll be brief, but I appreciate the opportunity to put a couple of questions forward.

Thank you.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Member.

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 8.1(a) contained in Resolution 8.1.

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

MLA Naylor: Yes. Thank you.

I introduced the staff in attendance, because the last round it sort of got missed.

So these are the staff that I previously mentioned, and I'm grateful to have them here at the front with me.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Guenter: I'm wondering if the minister can confirm that the organizational chart in the supplemental Estimates is complete and up to date.

* (16:20)

MLA Naylor: Yes, there have been a couple of changes to the organizational structure as published in the supplement that the member has asked about.

So the ADM for Asset Management recently retired and so we're in a hiring process. And also, the chief information officer under Digital and Technology Solutions is no longer with the department, so we are in a hiring process. And there's an additional change under Entrepreneurship Manitoba, which is an SOA of this department; we have someone listed as the acting chief operating officer, but that's no longer an acting position, that's a permanent position.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Guenter: I'm wondering if the minister could—what political staff work either within the office or outside and what their roles would be.

MLA Naylor: Thank you for that question. It gives me an opportunity to explain the unique situation in this department. If the member has taken a look at the budget, he will think I have no political staff.

I don't, though. I have three very efficient, fabulous political staff. So I have a director of ministerial affairs; I have an executive assistant and a special assistant. However, because I am the minister of two departments, when those OICs were completed for hiring, everybody was hired under the MTI budget.

So they equally support my work in both departments, but they are not listed as political staff the way it looks.

Mr. Guenter: I thank the minister for that.

Can the minister perhaps talk a little bit about how casework is handled within the department. Does it go to a single political staffperson? Is it—you know, does it go to—is it handled by civil servants exclusively? How does casework—how is that dealt with and referred through the department?

MLA Naylor: So casework in my department is handled probably very much like, I assume, every minister's department; it's really a team effort. Casework really, really varies. Sometimes it's quite technical; it requires subject matter expertise. Certainly any casework of that nature is sent through to, you know, through to the deputy, the ADMs and through to the

department to have the correct person providing the information.

Sometimes casework is really political in nature, in which I—in which case I would lean on my political staff for responding to those emails or letters or other inquiries, but we work together.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Guenter: Is there—thank you, Chair, and I thank the minister for that.

Is there an internal sort of target timeline for responding to casework, an ideal time frame?

MLA Naylor: Yes, I think this is a really reasonable question from the member opposite.

I think it's very important that we're responding to casework in a timely manner. I won't pretend there weren't challenges that, you know, coming into two departments with substantial vacancies—30 per cent vacancy rates across departments—really, really challenges our ability to respond to Manitobans in a timely manner. But we've worked really hard on this over the last year to be as efficient and as timely as possible.

* (16:30)

Sometimes there's a triaging process—especially in CPGS, a lot of the types of inquiries that we get are—can be extremely confidential, they can be extremely sensitive; sometimes we need to consult with our partners at Justice in order to provide the correct information to folks.

So just because of the nature of the department, sometimes it can take longer to get to some of—you know, to resolve things for folks. But, our—we do triage for the most essential—you know, to respond quickly and efficiently, especially because when we're talking about things like, you know, people's identity documents, we don't want to delay. So, you know, that's an ongoing project to get a response—our responses out to people as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Guenter: Again I thank the minister for that.

And—I will say as well—you know, this is a partisan environment, but we all come from constituents where—or, constituencies, areas that we represent across the province where constituents encounter problems when they're engaging with government or

in their life, and some of these issues involve government and so they will approach MLAs.

And so that's where that process of engaging with ministries and ministers comes into play, and so I just do want to thank the minister and her department and her staff as well for—I know I've had a number of issues in my constituency as well, and it's always appreciated when we do get a response.

Again, this is a partisan environment, but I think that very fundamental level of work—there's an expectation, I think, on the part of our constituents that government still functions and provides the services that they depend on, and that politicians be able to work together. And so that's something that I've always considered to be very important, both—you know, since I've been elected in 2019.

So I appreciate that the minister and her staff continue to engage, and I hope that that continues going forward—that responsiveness to casework; I think that's very important and something that our constituents depend on.

So just in terms of—the minister talked about Manitoba health cards, and so I think that is a major upgrade. I wonder if the minister can perhaps talk about, you know, where progress is at on that, what the timelines are, expected costs associated with that, and whether it is being done in-house—I don't imagine that it is, so it's been contracted out, and who would be doing that?

MLA Naylor: So I'll try to give a little bit of information here, but the health card project is not yet complete. It is a project very much in development as we speak. It's also a partnership. I mean, while the project is being overseen by CPGS, we're also working really closely with Health because, obviously, this, you know, is reflecting the interests of the Health Department and we require Health partners in terms of creating a system for cards to be able to be read in health-care facilities and that type of thing.

But, so I can't comment on the dollar amount because it is a project still under development. I can say that it is—the cost was included in this year's fiscal budget and with the intention of completion of that project within this year's budget.

And—oh, I had another really important point. What was—oh yes, your—you had asked about who was doing the work. So a big part of the work is in-house, but it is a mixture of internal and external expertise on this project.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Guenter: The supplemental Estimates on page 28 makes reference to a number of initiatives, key initiatives that the CPGS is undertaking in its digital and technology solutions operations, including an enterprise resource planning modernization program.

I'm wondering if we could get an update on that initiative, and what is the cost to complete that upgrade?

* (16:40)

MLA Naylor: Yes, I'm really glad that the member's asked about the enterprise resource planning. This is the largest IT project in the history of our government, so it is very exciting.

In October, we launched the learning management system. And the focus of—for this year, '24-25, is to deliver also the procurement—there's a long name—Ariba contract management and spend analysis, but we can just call it procurement; that module in November. And the Human Resources learning management system and financial consolidation; we're doing work to prepare for those launches in the next fiscal year.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister

Mr. Guenter: I thank the minister.

I know we're coming short on time here, so am just keeping on finger on page 48 but I think I might jump ahead to the Residential Tenancies Branch.

I'm just wondering if the minister could outline how long it usually takes for the Residential Tenancies Branch to adjudicate complaints from tenants regarding rent increases or above-guideline rent increases, or other landlord-tenancy issues related to the Residential Tenancies board?

MLA Naylor: So to the member's question about the turnaround time in RTB, the benchmark that we endeavour to hit for all of that is 90 days.

I will just use this opportunity to comment that certainly there has been an increase in demand. Just for example, the number of above-guideline rent increase applications continues to increase; in 2021 it was, you know, 312, then there were 353 applications in 2022, and then 472 applications in 2023. So we do still endeavour to hit that 90-day benchmark. And, you know, I think that our team does a really good job of doing that because that is the intention and goal of their work, but I can see where there are some, you

know, pressures—growing pressures on the department with those increasing numbers.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Guenter: This will be my last question, so I'll just kind of bundle. Again, on page 48 there's a reference to—I did ask about the Enterprise Resource Planning modernization program but there's also a Vital Statistics modernization initiative for information technology, there's a courts—reference to a courts modernization for information technology, and then a cybersecurity program initiative that is spelled out on page 48.

* (16:50)

I'm just wondering if, perhaps briefly, the minister could share a little bit more information on these projects: where they're progressing along the time frame that has been prescribed; or whether there are any issues—costs with these—associated with these programs; whether the minister expects these initiatives to be completed on time and on budget.

MLA Naylor: So, I'll try to—I know we've got to get through this so we can get to the end—but the—to—I'll speak to each of these in turn.

Vital Statistics modernization is big priority for our government. Certainly, there is a focus on Vital Statistics in my mandate letter. We have been working very hard to clear the backlog that existed for many, many months or years under the previous government. But also the modernization piece: So we've started—I was very excited to announce the digital death registry upgrade, like a modernization we've been able to do in concert with the federal government. And as I mentioned in my speaking notes, it allows us to fulfill two of the TRC's Calls to Action.

In terms of the courts modernization, this is a multi-year project we anticipate to be complete probably around '27-28. It has to be co-ordinated with the courts to minimize disruption to the courts, so that's why it's going to take a few years.

And cybersecurity is not a specific project; it's an ongoing program of our IT department. I was recently at the federal-provincial-territorial ministers meeting in regard to cybersecurity, and we are working extremely collaboratively across provincial governments and the federal government as kind of more of a national lens and then learning from each other. Some of the provinces are substantially further ahead than Manitoba. So we're really learning within the department, and at the minister level as well, about how to do this as well as we can to protect our government resources.

The Acting Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Thank you, Minister.

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

I will now call Resolution 8.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$364,620,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Capital Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$77,887,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Digital and Technology Solutions, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,568,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Procurement and Supply Chain, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$22,419,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Public Safety Communication Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.6: resolved that there is—RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$14,827,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Consumer Protection, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$48,114,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$48,501,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates for this department is item 8.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 8.1.

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

The floor is open for questions.

So there are no motions forthcoming.

Resolution 8.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,521,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Financial and Strategic Management, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

* (17:00)

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Consumer Protection and Government Services.

The hour being 5 o'clock, what is the will of—okay. The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

CHAMBER

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

* (15:00)

The Chairperson (Tyler Blashko): 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 Environment and Climate Change.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Good afternoon.

As the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, it is truly an honour to lead the department's many important programs and initiatives to protect Manitoba's natural environment and tackle the challenges posed by climate change.

First, I would like to acknowledge that we are on Treaty 1 territory and on the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe, the Cree, Ojibwe-Cree, Dakota, Dene and Inuit people and the homeland of the Red River Métis Nation.

Climate change is a present and urgent threat, impacting communities globally and right here at home in unprecedented ways.

Climate change is not just an environmental issue. It poses severe risks to our health, our agricultural sector, our security, our infrastructure and, importantly, our economy.

Here in Manitoba, we witness the effects through changing droughts and flood frequencies, shorter winters and more serious wildfires.

While the effects of climate change may seem distant or abstract to some, they are deeply felt by those on the front lines: communities facing displacement, farmers battling drought and species struggling to adapt in rapidly changing environments.

In particular, research is showing that climate change is disproportionately affecting our northern communities, who are bearing the earliest and most drastic effects.

Our department staff are central to our ongoing efforts to address these challenges, and I'm so very impressed by those that I've had the pleasure of meeting and working with so far.

We have some senior leadership that will be joining us shortly, so when they enter the room, I will take a moment to introduce and thank them very much for their work on behalf of the Province of Manitoba and their leadership in the department.

Addressing climate change is not just a matter of policy or technology, it is our moral obligation. We have a responsibility to future generations to leave behind a healthier planet, and I very much consider this a sacred duty.

For this reason, I am proud to be part of the work that is key in preserving our ecological and biological balance. The relentless pursuit of environmental stewardship of the Environment and Climate Change staff is an inspiration to us all and reinforces the importance of collective action in confronting our environmental challenges.

Our mandate and key priorities are critical to securing Manitoba's environment for future generations. Manitoba's natural environment is not just a backdrop, but it's the cornerstone of our communities, driving economic growth and fostering job creation.

Our government is taking bold steps towards a cleaner future with initiatives aimed at a net-zero grid by 2035, enhancing the use of electric vehicles and attracting low-carbon industries to our province.

In partnership with the Department of Finance, as of July 1, 2024, we began offering Manitobans rebate

incentives for investing in new and used electric vehicles as well as plug-in hybrids. By investing in zero-emission vehicles, we stimulate economic growth in sectors such as critical minerals, including lithium, battery production and vehicle component manufacturing, while also expanding our provincial market to accommodate a wider variety of vehicle types.

To further our commitment to being a clean energy leader and to keep energy affordable for all Manitobans, we are very excited to have recently announced our new Affordable Energy Plan in partnership with the Minister for Hydro.

For the first time in Manitoba's history, our Affordable Energy Plan includes Indigenous-owned utility-scale electricity resource supply through the creation of government-to-government partnerships with Indigenous nations in wind generation while ensuring that Manitoba Hydro stays public forever and always.

We're also supporting industry and the agricultural sector to become leaders or enhance their leadership in sustainability. In partnership with the federal government, we have allocated dollars from the Low Carbon Economy Fund to over 30 important projects so far, focusing on fuel switching, reducing energy costs and focusing on renewable energy opportunities. This partnership supports Manitoba in advancing its strategic priorities related to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 and green economic growth by supporting industry competitiveness and green job action.

We are also committed to increasing home heating efficiencies, lowering costs for Manitobans and transitioning to a more environmentally responsible and sustainable province. Through the implementation of the affordable home energy program, we will facilitate the switch to geothermal heating and make sustainable living more affordable for Manitobans.

This exciting program will be delivered in addition to Efficiency Manitoba's current range of incentives to support emissions reductions and advancing energy efficiency for new builds and retrofits that supports affordability and quality jobs in the new low-carbon economy.

I'd like to talk a little bit about our most precious resource, and that's water. Water is essential for our lives. It's crucial for our health, our food, our energy, our economic growth and our natural environment. Safeguarding the health of Manitoba's lakes, rivers

and streams is a priority of our government and a key mandate for our department.

We are fortunate in Manitoba to have an abundance of high-quality water resources that our government is sustainably managing and protecting. The province is home to over 100,000 lakes covering nearly 16 per cent of our province, and our government is committed to ensuring that our waters are protected and managed so they can be enjoyed by many generations of Manitobans to come.

Our department will ensure a long-term approach to managing our water resources through the continued implementation of the Water Management Strategy and ongoing dialogue with partners. As part of the action under the strategy, we're pleased to have launched a new website promoting simple steps that everyone can take to make every drop count by reducing water consumption and saving water. You can find those tips and tricks at gov.mb.ca/savewater.

* (15:10)

We have also extended the lead in drinking water grant to March 31 of 2025, allowing schools and licensed child-care centres to continue accessing funding to test for and address elevated lead in drinking water, and this is benefiting over 1,000 schools and licensed child-care centres in our province.

Conserving and protecting drinking water resources, among other actions under this strategy, further supports the department's continued work to implement recommendations by the Auditor General in the 2020 report on drinking water safety.

Informed by work with experts and scientists, Environment and Climate Change is taking strong action to reduce nutrient loading in Lake Winnipeg and elsewhere through strengthening the enforcement framework under The Environment Act, research and monitoring, education and working with upstream and downstream jurisdictions.

To further protect our waters and lands, the department will work with Indigenous communities with the goal to protect 30 per cent of Manitoba's diverse landscapes by 2030.

To further our promise, our government has signed a memorandum of agreement—sorry, pardon me—a memorandum of understanding between the Seal River Watershed Alliance, Indigenous nations, the Government of Canada and the Manitoba government to assess the feasibility of establishing a protected area

in the Seal River Watershed to pursue the establishment of a protected and conserved area.

Manitoba is also enriched with 93 parks throughout the province. These natural sanctuaries not only offer a number of recreational opportunities but also serve as safe places for biodiversity and ecological preservation. We recognize the invaluable role parks play in promoting community wellness and providing environmental benefits.

I am pleased that Budget 2024 included strategic investments aimed at supporting our commitment to the protection and accessibility of these cherished natural spaces, including funding to support the development and maintenance of our parks. These investments emphasize our dedication to ensuring that Manitobans continue to benefit from the beauty of our parks for now and generations to come.

Moving to our more broader environmental strategy, we're taking a collaborative approach to achieving our bigger goals of protecting our environment by ensuring the well-being of—and ensuring the well-being of Manitobans. Our department is committed to advancing sustainable practices by enhancing waste management, enhancing efficiency, modernizing programs and policies to protect the environment, public health and foster a circular economy.

The creation of a Multi-Material Stewardship Manitoba transition plan advisory committee, which includes key stakeholders and subject matter experts, was designed to enhance the transition plan for a full industry funded and operated residential blue-bin recycling program.

We are leading remediation efforts for orphaned and abandoned mine sites across Canada. Perhaps we'll get more into that during the question and answer period.

We've also restored funding to environmental non-profit organizations to continue fostering partnerships with places like the International Institute for Sustainable Development and climate centres of excellence, such as ClimateWest, the University of Winnipeg's Prairie Climate Centre, non-profits like the Green Action Centre. We are so proud to support these excellent organizations and the work that they do.

Very pleased to be here today. Look forward to speaking more about our Estimates.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): I'm going to keep this brief. I'd prefer to use the time we have this afternoon to ask the minister questions, and I'm hoping that the minister will be very open and candid with her answers to the questions that we're going to propose today.

So I intend to share the time this afternoon with my colleague here, the MLA for Swan River, on some of these questions as well. So both of us will be asking questions.

So with that, I think I'm ready to proceed.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item under consideration for a department. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 12.1(a) contained in resolution 12.1.

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

So we'll start with the minister. Could you please introduce the staff you've welcomed into the Chamber.

MLA Schmidt: It would be my pleasure to introduce the staff that are joining us here today. I'd like to acknowledge their work and thank them for their work. The senior leadership in the Department of Environment and Climate Change not only lead the department in achieving our environmental goals, but they also inspire and foster innovation and positive work environments.

So joining us we have Paul McConnell, the deputy minister. We have Todd Callin, the executive financial officer and assistant deputy minister of Finance and Shared Services Division. We have Nicole Armstrong, the acting assistant deputy minister of Parks and Trails Division.

As political staff we have Julia Antonyshyn, the director of ministerial affairs. And towards the back of the room we have Elliott Brown, assistant deputy minister of the Water Stewardship Division; Neil Cunningham, assistant deputy minister of the newly renamed Climate Action and Energy Innovation division. We have Shannon Kohler, assistant deputy minister of the Environmental Stewardship Division. And last but not least, we have Josh Beaupre, the acting executive

director of our Legislation, Policy and Coordination Branch.

Thank you all for joining us here today.

Mr. Nesbitt: I don't have quite the entourage that the minister does, but I'm very happy to have Mat Preprost here, a researcher in our caucus.

The Chairperson: In accordance with subrule 78(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put on the resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Nesbitt: In the Estimates here, there's an org chart as of March 31. I know the minister indicated here that there's a new ADM of Parks and Trails—acting ADM, I think the minister said.

Can the minister tell us whether there's any significant changes to the org structure as it stands right now, in terms of either personnel or the way it's organized?

* (15:20)

MLA Schmidt: Before I answer the question, I just want to lean in a little bit more into what I was saying in my opening statement and as I introduced the staff, which is what an honour it has been to work for this department.

And that's really how I consider it: I work for the department. That's how I see it. I'm here to support the great work that they're doing, and that's the senior leadership that's here today and all the way down the org chart. It's really been the honour of a lifetime. It's been in—so inspiring to learn of the work that is going on in this department.

When I first took on this role, and you learn about the devastating effects of climate change that are happening across the globe and certainly here in Manitoba, it can be significantly overwhelming.

And I want to highlight for the committee the fact that one of the first acts that we did in forming government and taking on this office was renaming this office to the office of Environment and Climate Change, recognizing and acknowledging and really naming climate change, which is one of the greatest threats that our province is facing and that humanity is facing. So I think it's important, I think words matter and I think it was an important renaming of the department.

But when you're thinking about climate change, it can be very overwhelming. Manitoba is just one province in just one country on the globe, and so it can feel overwhelming about what we can do, what difference we can make.

But it has been—that overwhelming feeling that I had in the beginning of taking this role one year ago has really been supplanted by hope, and that hope has been provided largely from the people that work in this department.

The work of the Environmental Stewardship Branch, the Water Stewardship, the climate and energy innovation department, the Parks department; the work that's going on here in Manitoba, led by the public service, is inspiring and gives me a lot of hope, and I think should give Manitoba a lot of hope; that there are great people at the helm of this department doing really great work on behalf of all Manitobans to protect, preserve and enhance our natural environment.

So to answer the question more directly, I can update the committee that there are no structural changes to the org chart. There certainly has been a little bit of movement since this was printed.

So yes, we currently have an acting assistant deputy in our Parks and Trails Division. David Hunt has moved on to other employment, and we're very happy to have Nicole Armstrong acting in that role.

And the other significant change—or, at least a change of note—would again be the executive director of legislative policy and co-ordination. Ed Policarpi has moved on to another branch of government. We're very happy for him to take on that new, exciting opportunity. And so we have an acting ADM—or, apologies, an acting executive director—in Josh Beaupre, who has joined us, and we welcome him and his work.

But other than those names, no significant—or, really no changes to the org chart structure itself.

Thank you.

Mr. Nesbitt: Well, thank you to the minister for that.

I recognize that the, you know, Parks came into this last October from Natural Resources, moved over, so it's a bit of a combination year here, and I think we certainly recognize that.

Just one more question on staff before we get into some other questions here. Can the minister elaborate on her political staff in terms of numbers and perhaps the names of her political staff in her office, for our reference?

MLA Schmidt: Happy to talk more about the incredible staff that we have on the political side.

So we are joined here today by our director of ministerial affairs, Julia Antonyshyn, who has really just shown incredible leadership. It is a pleasure to work with her. It's a thrill every day. We are—it's an incredible department to work with and to work for, and we're learning and supporting the department in their great work every day. So thank you very much, Julia.

And I also, on the political side, have an executive assistant whose name is Nicole Dvorak. Nicole joined us somewhat recently. Nicole worked in government in the Minister of Finance's office, and I think she's been an incredible fit in our office.

And I just want to—it's not lost on me, the incredible leadership that is done in our office by women. I'm very, very proud of the role that women play in our government, in our Cabinet, in our caucus, in our political staff, in our department. I think it's true that when we're talking about the impacts of climate change and the preservation of our natural environment, women have led that charge for millennia.

I think about the role that Indigenous women have played in protecting water on this land here that we now call Manitoba. They've been doing that for millennia. We have much to learn from traditional Indigenous knowledge and from the work of the women water protectors and water keepers.

And I also want to note that women—you know, I think the research shows that, globally, women are often most impacted by the devastating effects of climate change.

So as a woman, I'm very proud to serve in this role and very proud to work with so many brilliant, incredible women.

Mr. Nesbitt: You know, I certainly agree with the minister that the departmental staff is always top-notch, always has been, and I'm sure the political staff support you as well. I know the feeling, and I too was honoured to be in the position at one time, so I know the way you feel.

We're going to move on here. We're going to start asking a few questions about parks. And I know the minister has said to me numerous times in this House when I've tried to get answers to questions that she loves parks. And I fully appreciate that the minister does love parks, and I think most Manitobans love

parks. And I can say that my colleague, the MLA for Swan River, and myself certainly love parks as well.

So today I'm going to table the Manitoba Provincial Parks Infrastructure Renewal Strategy. As the minister is likely aware, you know, this strategy was developed over three years and informed by consultations with over 10,000 Manitobans as well as industry groups all across the province. And I know the minister's been—was briefed on this strategy likely fairly quickly when she took office last October.

And I guess what we would like to know on this side of the House: Is she planning to honour and follow through on the projects identified as priorities by Manitobans in this strategy?

MLA Schmidt: Yes, I do love parks. I've put it on the record many times; I will continue to.

* (15:30)

I love all of the branches of our department, but Manitoba Parks does hold a very special place in my heart. I am an avid camper. I've grown up my whole life camping. My parents are both two retired schoolteachers, so I had the great pleasure of being able to enjoy my summer holidays with my parents all summer long. I thought everyone grew up that way. I didn't know that most kids went to daycare and spent their summers that way.

I was lucky enough to enjoy the months of July and August travelling around our great province. And we didn't have a lot of money. We didn't go to Disneyland and all that kind of stuff. But what we did have enough money to do—and had the great fortune to do—was to travel this beautiful province and spend our summers in Manitoba parks, and it's something that I—some of my best memories of my life occurred in Manitoba parks.

I know that Manitobans share this experience with me. I find Parks to be such a relatable part of this department and something I enjoy very much. I continue the tradition of camping with my own children, as I know that so many Manitobans do. We are so very fortunate in this province to have so many beautiful parks to visit, 93 parks from the north to the south and the east and the west.

This summer, myself, I was lucky enough to visit Spruce Woods, Whiteshell, Birds Hill and St. Malo. I prefer to hit many more parks than that, but with our work we keep very busy over the summer. So those were the Manitoba parks I was able to enjoy this

summer; I hope that the member opposite was able to get out, enjoy some parks himself.

And I mentioned this in question period early today, but I would be remiss not to put a few words on—a few words on the record, just given the time of year it is. We're in the late days of October, sort of the end of the parks season here in Manitoba.

So I would just like to extend my sincere thanks to the Parks branch, but also the Parks staff that work so hard and produce such a successful 2024 park season. The full-time staff, the seasonal staff, everybody worked so hard to make—to keep our parks beautiful and to keep them safe and to make sure that Manitobans are able to have a relaxing and enriching experience in our parks.

Our government shares the love that I have for parks. We are investing in parks; we will continue to invest in parks, to modernize and improve park amenities and services for all park users. Our provincial park investments will focus on priority areas that enhance visitor experiences while also reducing operating costs and ensuring continued delivery of essential services.

As an example, key investments for '24-25 are expected to total \$10.8 million and include the Nutimik museum, Captain Kennedy House upgrades, new electrical sites at Birds Hill, water treatment plant improvements at Asessippi and Birds Hill and the reconstruction of the flood-damaged West Hawk sea wall.

There are additional projects planned. I appreciate the member's question about the previous government's park strategy, or investment strategy, but in—the Parks department is no different than branches in departments across government.

We have a lot of questions. Manitobans elected us on a new mandate. It's a new day in Manitoba, and so we're looking at everything. We're going through the plan with a fine-tooth comb to make sure that investments are made strategically, that they're made responsibly and that they put us back on a path to balance.

So, happy to talk more about Manitoba parks any time.

Thank you.

Mr. Nesbitt: Well, thank you to the minister for that. I guess I didn't really get any reassurance there that the strategy was going to continue as it was printed as what I tabled there, and it's sad to hear that perhaps

consultations with 10,000 Manitobans and stakeholder groups may have been wasted.

I know there was so much excitement when that plan was announced under our government, and I think that cottage owners across the province and parks users were so excited to see some rejuvenation-planned rejuvenation of parks and roads leading into parks over the next 10 years. It wasn't just a one-off plan; it was a 10-year plan that was going to modernize our parks and make them very, very attractive to Manitobans and people visiting from outside of the province.

Now, I know the minister's mandate letter instructs her to invest in parks and I think, though our opposition and many, many Manitobans that I talked to were concerned about Budget 2024, where, you know, the Parks capital budget was cut by six—yes, \$6 million for this year, as part of the 10-year plan.

So you—the minister just said they went though it with a fine-toothed comb; I think it was—you know, it was more of a haircut, when you shave \$6 million. And I guess, how do we square that with a \$6-million cut when the minister just said they're spending \$10.8 million on projects? Now I'm assuming the projects that were started in the '23-24 year under our government—because let's face it, a lot of this work is done in the summertime—is likely being included in that number.

So I guess I would like the minister, if she—or, if the minister could share with us the projects that she's talking about were started in '23-24, but what new projects have been started in Budget 2024, this fiscal year. And if indeed only \$6 million is going to be spent in this fiscal year.

And I table this, sorry.

* (15:40)

MLA Schmidt: We're very proud of our \$10.8-million budget; 6.8 that was printed in the budget, as the member opposite is referring to, but also an additional \$4 million in Disaster Financial Assistance projects. And that's money leveraged by our government on behalf of Manitobans from the federal government to serve Manitobans and to enhance our parks.

I'm very proud of our government's ability to work across jurisdictions with 'ovel'—with other levels of government in service to Manitobans. Because that's what we were elected to do is to work for Manitobans, and that's what we're doing.

Happy to talk a little bit more about some examples of the investing that we've been doing in our parks over the last year and the work that we're doing in prioritizing investments that will have the greatest impact on rejuvenating Manitoba's provincial park network today and into the future.

So I'd like to talk a little bit about, first, the Bakers Narrows washroom-shower building. Park staff have installed new gender-neutral and accessible washroom-shower buildings with energy-conserving features such as low-flow fixtures and radiant heating. This is located in the campground at Bakers Narrows Provincial Park, one of the most beautiful parks in the province.

I don't know if you've had a chance to go there, Member. I know he's—I see a nod. It's absolutely beautiful. I was lucky enough to be up there a few years ago with my family, and I was taken aback by the natural beauty at Bakers Narrows. And I'm very glad to hear that they now have new gender-neutral and accessible washrooms delivered by our provincial park staff. The energy-conserving features are just the icing on that cake.

Another plan—another project, pardon me—I'd like to highlight for the committee is the water treatment plant at Asessippi Provincial Park, which I know that the member opposite is familiar with. At Asessippi, we have a new water treatment facility to address Office of Drinking Water regulations. We're very proud to do that important work. We know that safe and clean drinking water is of the utmost importance for Manitobans everywhere and certainly when they are enjoying our Manitoba parks.

There's also been a water treatment plant upgrade at Birds Hill Provincial Park, where we expanded the existing water treatment facility to address, again, the Office of Drinking Water regulations. We're very happy for the guidance of the Office of Drinking Water and proud of the project that our park staff were able to deliver.

And on the more fun side, we've also got new playgrounds installed. So there are now new playgrounds at Clearwater, Whiteshell, at White Lake—another lake I've been to with my family, it's absolutely beautiful; definitely was in need of a new playground, so I'm glad to hear that that's happened. We've got new playgrounds also at Winnipeg Beach and Turtle Mountain Provincial Park.

As someone who camps regularly with their young children, the value of a good playground cannot be understated. Kids can get restless in parks. They need

stuff—they can only stay in the lake for so long. They can only walk the trails for so long. And sometimes they need a good game of grounders on a playground. So very proud of that work.

Very proud to talk more about our capital plan when it comes to Parks in our next question.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I appreciate the minister's comments in sharing and summarizing some of those great projects we initiated while we were in government. But there's really not any spending or \$4 million on new spending.

However, I want to talk a little bit—have a number of our constituents in western Manitoba quite concerned about early layoffs of our seasonal park staff this year and future years. A number of people in my riding are very concerned about the decision affecting their ability to claim EI benefits and continue supporting their families, these men and women who pull out our docks and help finish capital projects, drain water lines, just prepare for the winter and make sure our parks are ready in the spring.

Can the minister confirm whether any seasonal staff have been laid off early this season, and if so, how many and why?

And also, can the minister explain how she expects to recruit and retain workers for our parks and how she's going to deal with the chaos next spring if people do not return because of how they've been treated by this government in the early layoffs, and really pinned for cash within their families this year and perhaps have to leave this province?

Thank you.

MLA Schmidt: I thank the member opposite for the question; however, I regret the tone. I'm not surprised by the tone, but I regret the tone.

It's a new day in Manitoba. I've said it once, I'll say it again: it's a new day in Manitoba. Our government is here to bring Manitobans hope.

The member opposite is talking about chaos. I don't know if he spends any time in Manitoba parks, but I spent a lot of time in Manitoba parks this summer and I didn't see a lot of chaos. I saw a lot of happy kids, I saw a lot of Manitobans enjoying the great outdoors. I saw a lot of recreation, a lot of peace.

I have seen a lot of chaos, honourable Chairperson, in looking at the books that we inherited. If the member opposite wants to talk about chaos, we can certainly talk about the chaotic way in which, in the dying

days of the Heather Stefanson government, a government that the member opposite was a member of, they made chaotic and reckless decisions with the purse of Manitoba that have left our government in a situation where we've inherited a \$2-billion deficit—nearly \$2 billion.

* (15:50)

And, again, you don't have to take my word for it, honourable Chairperson. Independent firm by the name of KPMG, which the members opposite will be—no, MNP. My apologies, I'll correct that for the record. MNP audited the books of the previous government, and they found independently that the previous government were making reckless, risky decisions with the Manitoba purse, and so that's unfortunate.

But that's okay. Manitobans made a great choice on October 3 of last year, and they've elected a new government, one that's going to make decisions in a fiscally responsible way and one that is focused on Manitoba parks and investing in Manitoba parks.

So I can confirm that when it comes to seasonal employment in Manitoba parks—which, again, many of our park staff are seasonal employees because of the nature of parks and the way they work—we have many full-time staff, but we also are lucky to have many seasonal staff.

And in managing seasonal staff, it is absolutely normal to operate under a system where you extend seasonal staff. In some cases—this year, like in previous years and like it will be in years in the future—some of those seasonal staff are extended and some of those seasonal staff are not. We take a look at the need and, you know, at top of mind in making these assessments of where extensions are needed and where extensions are not needed—of top of mind is health and safety.

But I can certainly confirm that there were no early layoffs as was characterized by the member opposite. We value our seasonal staff; very excited about some of the work that's going to be happening this winter. I understand over—or, around 400 firepits are going to be installed by seasonal staff over these coming fall and winter months, improving campgrounds and the park experience for Manitobans that are lucky enough to get out there and use them.

But, yes, certainly no early layoffs. We—our government appreciates the efforts of all park staff, regular and seasonal. We know how hard they work to maintain our parks and to provide the best possible experience for park visitors.

Every year this is something the department must do, is we must balance our budget, we must look at the need, look at the resources we have, look at the need, look at the pressures. That will certainly be a unique situation year to year, and that's how our decisions are made.

Thank you.

Mr. Nesbitt: I'm certainly sorry that my colleague struck a nerve. I think he was just trying to get an answer to what his constituents were telling him in terms of seasonal layoffs. And I'm struggling here to, you know, listen to the answer from the minister saying there was no seasonal layoffs, but yet her preamble basically indicated she had to save money.

So I'm kind of wondering: Was there or wasn't there layoffs? And if indeed there were layoffs this fall, how much money was saved, and was it strictly a budgetary reason for the layoffs? Because my understanding is that, you know, seasonal employees—yes, they're called seasonal, but traditionally, for all the years we were in government, I believe that seasonal employees were always extended and always counted on those hours.

So I'm just a little confused by what the minister just said, so if she could perhaps clarify for me and my colleague, like I say, whether there was any seasonal layoffs, if and indeed there was because of budgetary reasons, let us know and how much money was saved and how they plan to get that work done next spring that wasn't done this fall.

MLA Schmidt: Happy to clarify for the committee, although I'm not sure how much more clear I can be. But I will reiterate that there were no early layoffs. Seasonal employees, by their very nature, are seasonal. It is in line with their employment agreement that there may be extensions, there may not be extensions. This is standard—a standard term for seasonal employees. So absolutely no layoffs.

And in fact, I question the member opposite. If it was just a matter of—if it was an automatic extension of seasonal workers under his government, as he said it was, I do question why those employees were perhaps not made full-time employees. But that's maybe a question for another day. Perhaps some ideological differences.

Seasonal employees are, by definition, seasonal. They are extended when there is a need, and their—extensions may not be offered where there is no need. Again, we assess that on a case-by-case basis. There are unique situations that arise, or may not arise, that

would justify the extension of a seasonal employee or the decision to not extend them.

Seasonal employees perform amazing work and are able—it's essential for the department to have access to seasonal employees because of the varying nature of Manitoba parks. Sometimes we have early springs; sometimes we have early winters. Sometimes we have spring storms. And so there needs—the Parks Department needs to avail itself to seasonal staff, and it needs to be nimble to address the needs that arise in our parks.

So I'd like to highlight a few projects which seasonal staff participated in. So this spring, there was a snowstorm in Turtle Mountain Provincial Park. That snowstorm happened in late May, so somewhat unseasonable, even here in Manitoba. And that late-May storm required the closure of the park. Park staff, with support from the wildfire crews in Lac du Bonnet, were able to get the park back open in less than a week. So it's a great example of where seasonal and permanent staff are able to work together to address unique situations as they arise in our parks.

Another great example is that Hecla staff were able to rebuild the Grassy Narrows boardwalk in Hecla/Grindstone park, constructed of 28 pontoon decks with an amazing telescope at the end of the walkway for all bird lovers to enjoy the view.

So those are just a few examples of the great work that our parks staff do. We value our seasonal Parks staff. We rely on them. And in fact, in many parts of the province, I know we struggle to even find seasonal Parks staff. So we very much thank all of our Parks staff, including our seasonal staff.

* (16:00)

I encourage folks across Manitoba to keep an eye on the Manitoba Parks website and look for employment opportunities. It is a great place to work. There are great opportunities at Manitoba Parks for both seasonal and regular staff.

Thank you.

Mr. Nesbitt: I appreciate the minister confirming that indeed there was many, many seasonal employees this year that were not extended. And I know that is always the prerogative of seasonal staff, and I will reiterate that for many, many years, as long as the weather is good in the fall, seasonal staff were always continued employment so they could prepare parks for the spring. So I guess we'll just have to wait and see what

the non-renewal of these seasonal staff is going to do to the parks in the spring.

But we're going to move on a little bit. We're going to talk about the parks reservation system here in Manitoba, a very successful reservation system that was put in place by a Progressive Conservative government. Lots of accolades on how the system works, the ease of use and many, many more Manitobans being able to get reservations in parks and get the dates they want.

So I just—I want the minister to comment on the reservation system, whether they're going to continue with that reservation system to ensure Manitobans—and I guess anyone from outside Manitoba—that wants to reserve places in parks will continue in the iteration it's in now.

And in the same question I want to ask the minister—or, thank the minister for anything the minister may have done in speeding up the passage of Bill 211 this spring, the provincial parks plate. I know she's very proud of parks; we've determined that from question period and from the questions we've asked today, so I would hope that her vehicles will proudly display a plate once they're available.

But my question there is, I just want to make sure that there'll be no interference from the minister's office in the implementation of the parks plate. As you know, this summer we did a call across Manitoba for designs, and I'm proud to say here today we had over 90 Manitobans submit designs for these plates, and we've—we're in the process of narrowing those down in co-operation with some stakeholders here across Manitoba, and we hope to—you know, we hope to move these forward for a spring introduction to Manitoba.

And as you know, the reason for doing this plate was to promote our parks, not just within Manitoba, but for motorists driving all across Canada and the United States, to encourage them to come to this beautiful province.

So, question on the parks reservation system and a thank-you and an assurance that there'll be no interference from the minister's office on this plate moving forward.

MLA Schmidt: I know, I don't do well on the waiting part. Thank you, honourable Chairperson.

To talk about the Manitoba parks reservation system—and I thank the member for the question—my understanding is that contract is up for—or, expires in

2026, I believe. And as I mentioned before, you know, in forming government—a new government here in Manitoba—one year ago, we have a lot of questions.

And so, not unlike all contracts across government—and that includes IT contracts, of which this is one—to ensure that we are being responsible managers of the provincial purse and to make sure that that contract is cost-effective for Manitobans, I think it's only prudent for our government to take a look at that contract. We're taking looks at contracts across government, and I think that's the responsible thing to do and I think that's the thing that Manitobans elected us to do.

So nothing in particular special about this contract. But again, as a government—in this department and in departments across government—we are going to be looking at every contact—contract to make sure that it is serving Manitobans and is in the best interest of Manitobans. So that's what I'll say about the parks reservation service.

When it comes to the parks licence plate, I want to also thank and congratulate the member opposite: I think it's great to see our two sides of the aisle come together and pass that bill, and have created another licence plate now here in Manitoba. There's a growing number of licence plates; we should all be very proud of this one. Looking very much forward to see the final result of how that plate looks.

And I don't have much more to say about it than just to congratulate the member on his work and thank him for bringing this new plate into fruition. I know we had originally talked about me seconding that bill; didn't end up happening, maybe next time, next licence plate.

But, again, I am glad to see both sides of the aisle come together and support parks in this way. I appreciate that the proceeds from the sale of these licence plate will go to the Parks endowment fund, which will serve to invest further into Manitoba parks, something that I think we can all agree on is a great thing.

So I hope that he would know that he shouldn't anticipate any interference, as he put it. And happy to work with the member opposite on the parks licence plate or any other issues, policy ideas that we can collaborate on to improve parks here in Manitoba.

Thank you.

Mr. Nesbitt: I appreciate the minister being candid on both those questions.

I can certainly appreciate that—you know, that every contract has to be looked at and it's good to know the

reservation system comes up in 2026. And I'm sure the minister will agree that the system has been a real success here in Manitoba and anything they do, I'm sure, will be to continue the success. So we'll—next year perhaps, in Estimates, we can talk about that a little bit again.

And, yes, I would have been honoured if the minister could have seconded my bill. That was the intention; I certainly extended the olive branch to have that happen and it's too bad it couldn't have happened. But—and I was also disappointed, perhaps, that the minister couldn't be involved in the selection of our plate, looking at the 90 entries and helping us come to a conclusion on the plate. But again, we extended the offer to the minister, the deputy minister and the director of Parks to help us pick a plate.

* (16:10)

But I just want to indicate to the minister that I think the final design that we have is one that's going to be—I'm going to say it's going to be the most beautiful plate here in Manitoba, and I'm anticipating huge sales. And if the minister would like, we could certainly have a meeting and just kind of have the minister look over the design of the plate, just to get a look at it before it moves forward. And I appreciate the reassurance that there'll be no interference at all as we move this forward. I hope to introduce it to Manitobans by next spring.

So we'll move on from that topic. So as the minister's certainly aware, our Progressive Conservative government and the Manitoba Provincial Park Cabin Owners Association signed a memorandum of understanding to work collaboratively on shared priorities, including park cottage leases and a service fee model.

Now, this came about after, you know, extensive conversations with the association, and they were looking for some fairness and things like that, and I think we came to a real understanding on these issues.

And you know, I think when the government changed last fall, I think maybe there was a little concern out there by—maybe not by the association so much, but by individual cottagers on what was going to happen; was this new government going to honour the agreement?

And so I think the whole point of the MOU was to—working towards a fair deal for the owners of the cottages—6,200 cottages across Manitoba. And, you know, I'd like to believe that this government feels the same.

So I guess my question today is a pretty simple one: Is the minister still working with MPPCOA on honouring the MOU and advancing this work with the association, and when does the minister expect to perhaps have a final agreement finalized on the lease fees and service fees?

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

Yes, we're in a very unique situation here in Manitoba and one that makes—yet another reason why Manitoba parks are so special and unique is that here in Manitoba we have more cottage owners in provincial parks than anywhere else in Canada. I know that you know this—speaking to the member opposite there. More than 6,200 cottage lots in Manitoba—that's very unique across Canada. The jurisdiction that is second in cottage lots in their provincial parks is Saskatchewan, and they have roughly half as many as Manitoba does.

So we are in a very unique situation here in Manitoba with the number of cottage owners that we have. And we're also very, very fortunate to have the Manitoba Provincial Parks Cabin Owners Association working on behalf of their members and advancing their priorities and serving as their voice.

We are very lucky and I'm very grateful to enjoy a very positive working relationship with the MPPCOA, one that is fostered through our department's staff and through myself as minister. We are continuing to build on that relationship.

And when it comes to executing the memorandum that you've referenced in your question, absolutely; we are still working diligently on that work. My understanding is that there are ongoing meetings occurring on a regular 'schedule'—schedule, that there is a positive and productive dialogue happening at that table and that the relationship is healthy and mutual and that we're working towards modernizing and changing the fee model here in Manitoba.

The MOU is intended to provide Manitoba and the MPPCOA with a framework for advancing discussions in developing a new fee structure and for the collection of land-lease fees and a service fee model whereby cottagers can pay a fair, equitable, transparent and sustainable share of lease and service fees in relation to all other park users.

Our government very much values what cottage owners contribute to our provincial parks, and we want to work with them, in partnership with them to make sure that whatever changes are made serve their

interests and further enhance Manitoba parks, their sustainability, their affordability and the recreational and quality-of-life opportunities that are offered therein.

So again, very, very proud of the relationship that our department has fostered with the MPPCOA, continues to foster, will continue to foster. Very proud of that work. That work is ongoing; I would hesitate to put a timeline on it, because I don't want to interfere in the work of that working group. I know—as I said earlier, I know that they're meeting regularly. Those meetings are ongoing and hopefully we will have a new path forward soon.

We are a listening government; we're really here to listen. I don't want to put expectations or tell the MPPCOA when and how to get this done. We're going to make sure that it's done in a timely way, but we're going to make sure it's also, most importantly, done the right way and in a way that everyone can be proud and satisfied with.

So, thank you for the question.

Mr. Wowchuk: Okay. And I just want to thank the minister for continuing that great work with MPPCOA and the—and their working group, because that was really important. We heard a lot of positive things about them.

I want to talk a little bit about protected areas now here. Recently, public statements by the minister and government made it clear that they're—clear the goal is to establish nine Indigenous protected areas, starting with the Seal River, which is about the size of Nova Scotia. And wondering if the other 8 IPAs, where their location could be provided for us.

* (16:20)

And under the implementation of this minister's IPA initiative, to get an idea what the plan for public consultation is, and more specifically, what the Provincial Parks Cabin Owners Association, and in my area, the Duck Mountain cottage owners association.

So just the consultation with them, and where the location of the other eight IPAs is located.

MLA Schmidt: Thank you the member opposite for the question.

I'm extremely proud of the mandate given to me by our Premier (Mr. Kinew), proud of all the mandate items in there. Particularly proud of the fact that Manitoba has committed to protecting 30 per cent of Manitoba's lands and waters by the year 2030. And it's a very important commitment for many reasons;

conservation effort, which protects biodiversity; enhancing our biodiversity helps us to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

But when you read the mandate letter, it's not just protect 30 per cent of Manitoba's lands and waters by the year 2030, it's to do that in partnership with our Indigenous communities, our First Nations here in Manitoba.

And that's important for many reasons. I think that's important from the aspect of reconciliation, when we really acknowledge the history of this province that we now call Manitoba. The Indigenous peoples of Manitoba were the first inhabitants of this land and they protected and conserved the air, land and water for time immemorial, and so it's only right that the government partner with Indigenous communities and First Nations in pursuing our conservation goals.

The other reason it's a good idea is because Indigenous communities are doing this work. They are leading this work. They are leading the way for all of us. I spoke earlier about the inspiration and the hope that I get from the public servants here in our department, and I certainly get a lot of inspiration and hope when I look at First Nations and Indigenous communities around our province and the incredible work that they are doing when it comes to protecting our land, our air and our water. And so it is a honour to be able to partner with First Nations and Indigenous communities in this work.

When it comes to the issue of IPCAs, or Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, that's a very specific definition or category. It's one that currently exists in the federal sphere. There isn't yet a legal definition of an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area in Manitoba law. So this is really a federal concept, if you will, at this point. And the federal government is working with First Nations across the country, including here in Manitoba, to advance priorities and initiatives that First Nations and Indigenous communities themselves are working towards.

So a great example of what could become an IPCA, or Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area, is the Seal River Watershed.

Our government—one of the first acts of our government was to sign a memorandum of understanding between the Government of Manitoba, the Government of Canada and the Seal River Watershed Alliance, which is an alliance of four First Nations in

northern Manitoba that have been working for years on protecting lands in their traditional territories and conserving them for years to come. The Seal River Watershed is one of the last pristine intact watersheds in the world.

And the area that's been identified through that memorandum of understanding, which is pursuing a feasibility study to see what exactly that conservation initiative might actually end up looking like. The area has been—and again, this number's—depends who you talk to, depends what map you're—

The Chairperson: The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Nesbitt: I think we'll give the minister a chance to expand in the next answer here, that's for sure.

So I just want to put on the record here today that on this side of the House, we're not against IPCAs at all. We're not against protecting the environment and things. We just want to ensure that, you know, all Manitobans can make use of our natural resources moving forward. I think that's the concern that's happening.

You know, I think this summer was—the minister talks about Seal River and, you know, obviously our government had lots of discussions with the Seal River group as well, and we just wanted to make sure that all stakeholders had input into major decisions.

And I think that—I'm not sure that the minister would disagree with this—that a four-week online survey in the middle of the summer was enough time to gather important and—data and input from stakeholders on something as big as Seal River, the size of Nova Scotia, in northern Manitoba.

* (16:30)

So I'm asking the minister to commit today and guarantee to Manitobans that there will be allowances or they will work towards allowances moving forward for licensed hunting and angling to continue in the Seal River Watershed once the study is done.

MLA Schmidt: Thank you for the opportunity to talk further about the Seal River Watershed Alliance and the MOU that we have entered into with their organization as well as the federal government of Manitoba.

And I think it's important to note that the MOU that we have entered into is in furtherance of a feasibility study. That's the process that we are engaged in right now in partnership with the alliance and the federal government. It's a feasibility study that is using research

and data and community consultation, in consultation with the mining sector, in consultation with the tourism sector, with the lodges and the outfitters and communities across Manitoba to assess the feasibility of what exactly this protected and conserved area might look like.

And when the member opposite talks about all Manitobans, I want to speak a little bit more about that. And I want to speak about the history of Manitoba here when it comes to natural resources. The member opposite talked about fishing and hunting. We think about the mining sector; we think about the legacy of hydroelectricity here in Manitoba. And the truth of the matter is that not—it has not always been the case that all Manitobans have been at the table when it comes to projects like that.

I'm a very proud Manitoban, so proud of our province. I'm so proud of our government and where we're at today. But it hasn't always been that way. And there have been certain members of our community that have not always been engaged, have not always been consulted, have not always been at the table and have not always benefitted from initiatives of the provincial government.

And our government has a different perspective. Our government believes in true government-to-government relationships, and the First Nations that make up the Seal River Watershed Alliance are just that: they're nations. And they've been doing incredible work on this initiative for years.

It's not Manitoba that is leading this work, it's the Seal River Watershed Alliance, and I say that unequivocally. The Government of Canada and the Government of Manitoba are supporting and partnering the work that is being led by these First Nations and by these Indigenous communities. And I'm happy to put that on the record.

The Government of Manitoba will be at the table as we—as the results of the feasibility study start to come in and we start to understand what is feasible in this area that's been identified. And we look forward to seeing the results of that work. And again, that work involves consulting with communities, consulting with our mining sector, consulting with tourism, lodges, outfitters.

We are a listening government. We're going to bring everybody to the table. But I want to be clear, and this is something—and I think this is the reason why the previous government never signed the MOU allowing this feasibility to—study to go forward. And

that is because this initiative is led by the Indigenous Nations.

This is their traditional territory. This is a pristine, beautiful landscape that has been preserved for millennia. And we are so happy and proud to support the work that will hopefully see this land conserved and preserved for generations to come. But that work is going to be Indigenous led, and we're here to support it. Manitoba is not here to dictate. We're here to collaborate. We're here to listen. We're here to partner.

We're going to make sure that whatever comes out of this feasibility study is going to be in the best interest of all Manitobans, but certainly that it's going to be led by the Seal River Watershed Alliance. And we're so proud of their work.

Mr. Nesbitt: Well, thank you to the minister.

The Premier (Mr. Kinew) always talks about one Manitoba, and I think that's certainly what the minister's getting at here, is that perhaps it always hasn't been one Manitoba.

And I can appreciate that First Nations have the rights—certainly the rights and responsibilities to determine what happens on their lands and things. I guess where we're coming from here a bit is that, you know, we're hearing from stakeholders, whether they be cottagers, hunters, fishers, anglers, a little worried about the future. My colleague here just talked about the potential for more—eight more IPCAs here in Manitoba, and I don't think the minister's addressed that yet. I mean, Seal River's one thing; it's a huge track of land in the North. But where are these other eight IPCAs going to be located?

And I think all cottagers and hunters and anglers are looking at is to have input and access to continue what they love to do here in Manitoba, part of this one Manitoba. So that's part of the question there, is to ensure that all the stakeholders get a say in any future IPCAs, and not just a four-week window in the middle of the summer to make comments and things like that.

* (16:40)

So I would appreciate some assurances from the minister that all Manitobans would be notified of their plans moving forward and have the right to comment on anything that's going to take land out of the hands of hunters, anglers and cottagers.

I guess the next part of my question is: Does the minister plan to extend or make permanent the government's moratorium on geoscience investigations within the Seal River Watershed? It's my understanding

now that the MOU likely indicates there'll be no mineral exploration, nothing to do with that under the terms of the MOU, until something is actually decided what's going to happen with Seal River.

So just some insurances on consultation and respecting all Manitobans in any of these decisions moving forward. And for the mining industry's benefit, what, perhaps, are the plans for Seal River moving forward given that, you know, we have an abundance of minerals in the North, have a lot of critical minerals? Without exploration, you'll never know what's there.

So I'll just leave it to the minister to answer that, please.

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

We're very proud of the work that we're doing in partnership with the Seal River Watershed Alliance and Canada in pursuing this feasibility study, which is ongoing. A lot of the work of that feasibility study is public consultation.

Just to sort of correct the record, there's far more consultation going on on this project, on this feasibility work, other than the four-week online survey that the member opposite is referencing. Yes, there was a four-week online survey, but there have been in-community consultations with affected communities, those citizens, with stakeholders, with the mining sector, with the tourism sector; those conversations are ongoing. And, again, I think it's important to note again for the record that this is one phase of the process; this is a feasibility study.

At the conclusion of the feasibility study, at that point, there will have to be some decision points about what—how we move forward with protecting and conserving this land. That might be an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area. There are other things that it might look like too. It might be a combination of things. And when those decision points are entered into, there'll be further consultation with community, with Manitobans, with stakeholders.

Part of the work of the feasibility study is a mineral assessment. That is going on. That was conducted by the federal government to get a clearer picture of what mineral resources might exist in this—in the identified area. That mineral assessment is going to include a cost-benefit analysis. And I think that work is very important, and we look forward to seeing that work.

I do want to comment a little bit, and I'm—we're trying to keep this friendly, because this has been a great committee so far. But I do take a little bit of exception, and I wrote it down, of—when the member opposite, you know, articulates this: that—you know, that we are taking land from Manitobans. That's not what we're doing. We're not taking land from anybody.

And I find it a little bit offensive, the notion that what this feasibility study might produce would—that any Manitoban would perceive it as land being taken from them. That is not our intent, that's not the intent of the federal government, and it's not the intent of the Seal River Watershed Alliance.

Again, on the issue of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, which this may become—it might become other things—the concept of an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area, as I understand it—again, appreciating that this does not have a legal definition or a working framework here in Manitoba yet—but an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area can be a lot of things. It doesn't mean what I think sometimes people think it might mean, and maybe perhaps members opposite think it might mean, which—that is a—it becomes an area that no one can walk upon, that no one can fish upon.

The idea of a Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area, as I understand them to be, is that the conservation efforts become led by the Indigenous communities and that they are given more stake and more agency in deciding what activities occur on those territories. And I think that that's something that is—has been a long time coming, and I think that's something that should be welcomed.

I think that these are important projects to pursue. Manitoba has been pursuing a conservation agenda for some time. Currently, about 11 per cent of Manitoba's land mass is protected. And, again, trying to keep this friendly, but the record of the previous government is that they protected less than 0.1 per cent of Manitoba in the seven and a half years under Brian Pallister and Heather Stefanson. Less than 0.1 per cent was protected under the previous government.

Depending on the results of the feasibility study, we have the opportunity here to work with the Seal River Watershed Alliance to protect a land mass of 6, 7, 8 per cent of Manitoba. I think that's something worthy of doing. I'm very proud of that work.

Mr. Nesbitt: Well, thank you to the minister.

And, first of all, I certainly want to apologize. Taking was the wrong word; it was protecting. And I

just want to make sure that all users can still have rights on protected land, whatever might be decided in consultations moving forward.

And I'm pleased to hear the minister say that there will be more extensive consultations in the future on any planned more IPCAs—which the minister didn't confirm any number about the eight today, so I don't know where we got that eight from. But she hasn't confirmed that today, so that may lead to more questioning moving forward. But we'll—I think we'll leave that for today.

I appreciate the minister's mandate letter to protect as much of Manitoba as they can to get towards the federal government's goal of 30 per cent of Canada's land being protected by 2030.

I also respect in her mandate letter—at the same time, I'd remind her that she's also been tasked with protecting and investing in parks, in keeping them public and affordable for families to enjoy. So to that end, I want to table this document—she might not have a copy, I'm not sure—evaluating tourism potential in Manitoba's provincial parks. If not, some more late-night reading. I'll just table that today.

We only have a few more minutes, so we got to get rolling here. I just want to talk about the program to do with the geothermal heat pumps here in Manitoba.

Quick question: I know that we discussed that, at one time, I think at committee one time but—so the minister's 25 per cent of the way through her mandate. Is the minister 25 per cent of the way through her commitment of installing geothermal heat pumps in 5,000 homes? And if she isn't at 25 per cent of the 5,000, what is the number?

* (16:50)

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the member opposite. I'm really excited to talk about our clean heat program, our affordable home energy program, that's part of our larger Affordable Energy Plan that I had the pleasure of working on with the Minister of Finance and the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro (MLA Sala), which is really going to revolutionize the energy landscape here in Manitoba; something that's been needed for a long time.

Manitobans are concerned about our energy future, and we all know that we're heading towards an age of electrification; that's how we're going to reduce our emissions and make some real change here in Manitoba when it comes to addressing some of the impacts of climate change and trying to reduce our emissions and

hit our net-zero targets. So I'm very excited to talk about our affordable home energy program.

I appreciate the question, you know, and the sort of simple math of we're 25 per cent of the way through the mandate, we should be 25 per cent towards our goal. But I think the member opposite can appreciate that in standing up a new—what I would call revolutionary—program that we're envisioning, that's not really the way it works, right? It's going to take some time, and we're taking our time to make sure that we get it right.

Efficiency Manitoba has been doing great work, but quite frankly, Efficiency Manitoba struggled under the previous government as a new Crown corporation. I understand that they struggled to get staffed up under the previous government, they struggled with their mandate, knowing that they could do more but weren't given the tools and the resources to do that. So, very proud to have worked with the MLA for Riel, the legislative assistant for Environment and Climate Change, on appointing a new, ambitious board at Efficiency Manitoba.

And wow, are they doing great work. I've been invited to board meetings of Efficiency Manitoba to get regular updates about their work on implementing our affordable home energy program, including a meeting just last week that I had the pleasure of attending.

And I can tell you that they are well on their way; Efficiency Manitoba already has incentive and rebate programs when it comes and—pardon me—they have incentive and rebate programs when it comes to geothermal options for Manitobans; they've been doing that for—since their inception with some success. But we're—what we're talking about in our affordable home energy program is much more dynamic and fulsome, I guess.

So it's going to take some time to make sure that we get it right, to make sure that Manitobans have an easy and accessible and, most importantly, an affordable way to adopt this new technology. We're working with Manitobans in individual homes. We're also looking at multi-unit developments in order to achieve our goals. But again, it's going to take some time.

You shouldn't have to wait too much longer. We should have our affordable home energy program ready to roll out very, very soon. And it's going to be

a great way for Manitobans to be able to, in some cases, reduce their emissions, in other cases to reduce their strain on the grid and in all cases to have a more affordable home heating bill.

So I hesitate to—I can—I do have some numbers; I hesitate to share them. There's not 25 per cent, I'll tell you that much. But I have no doubt that we will be able to ramp up the program once it is deliverable and be able to get this amazing, revolutionary technology into homes and residences of Manitobans so they can enjoy this renewable, sustainable, clean heat.

The Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, we will now turn to the resolutions, beginning with the second resolution as we have deferred consideration of the first resolution containing the minister's salary.

At this point, we will allow—oh. We have no virtual members, so I will move on to the first resolution.

Resolution 12.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$21,558,000 for Environment and Climate Change, Environmental Stewardship, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,473,000 for Environment and Climate Change, Climate Action and Energy Innovation, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$20,649,000 for Environment and Climate Change, Water Stewardship, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$40,068,000 for Environment and Climate Change, Parks and Trails, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,825,000 for Environment and Climate Change, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 12.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 12.1.

At this point, we request that all ministerial and opposition staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of the last item.

Twelve point—I'm sorry.

Resolution 12.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,394,000 for Environment and Climate Change, Finance and Shared Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Environment and Climate Change.

* (17:00)

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

IN SESSION

The Deputy Speaker (Tyler Blashko): The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 31, 2024

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Committee Reports		Highways 8 and 67	
Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development		Perchotte	3264
Ninth Report		Naylor	3264
Dela Cruz	3256	Infrastructure Investment Strategy	
		King	3265
		Naylor	3265
Tabling of Reports		Serious Injury and Death for Children and Youth	
Fontaine	3257	Lamoureux	3265
Wiebe	3257	Fontaine	3265
Ministerial Statements		Children and Youth–Mental Health Services	
Movember		Lamoureux	3266
Bushie	3257	Fontaine	3266
King	3258	Serious Injury and Death for Children and Youth	
Members' Statements		Lamoureux	3266
Peter Martin		Fontaine	3266
Dela Cruz	3259	Free Prescription Birth Control	
Swan River Farming and Logging Industries		Kennedy	3266
Wowchuk	3259	Asagwara	3266
Winnipeg West Pickleball Club		Population Increase for Morden-Winkler	
Sala	3259	Hiebert	3267
Highlighting Lac du Bonnet Organizations		Kinew	3267
Ewasko	3260	Provincial Park Budget	
Clean Energy Initiatives		Wowchuk	3267
Moroz	3260	Schmidt	3267
Oral Questions		Bus Service in Northern Manitoba	
Interlake Region		Lathlin	3268
Ewasko	3261	Naylor	3268
Kinew	3261	Highways 433, 313 and 520	
Highway Budget		Ewasko	3268
Narth	3262	Naylor	3268
Kinew	3262	Highway 201 RTAC Expansion	
Highway 2		Narth	3268
Jackson	3263	Naylor	3269
Naylor	3263	Phoenix School Renovation and Expansion	
Grace Hospital		Cook	3269
Cook	3263	Schmidt	3269
Asagwara	3264	Grievances	
		Cook	3270

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Committee of Supply
(Concurrent Sections)

Room 254

Agriculture
Kostyshyn
Bereza
King
Narth

3271
3273
3278
3279

Room 255

Emergency Expenditures

Naylor 3281
Narth 3283

Consumer Protection and Government Services

Naylor 3288
Guenter 3290

Chamber

Environment and Climate Change

Schmidt 3293
Nesbitt 3296
Wowchuk 3300

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<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>