

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

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

Vol. LXXV No. 69 - 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 26, 2021

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 26, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): It is my duty to inform the House that the Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

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

Please be seated. Good afternoon, everyone.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 236—The Protecting Communications on Public Interest Matters Act (Court of Queen's Bench Act and Defamation Act Amended)

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I move, seconded by the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), that Bill 236, The Protecting Communications on Public Interest Matters Act (Court of Queen's Bench Act and Defamation Act Amended), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Fontaine: I'm pleased to introduce Bill 236, The Protecting Communications on Public Interest Matters Act, Court of Queen's Bench Act and Defamation Act amendment.

This bill will protect citizens from strategic lawsuits against their public participation when they are speaking up on a matter of public interest.

Bill 236 would also limit the abilities of large corporations and wealthy individuals to intimidate or

silence individuals' freedoms of speech and expression with a lawsuit.

I hope Bill 236 will receive the unanimous support of this Assembly.

Miigwech.

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

Bill 234—The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Right to Repair)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I move, seconded by the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew), that Bill 234—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh, order. Order. I just want to remind—oh, just one second. So you have to do it all over again. We just want to make sure that the person who seconded has to be in their seat or on Zoom.

Mr. Maloway: I move, seconded by the member for Fort Rouge, that Bill 234, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Right to Repair), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Maloway: The right to repair legislation empowers Manitoba consumers and fosters sustainability by requiring manufacturers of electronic devices and appliances to make information, parts and tools necessary for repairs available to consumers and independent repair shops at a reasonable price.

Products covered by this right to repair legislation would include smart phones, tablets, laptops, washers, dryers, refrigerators.

Manitoba consumers would have the same right to repair as consumers in the European Union have beginning this year.

Canada produces 757,000 tons of electronic waste annually and right to repair legislation will be a giant leap forward in reducing this waste by giving Manitobans access to products that are made better and last longer.

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

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs Eighth Report

Mr. James Teitsma (Chairperson): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following as its Eighth Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on May 25, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 217) – The Legislative Assembly Amendment and Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative et la Loi sur la Commission de régie de l'Assemblée législative**

Committee Membership

As per the Sessional Order passed by the House on October 7, 2020, amended on November 19, 2020, December 3, 2020, and further amended on May 18, 2021, Rule 83(2) was waived for the May 25, 2021 meeting, reducing the membership to six Members (4 Government and 2 Official Opposition).

- Hon. Mr. EWASKO
- Ms. FONTAINE
- Mr. MICHALESKI
- Hon. Mr. PEDERSEN
- Mr. TEITSMA
- Mr. WIEBE

Your Committee elected Mr. TEITSMA as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Mr. MICHALESKI as the Vice-Chairperson.

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- Hon. Mr. GERRARD

Public Presentations

*Your Committee heard the following three presentations on **Bill (No. 217) – The Legislative Assembly Amendment and Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative et la Loi sur la Commission de régie de l'Assemblée législative:***

Patrick Falconer, Private citizen

Lloyd Talbot, Private citizen

Lloyd Axworthy, Private citizen

Written Submissions

*Your Committee received the following written submission on **Bill (No. 217) – The Legislative Assembly Amendment and Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative et la Loi sur la Commission de régie de l'Assemblée législative:***

Paul Thomas, Private citizen

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 217) – The Legislative Assembly Amendment and Legislative Assembly Management Commission Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative et la Loi sur la Commission de régie de l'Assemblée législative**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment

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

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we'll go on to tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Will Gault

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Today, I want to shine a light on one of Kirkfield Park's constituents, Will Gault, owner of Willy Dogs hot dog cart.

Back in 2015, Willy was on the streets of Winnipeg, homeless, addicted to alcohol and meth, and struggling to get ahead. He had lost his job as a peace officer and had been in treatment four times before deciding a change of scenery might help him as he moved to Brandon.

In Brandon, Will suffered a withdraw seizure and decided to seek further addictions treatment with the support of Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. After some time in a crisis stabilization unit in Brandon, Will eventually made his way back to Winnipeg with the help of Two Ten Recovery, an organization that provides home atmosphere while promoting sobriety by offering a safe, structured and independent living environment.

Will has proudly been sober for six years, as he's celebrating with his family. During this time, he has turned his life around, which includes starting his own business, Willy Dogs, getting married to his partner Courtney, buying a home and now having two daughters who keep him extremely busy, Ireland, who is four, and Taylor, who is one.

Being a small-business owner during the pandemic has been difficult, but Will has been—very supportive community behind him. As a result of this support, Will has been able to give back some proceeds from his organization, from his business, to different organizations that helped him and his family along the way, that includes Two Ten Recovery and the Children's Hospital. He has also fundraised twice for the newly opened Bruce Oake Recovery Centre, and is currently supporting the St. Boniface hospital by offering customers the opportunity to gift a food voucher to front-line workers through September on his website at willydogs.ca.

Will Gault is an example of perseverance, hard work and determination, Mr. Deputy Speaker. His journey has not been a easy one but it is an inspirational one, and we are lucky to have people like Will Gault in Kirkfield Park who continue to give back to the community.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Julie and Liam Western

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I rise today to speak on behalf of Wolseley constituents Julie Western and her 12-year-old son Liam, who was diagnosed with epilepsy at 15 months of age. Liam also lives with Tourette's syndrome, ADHD and an intellectual disability.

Julie was thrilled in May 2017, when private donors donated \$2 million to open a pediatric epilepsy program at Children's Hospital.

* (13:40)

At that press conference, Manitobans were told that the new pediatric epilepsy and pediatric neurosurgery program would consist of a two-bed monitoring unit, two pediatric epilepsy neurologists, a pediatric epilepsy surgery program and the acquisition of a specialized robotic navigation system called ROSA. ROSA helps surgeons perform complex neurosurgical procedures in a minimally invasive way.

The acting Health Minister should recall the promises made that day. Families were promised a 2018 start date, shorter hospital stays and no more travelling out of province for testing or surgeries. They were told this program could change their lives forever. Instead, it's yet another broken promise from this government.

Liam requires specific testing to determine if brain surgery is the right course of treatment for him, but he still must travel out of province for that test. Many Manitoban children are on the wait-list for surgeries that can't be done at home because the Province has not purchased the promised ROSA technology.

This month, this government announced an adult epilepsy monitoring expansion, but they still haven't kept the promises they made to children and their families four years ago. After four years of waiting and broken promises, Liam and Julie and families like theirs have waited long enough.

I demand that this government fulfill its promise to Manitoba children with epilepsy. Liam is still waiting for his life to change.

Dauphin 2021 Graduates

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): As we approach June, schools across the province are making final preparations for the conclusion of another year. Students are completing final assignments and exams while looking ahead to the fall as plans for their futures take shape. It is another year in which things look quite different, however today I speak encouragement to our youth and to those who have been supporting them all the way along.

Last year, schools and communities in my constituency of Dauphin were innovative in finding unique and safe ways to support and cheer on their graduates. Several communities held drive-in ceremonies, many had community parades, some put up lawn signs and others hung banners on main street to honour the achievements and hard work of our graduates. Extended newspaper tributes, live streams,

and recorded video messages were assembled. Communities came together in spirit to safely and collectively cheer on these young people, and I look forward to this year's graduation festivities with enthusiasm.

This has not been an easy year for many of our graduates. As they look to graduation, I encourage them to find ways to mark this 'occasion' and celebrate their successes and achievements. This is the marking of a milestone, and there is a bright future with many opportunities ahead.

Parents, teachers, friends and community members have done so much to support our graduates already. I encourage them to participate in this year's celebrations in any way they are able, and I wish all participants the very best. Let's all take time to join together in supporting and cheering on our graduating class of 2021.

Thank you.

Leftovers Foundation

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I am honoured to recognize Leftovers Foundation rescue food, and the immense contributions of the Winnipeg city lead coordinator, Brandy Bobier.

COVID-19 has emphasized food insecurity in Winnipeg but people like Brandy address it in a practical, productive way that deserves our appreciation and gratitude.

The foundation launched in Winnipeg on World Food Day on October 16th, 2020. Volunteers use a mobile app to transport food, otherwise destined for the landfill, from grocery stores and businesses to communities in need.

The foundation relies on our community, and an example of this is the weekly donation of 4,000 pounds of potatoes from Peak of the Market. Before the end of 2020, 16,000 pounds of food were redirected back into the community here in Winnipeg, which contributed to the almost 600,000 pounds collected across the country.

The foundation depends on donations from businesses, volunteers picking up and delivering food, and their partnership with Altoba Freight Systems, who help them achieve their monthly average of picking up 50,000 pounds of food.

On behalf of members here today, thank you to all the businesses and volunteers who make this work happen and a special thank you to Brandy for her commitments to Leftovers Foundation rescue food. I encourage all Winnipeggers to learn about the foundation and support them in addressing food insecurity here in our city.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Carman Area and Miami Area Foundations

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): Today I wish to recognize two very important and dedicated foundations within my constituency: the Carman Area Foundation, and the Miami area foundation.

The Carman Area Foundation has done tremendous work in supporting community projects and initiatives. This community foundation was established in 1998 and uses the income earned to make grants towards a wide range of charitable groups that benefit our local communities.

Some of the funds that the Carman Area Foundation have assisted include the Carman Memorial Hospital Fund, the Carman Collegiate youth philanthropy fund, the Carman golf and curling fund, RM of Grey, Roland community fund, Boyne library fund and many more. To date, the Carman Area Foundation has gifted over \$900,000 to the Town of Carman and surrounding communities.

The Miami area foundation is another foundation within my constituency that I would like to recognize for their immense contributions to our province and the community of Miami. They have established funds and awarded annual grants for the community of Miami since 2010.

The Miami area foundation has provided an avenue for people to leave a lasting legacy, and has gifted in excess of \$65,000. A few of their most recent grant recipients include the Miami railway museum, Miami Ag Society, Miami sports complex and the Miami cenotaph.

Thank you to the volunteers of both the Miami area foundation and the Carman Area Foundation, for all the work you do to support your local communities.

Thank you Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Deputy Speaker's Statement

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I have a statement for the House.

One of our pages is serving her last day at the Chamber today and I want to share some comments in—with the House.

Addison Franklin is a young Indigenous woman who will be graduating from the Murdoch MacKay Collegiate with advanced entry acceptance in the integrated education program at the University of Winnipeg. She hopes one day to teach First Nations reserves, to help give the children a chance to reach their full potential.

Addison says that, through being a page, she has found a passion for politics and hopes one day—be standing in the Chamber as an MLA, and I'm sure that's going to happen.

And Addison, all the best for—on behalf of all the members of this Chamber, I want to congratulate you and—on graduating and going on to bigger and better things. And I just want to say how well you did on doing all the votes. You did a very excellent job. Thank you.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Transfer of ICU Patients Out of Province Patient Safety Concerns While in Transport

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): As of yesterday, there were 18 patients who had been sent to Ontario from Manitoba ICUs, maybe more. Others are on their way to Saskatchewan.

Patients in ICU are some of the sickest of Manitobans, and they are there because they need life-saving health care, not blame. It is a great risk to transfer these patients. This must only be done as a last resort.

Manitobans who are seeing their loved ones moved across the country need assurance they are receiving the best possible care.

Will the Premier tell this House what the standards during transport are for patients being moved out of province so we can be sure they receive the care they deserve?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I thank the member for the question, and I think it's critical, during this pandemic, with, in particular, the spikes in cases and hospitalizations and the subsequent need for ICU services, to note that the expansion that we have made, which is approximately double what was there when we came to government, is not adequate given the number of cases, and that we have reached out and asked for help from our partners in the federation and others to assist us.

*(13:50)

And that, I think, will be a short-term need but, nonetheless, it is a need that needed to be addressed and we've addressed it as a government, always bearing in mind the need for maximum safety for all of our patients in every respect—not just COVID patients, but all of our patients in our hospitals and facilities.

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

Mr. Kinew: There are dozens of Manitobans who are being sent out of province. These are some of the sickest Manitobans. These patients need life-saving medical treatment.

Now, any time an ICU patient is moved or transported, that adds risk—a risk to the patient, a risk to their health. Now, we need to know that every precaution and every measure is taken to keep these patients safe.

The Premier should confirm for the House: are all the planes equipped for and are all the staff on board up to the task of caring for ICU patients?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable leader of the—I mean, the honourable First Minister, sorry.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you to my colleague for the question. It's an important one.

It should be noted that the safety of patients in transit is a concern now but was a concern always throughout our health-care system and that our health officials have always been conscious of the need to address this.

The previous government commissioned the Peachey report to evaluate the situation with respect to emergency and, in part, ICU services, and the recommendation was that excessive movement of patients was a consequence of inadequately equipped ICUs. We've addressed that prior to this pandemic and continue to during it.

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

Mr. Kinew: Transporting a patient who is ventilated always introduces risk.

Now, we used to have world-class medical transportation here in Manitoba, but they privatized Lifeflight and now that work is done by private companies. We know—we need to know that these services, when moving the sickest of patients, are up to the task.

The government has updated the public on ICU patients who've arrived at their destination in other provinces, but is the Premier keeping the public informed of all attempts to transport patients out of province?

Mr. Pallister: It's good the member raises this issue. It is important and it's imperative during this time, in particular with an unprecedented pandemic creating incredible pressures for our front-line workers, incredible pressures on all involved, including in patient transport.

His reference to privatization should have, of course, included the NDP's untendered contract to the STARS helicopter service as well, and I know he omits that.

But that being said, Dr. Peachey had noted that the necessity for transferring patients from emergency rooms to other emergency rooms because of inadequate equipment—and, in some cases, inadequate expertise in the facility—was putting Manitoba patients at high risk.

I would include in that, of course, people who had to be transported again and had to be ventilated when transported. This was a reality in the past, a sad reality that we've addressed as best we can since coming to government by doubling the number of fully equipped and trained and staffed ICUs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a different question.

Transfer of COVID-19 Patient Inquiry Into Patient's Death

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Now, we don't yet know how many Manitobans will be transported out of province from ICUs in Manitoba, but we do know that they are being transported out of province because they can't receive the care that they need here at home. Now, that's

because our health-care system is overwhelmed. It is in a crisis.

We know when crises hit we need to be open and honest with Manitobans. Manitobans deserve to know the truth and to know the facts.

Will the Premier confirm for the House if any patients have died while in transport to other provinces or as a result of an attempt to transport them out of province?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I appreciate the member referencing the need for frankness and truth. I haven't seen it evidenced by his willingness to address his own background, his own record, frankly and honestly.

That being said, I'm not aware of anyone who's passed away as a direct consequence of what the member has just referred to. I can only say to the member we certainly hope and pray that that is not the case.

And I can also say that the—one of the direct consequences of the federal support—which I will be able to give members additional detail on, I hope, tomorrow, as far as our asks for support in terms of a number of categories—is that we will hope to have less need as we move forward for—well, hope is important to have in this circumstance. It's important to hope, and I would say to the member he shouldn't dash that hope.

The fact is we hope not to be able—we hope to be able to say that we have not needed to transfer as many people or any people in the future. That will depend, of course, on vaccination rates. It will depend on the behaviour of people adhering to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable First Minister's time is up.

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

Mr. Kinew: Manitobans deserve to know the facts. Manitobans deserve to know what is happening in our health-care system right now. During the second wave, it took anonymous whistle-blowers to reveal the situation that was unfolding at the Maples Personal Care Home. That tragedy was completely preventable. It could've been addressed earlier.

We're in a similarly dire situation and Manitobans deserve to know the facts, what is going on in our health-care system right now.

Will the Premier confirm for this House that a patient with COVID-19 who was supposed to be transported out of province died after being sent to Ottawa, Ontario?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I won't confirm what the member is saying, and I think it's disappointing that he would choose to put something on the record like that. That's—if it's factual, fine. If it's not, then it's deplorable that he would do it.

All I can say is I've answered his question honestly, and I would like him to answer questions about his background and his willingness to run as a candidate in a provincial election without revealing his own personal record and to address those.

It's an opportunity for the member to come clean on these issues. They'll follow him around like a shadow. They'll follow him around if he doesn't confront them, and I'm only saying when the member raises issues like this and talks about openness and transparency, he needs to behave accordingly.

Now, I am. I have answered his question as best I can and I'll continue to answer all his questions, but I'd appreciate it if he answered some of the accountability questions, like why did he break public health orders and yet not apologize for it? I'd appreciate that.

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

Health-Care System Staff Whistle-Blower Protection

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, I've been called worse.

Our health-care system is essential. During this third wave, it's a matter of life and death for Manitobans. Yesterday, doctors told us six Manitobans died while waiting for cardiac surgery. That is an incredible loss, and we should recognize and admire the courage of the physicians for speaking out.

We know that whistle-blowers deserve protection.

Will the Premier guarantee that whistle-blowers in the health-care system will receive every whistle-blower protection that they deserve for speaking up about incidents like this?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, the member, when it was found by an independent arm's-length

adjudicator that one of his caucus members had harassed a civil servant, decided to organize a gang of his colleagues and say that they weren't supposed to be having the rules applied to them. That's what the member did.

So the member speaks—*[interjection]*—about protecting people. We've brought in legislation and actions to protect the people who work in our civil service to demonstrate the sincerity of our effort, and the member says he is above that and doesn't need to behave accordingly. All I can say is there's a contradiction there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We'll continue to protect our civil servants in every possible way, such as against attacks by the member opposite deploring the work of our vaccine team and our medical health leaders that he continually launches, and shame on him for doing that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a different question.

Transfer of COVID-19 Patient Inquiry Into Patient's Death

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): We're at 2 p.m., May 26th, 2021. CBC just published a story approximately nine minutes ago: Manitoban with COVID-19 dies after attempt at transport out of province for care.

* (14:00)

Did the Premier know about this during his previous answers?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The member asked me a question about a patient being transferred to Ottawa, a moment ago, and I answered the question exactly as he asked it, and accurately and honestly, and I will continue to do that as we move forward.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, let's review the question that was asked, verbatim: Will the Premier confirm for this House a patient with COVID-19 who was supposed to be transported out of province died after being sent to Ottawa, Ontario? Those were the words that—the question was just posed.

I'll share for the benefit of the Premier the details that are—have now been made public: a Manitoban with COVID-19 has died after an attempt was made to transport the patient out of province to receive care. Medically stable but critically ill patient was

identified for transport to Ontario, destabilized prior to takeoff earlier this week.

It provides more details on this, but it's clear that this was a person—a Manitoban just like us—who was in intensive-care unit, here in the province, and was sent to Ottawa, Ontario.

The question was framed in a way to reflect the facts as they have been reported.

Why did the Premier mislead the House earlier today in question period?

Mr. Pallister: Though the member has some expertise in misleading people, I will not address anything but the question he asked, and he asked a question specifically about a patient passing away as a consequence of being transferred to Ottawa. I have no awareness of any such case.

And so, to answer a hypothetical question like that in any way other than I have already done would be misleading, and I will not mislead this House.

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

Mr. Kinew: The information reported comes from a Shared Health statement. The Premier would have been aware. The Minister of Health would have been aware. Were the other members of Cabinet aware? I don't have any information to indicate that they were.

It's clear that the Premier misled the House today about a damning turning point in the pandemic fight. I'll let him reflect on that.

But the situation is this: a Manitoban who could have been kept stable in an intensive-care unit here in our province passed away because they were moved. They were moved because of the strain put on our health-care system. We've gone into great detail about the origins of the strain on our health-care system.

However, we need to know from the Premier right now: What will be done immediately to ensure that this never happens again?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member, in his preambles, is apparently unclear of the facts, and so it doesn't enable me to answer a specific question. It's, rather, a diatribe about the dangers of transport.

Transport is done all the time. Transport of patients is done in non-COVID-pandemic times. People are transported for health care from all over the province, from our northern communities—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: Transport is done all the time.

If the member has a specific question to ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker—*[interjection]* If the member—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —would choose not to rattle on from his seat now and rather would like to ask a—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —specific question, I would be happy to answer it.

I can only say—*[interjection]*—I can only say that these are perilous times, that patients are in ICUs, that our ICUs are overrun, that they are double in number from what they ever were under the previous government, that we are doing everything we can to care for our patients in the best possible way.

If the member has a specific question, I encourage him to ask it.

Transfer of ICU Patients Out of Province Patient Safety Concerns While in Transport

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the privatization of Lifeflight in Manitoba has left us with gaps in our health-care system.

We know that publicly owned and operated medical transportation provides life-saving care. Lifeflight was staffed by critical-care nurses and physicians. This government privatized that essential service.

With dozens of patients being moved out of province, we need to know that these patients are receiving the best possible health-care while they're in transportation.

So I ask the Minister of Health—the acting Minister of Health: Will he guarantee for this House that all patients being transported out of province will have the staff and equipment necessary to provide them life-saving medical care?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Acting Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): It was the result of an incident, I believe, during the flood, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the former NDP government decided to issue an untendered contract that—which ultimately led to the hiring of STARS, a very large private helicopter medical transport company.

That isn't a reflection on the services that STARS provide, and I think they provide excellent service at all times, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But it is the fact that it is a privately run company, a medical transport company, that the members opposite hired. So they're derogatory about a private medical company, but they hired them. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order. I'm standing.

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

MLA Asagwara: Manitobans deserve to know the facts, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It took anonymous social media posts to learn about the scale of the tragedy at Maples Personal Care Home. Now we're learning more about tragedies in our health-care system from officials from the acting Minister of Health's office.

You know, this shouldn't be covered up or hidden, and it appears as though that's what's happening on the other side of the House. That's wrong. Manitobans deserve the facts, and they deserve more from this government.

What does the minister intend to do to ensure that the tragedy we've been made aware of today never happens again to a Manitoban?

Mr. Goertzen: If I'm understanding correctly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member opposite is putting anonymous social media information as somehow some factual medical information, that the members opposite are taking social media tweets or Facebook posts or Instagram or wherever they're getting it from, and making some sort of medical diagnosis from that.

That is not only irresponsible, it's not fair to the family, and I would caution the members opposite to not get their medical advice or their information from anonymous social media accounts, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Union Station, on a final supplementary question.

MLA Asagwara: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen so much—too much—spin from this government. Instead of taking responsibility, they blame Manitobans. Instead of being open with Manitobans, they choose to hide the facts. And when they're faced with the truth, they blame the messenger; they attack the messenger.

Now, we're facing a serious crisis in our health-care system. Dozens of the sickest patients in Manitoba are being sent out of the province. The minister needs to step up and stop blaming others and take responsibility.

What is this government's plan to make sure every patient being transported out of Manitoba is safe?

Mr. Goertzen: It is not blaming others to advise the member to not take medical advice or information from anonymous social media accounts, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is just common sense to be cautious about that and to wait for the facts to come out.

When it comes to medical transfer, Mr. Deputy Speaker, throughout this entire pandemic, patients who have had COVID have been transferred—transported in the air. They've been transported by STARS when there's been emergency calls because they sometimes quickly destabilize in their home communities and they've been transported to the Health Sciences Centre. They've been transported from the North into Winnipeg.

Transporting COVID patients by air is not something new, Mr. Deputy Speaker, either in Manitoba or anywhere in Canada.

Springs Church Indoor Events Violation of Public Health Orders

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Manitobans have made tremendous sacrifices the third wave of this pandemic. That's why it is unconscionable Springs Church would elect to brazenly violate public health rules by holding an indoor event, maskless and with many more people than allowed by our health orders.

It's not a one-time event. Leadership of the church have doubled down on their supposed right to break public health orders with all manner of justification: it was a college, it's a movie production. But let us be clear: this event was in violation of the orders.

* (14:10)

Will the minister explain how this event was wrong and offer a clear condemnation of this event in the House today?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Acting Minister of Health and Seniors Care): As with all potential or suspected violations of the public-health orders, there can be allegations that are made.

I'll use the example of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew). There was an allegation made that the event he held was in violation of the

public health orders. I understand that there was an investigation. I understand that public health officials attended his office, knocked on the door, issued him either a citation or a warning because he'd violated the public health orders.

If the member opposite has any specific information, she can certainly lay a complaint and an investigation will be done, if it's not already being done, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Clearly, there's a difference of opinion on this matter within the PC caucus. The Minister responsible for Wellness took to social media stating, and I quote: I have read several posts stating that I was present at the event. To my knowledge, no evidence has been provided to substantiate this claim.

This illicit event was also streamed and watched from cars.

Did the Minister responsible for Wellness watch this ceremony or not? It is a simple yes or no question. And why has she and the PC caucus done nothing to address this clear breach by Springs Church?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Two quick points: the member falsely asserts no action's been taken. Understanding is, there are enforcement officials in charge of enforcing. We're not those officials, but we encourage enforcement officials to enforce. I think that's important.

Secondly, on the issue the member highlights a communiqué in part. She quotes it to create a false impression. The member was simply responding—the member for Southdale (Ms. Gordon) was simply responding to an allegation which was false, that she was in attendance at the grad.

Now, members should not attack one another for trying to defend themselves when false allegations are made nor defend one another when true accusations are made, such as those against the leader of that party, who belittled the health orders and violated them clearly.

So if the members on that side are anything—
[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —but a tag-along gang, there's probably a lot of division on their side about what should be done to remedy that disrespect. [interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: A Manitoban died today that we just found out about, and that is the disgraceful response and so-called leadership from the Premier of Manitoba. It's just despicable, Deputy Speaker.

The former Health minister says anti-maskers make good points, the Deputy Premier enjoys the company of—with anti-vaxxers, playing up their right to put us all at risk—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —and now the Minister of Wellness knew about this event but has not taken clear steps to put down clear misrepresentations of the activities at Springs Church.

There's a reason Manitoba is in the catastrophe that it's in, and it is simply because of this government and every single member of that Cabinet. Do the right thing—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Pallister: We have the strongest health measures in the country. It doesn't matter, if people won't abide by them. The Leader of the Opposition refused to abide by them. [interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: His colleagues say nothing about it. They have no concerns, apparently, about that. [interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: We also have the strongest enforcement and ticketing regime in the country of Canada, Mr. Speaker. [interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The clock is ticking here.

Steinbach Regional Secondary School COVID-19 Vaccination Directive to Staff

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Steinbach Regional Secondary school has asked teachers to refrain from conversation or debate about COVID-19 vaccination. An email has been sent from school administration, and I quote: Please note that these are controversial topics in classrooms, with families. Do not enter into these conversations or debates. End quote.

This is absolutely one hundred per cent incorrect, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We need everyone educating the public about vaccinations. Please, for all of us, get informed about the vaccine.

Will the Minister of Education take immediate action to ensure this directive is overturned?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): We, as a government, have been very clear that vaccination is certainly our way out of this pandemic. We are encouraging Manitobans to become vaccinated when that opportunity presents itself.

Today, we have over 60 per cent of our Manitobans who are 18 and over vaccinated. For those 12 and over, it's over 56 per cent. Clearly, we're over the half-way mark, but I will say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a long way to go.

We have been educating and trying to educate Manitobans that—of the importance of vaccination. We're asking and encouraging all Manitobans 12 and over to roll up their sleeves and get vaccinated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Transcona, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altomare: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need active leadership on this file. We can't let this sit. Our kids, our future in this province certainly relies on it.

And, you know, our kids really need some positive direction from the department regarding this issue. School administration of 1,700 students that forbids teachers to talk about life-saving vaccines that will help bring this horrible pandemic to an end is absolutely necessary—or, unnecessary, sorry, and it's a shadow what's coming, as this government eviscerates our school system through Bill 64.

Will the minister intervene today and for the future by ensuring so-called sensitive content like vaccines and vaccinations are part of classroom dialogue?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Cullen: I will table for the House and for opposition members a memo from Dr. Joss Reimer, medical lead, the vaccine 'implementation' task force.

This was a document dated May 14th that was sent out through school divisions to parents, guardians, and caregivers. It clearly outlines the safety around vaccination for those aged 12 and up. The information is there, in terms of where parents and caregivers can reach out, where students can reach

out. It goes through the respective consent forms and how that process unfolds. It talks about the contact numbers for vaccination.

Again, madam—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I encourage all Manitobans 12 and over to get vaccinated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Transcona, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Altomare: The Minister of Education must use every tool available to ensure science-based factual information is provided about vaccines and that it is provided to students. Children need the facts about their effectiveness and their safety. That's a service to them and a service to the public.

Will the minister intervene and ensure that all school divisions and all schools, including Steinbach, have a plan in place to educate and inform students about COVID-19 vaccination, and will he do that today?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Acting Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was pleased to help open the supersite in Steinbach a couple of weeks ago. I'm glad to see that appointments are filling up.

My mom has struggled with COVID. My uncle passed away from COVID. There are many people in the community who have suffered from it. My wife got the vaccine; I've received the vaccine; my son, who is 14 years old, was very enthusiastic and demanding that he receive the vaccine, and received it a week ago.

Many in the community have struggled. I'm encouraging all of those within the community that I live in—Steinbach—and beyond to protect themselves, protect their loved ones, protect their community and get the vaccine.

MPI Agreement with Collision Shops Negotiation Concerns

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): In March, with no warning, MPI cancelled its agreement with over 230 Manitoba collision shops. They rejected a negotiated settlement and chose strong-arm tactics and misleading statements instead.

If MPI can't reach a deal as of June 13th, hundreds of Manitoba businesses and thousands of workers could be out of work, and Manitobans will have no place to get their cars fixed because shops won't be able to do MPI work.

MPI's offer is brutally one-sided. If collision shops take it, many will go under, and MPI—a highly profitable government monopoly—is abusing its monopoly power.

All they're asking is for MPI to go back to the negotiating table and bargain in good faith for a fair deal.

Will the Premier or minister ensure that happens, or will Manitobans wake up on June 14th with nowhere to get their car fixed?

* (14:20)

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, what we want to encourage is an understanding that the more vaccines we have in Manitoba, the better. And I think that getting vaccines in arms is one of the keys to getting us through this very dangerous time for all of us.

And so I wanted to emphasize that we have been reaching out and looking for all kinds of options, exploring many, many options to try to get more vaccines into our province. One of the them is to reach out to the United States. We've implored Joe Biden to—President Biden to allow the United States border states to take their surplus vaccines, get them up into Canadian provinces.

Yesterday, the Opposition Leader took the position the United States has done enough. We don't agree. Six per cent—6 per cent of our vaccinations have—vaccines have come from the United States, our largest trading partner, our most important—we to them, as well—the largest trading partner.

Six per cent is not adequate. There is no reason not to look for getting more vaccines from the United States into Canadian arms. We'll continue to pursue that option.

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

Mr. Lamont: Back to my question on MPI.

The crisis was created entirely by MPI's decision to bargain in bad faith, and let's be clear, because MPI keeps painting its partners as the bad actors: Saskatchewan collision-repair shops were paid up to 24 per cent more, their rates are sometimes 27 per cent lower, and they pay out larger rebates to citizens.

MPI's current offer is outrageous. It literally says that anyone can terminate its contract, quote, for any reason whatsoever. End quote.

MPI is not asking for a deal; they're asking for a blank cheque. It's a deal so bad, it could shut down virtually every collision shop in rural Manitoba as well as many in Winnipeg. We want those shops to be open, working and paying people good wages.

Does the Premier agree, and will he tell the board at MPI to smarten up and start negotiating?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member's caught in contradiction. He's earlier criticized me for actually not agreeing with the board of Manitoba Hydro to give \$70 million to David Chartrand; he joined with the NDP on that criticism. So I'm not going to double down on the mistake the member claims I've made.

We'll continue to stand up for ratepayers, whether it's not allowing \$70 million to go to a guy so he won't sue us or interfering in a negotiation that's under way at MPI. But I would remind all Manitobans: If you don't pay your fines—your COVID fines—you won't be driving your vehicle and you won't have to worry about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), on a final supplementary question. *[interjection]*

Oh, the honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a final supplementary question.

Plan for the Reopening of Schools Request for Early Parental Notification

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): This past year, schools, parents and students have demonstrated their ability to be extremely adaptable, but this does not give the government the right to throw last-minute decisions upon those who are affected by schools, whether they remain closed or reopen.

Teachers, EAs and school administrators need to be able to plan accordingly and prepare safety measures. Parents need to be able to plan additional child care and perhaps time off work or being able to go back into work. And students have the right to know where they are going to be next week.

Will the minister tell Manitobans today if schools will be reopened next week or if they will remain virtual until the summer break?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): Certainly, we have taken the stance that we'd like to see as many students as safely as possible in schools getting face-to-face education; that's where they learn best. We recognize we've—working through this pandemic—so we have about half of our schools

throughout Manitoba in remote learning and certainly we're monitoring the situation very closely.

I look forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Dr. Roussin will be out tomorrow. We'll be making announcements in terms of school going forward for next Monday.

Youth and Family Mental Health Services Additional Program Supports

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the mental health and wellness of Manitobans of all ages and backgrounds. Our children and youth are facing the added challenge of remote learning and being away from their friends.

Can the Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery please share with the House how our government is ensuring our children and youth have access to services they need to support their mental health and wellness during this time?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery): I thank the member for Dawson Trail for his question.

Our government is investing an additional \$185,000 in the NorWest hub to provide counselling support and physically distanced services to support 50 to 100 new clients, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as well as \$60,000 to expand the Families and Schools Together program, which is offered virtually throughout the summer months to help mediate the mental health implications of social isolation and loneliness.

These investments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in mental health and wellness supports will ensure our children and youth have access to the supports they need to cope with the effects of this ongoing pandemic.

Transfer of COVID-19 Patient Inquiry Into Patient's Death

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Mr. Deputy Speaker, four questions later, the minister and the Premier are still denying the very facts that are in front of them.

Wherever the facts came from—and it turns out they're true—minutes before the Premier answered the question about whether a patient died in transport, CBC posted a story that said they did.

Will the minister finally confirm for this House that a patient with COVID-19 died while in transport to Ontario?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Acting Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Mr. Deputy Speaker, certainly that is not information that has been provided in that way.

I would say, however, that during this pandemic, no matter how individuals have died from COVID, whether they were in personal-care homes, whether they died at home—and that has happened as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker—whether they've died in hospital, it is tragic, under this pandemic, that this deadly, deadly disease has taken so many Manitobans.

And, of course, every province has gone through a difficult third wave. Our province is as well now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we will emerge from this third wave.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wasyliv: You know, it takes whistle-blowers—anonymous posts by concerned citizens—to reveal the government's crisis that they have created. They still haven't learned after the tragedies during the second wave.

Staffing remains an issue. We don't have the resources we need to care for Manitobans here, so we have to transport them out of province.

Why won't this minister be forthcoming and admit to the House that a patient died while in transport?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): We've increased ICU staffing tremendously. We've doubled the number of ICU beds.

But the member speaks about whistle-blowing. The member and his caucus have been part of whistle-blowing by falsely accusing someone in the past. They falsely accused a senior civil servant of wrongdoing.

They did it repeatedly. *[interjection]* They did it repeatedly. They did not have facts, they simply launched false attacks, never thinking for a second about the family of—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —that civil servant, never thinking about that person's—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —mother.

The member from St. Johns speaks about compassion, not a thought in her mind to the children of a chip—of a civil servant—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —falsely accused.

What is important in these instances is to get the facts. What is important is to have them. What is important is to not make false assertions based on rumour without researching.

What the members opposite did was deplorable. They—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —pushed a civil servant out of the civil service with repeated false accusations they knew to be untrue, and repeating such false accusations may be what they're doing now—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The First Minister's time is up.

And oral question period has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do have a ruling for the House. [*interjection*] Order. Order.

Following oral question period on May 10, 2021, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Ms. Fontaine) raised the matter of privilege regarding the government's failure to table reports in the House, in contravention of statutory tabling provisions. In raising the matter, the member alleged that the government failed to table reports required by The Fatality Inquiries Act, impeded her ability to do her job as an MLA and to hold the government accountable. She concluded her remarks by the—by moving the House censure the minister and this government for their failure to respect the laws of this Province and to put forward information to the Assembly required by statute, and to require the government to publish all reports of the Chief Medical Examiner no later than by May 15th, 2021.

* (14:30)

The honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) and the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) also spoke to the matter of privilege before I took it under advisement. I thank the members for their advice to the Chair.

The members know there are two conditions that must be satisfied in order for a matter of raised to rule an order as a prima facie case of privilege: (1) was the

issue raised at the earliest available opportunity; and (2) was sufficient evidence provided to support the member's claim that their privileges, or the privileges of the House, were breached.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader asserted that she was raising this issue on the earliest opportunity, stating that she required time to research the relevant facts from the Legislative Library, only received them after the House started for the day. Regarding this assertion, I must point out that the member referenced that the most recent report in question here had been tabled on March 2020, and that the report of the year 2017—this suggests that the member could have raised the matter months, if not years, before she did. Therefore, I would rule that the member did not meet the test of timeliness at—on this matter.

Regarding the question of whether the evidence provided sufficiently demonstrated a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred, the third edition House of Commons Procedure and Practice provides some guidance: the footnote from page 443 of the volume described on April 1993 ruling made by the house common—the House of Commons Speaker John Fraser. This ruling involved a situation where the then federal government failed to table a document in a timely manner as required by statute. In ruling on the matter of privilege, Speaker Fraser noted that the members cannot function if they do not have access to the material that they need to do their work. In order to allow further discussion of the issue between government and opposition, he found that there was a prima facie case of privilege.

When the current Manitoba Speaker ruled on similar matter on March 8th, 2021, she referenced consultations of procedure staff of the House of Commons. Those consultations confirmed that the issue of timely tabling of reports and documents of compliance with statutory provisions continues to be relevant and that the prima facie matter of privilege could be found if it was demonstrated that there was a failure to table such materials as required by law.

In order to determine whether the prima facie case of privilege exists, it is necessary to confirm that statutory tabling requirements referenced, and also verify whether the reports were or were not tabled within a legal mandated period. In raising the manner of—the honourable Official Opposition House Leader noted that three reports were not tabled in a timely manner and accordance to the statutory provisions. Specifically, she referenced that: (1) section 41(1),

that The Fatality Inquiries Act states that, on or before March 31st each year, the Chief Medical Examiner shall submit a written report to the minister regarding the deaths of which occurred during the year of the residents in custodial facilities, psychiatric facilities or developmental centres; and (2) as May 10th, 2021, no such report had been tabled in the House since March 19th, 2020, when the report for the year 2017 was tabled.

I can confirm that the House—that the member has—correct on both of these points. I can also confirm that on May 17th, 2021, the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen) tabled the 2018, 2019 and 2020 reports required by section 43(1) of The Fatality Inquiries Act. While I appreciate the minister providing these reports to the House, the fact that they were tabled a week after the honourable Opposition House Leader raised this matter in no way negates her original points.

In speaking of the matter of privilege, the honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) noted that over the last year, as the Province responded to the COVID-19 crisis, many civil servants have been called upon to do 'exinory' things and work on 'extranordinary' hours. According, he asked that the members of the Assembly review the matter in this context. I am certainly sympathetic of the challenges that we all faced this year as a society due to COVID-19 pandemic, the provincial government included. However, the Speaker does not have authority to override the statutory requirement for the tabling of these reports, even if there may be valid in-'extenuating' circumstances that caused delay in the preparations and tabling of the reports.

Given that the reports in question were not tabled in accordance with statutory requirements, and due to the precedents of the 1993 ruling by the House of Commons Speaker Fraser, and on March 8, 2021 ruling of the current Manitoba Speaker, a prima facie case of privilege could not be—could have been established in this case.

However, in—the issue of timeliness must be reconsidered in this matter. Granted, the requirement of timeliness does not necessarily supersede the requirement of evidence. In this case, however, the Official Opposition House Leader (Ms. Fontaine) could have raised this matter any time after March 31, 2019. Due to the delay of over two years, I am obliged to rule that the prima facie case of privilege has not

been established, as the matter was certainly not raised in a timely manner.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we'll go on to petitions.

PETITIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara)? No? The honourable member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie)? The honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard)?

Menstrual Product Availability

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Many individuals have faced challenges in obtaining and affording period necessities.

In Manitoba, women, non-binary individuals and trans people have been denied free access to essential period necessities, such as pads, tampons, menstrual cups and reusable options.

The lack of free access to period items results in the perpetuation of poverty and deprives individuals of reasonable access to a basic health necessity.

This petition aims to ensure that these items are free to access in public schools and within Manitoba's health-care system, and that no individual who requests them can be denied on the basis of gender or sex identity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to implement free access to period necessities within public schools and Manitoba's health-care system.

To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to acknowledge the prevalence of people within Manitoba who are unable to afford essential period items.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In accordance with rule 30–133(6), when petitions are read they have been deemed to be received by the House.

Right to Repair

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

(6) In addition, the right to repair ensures manufacturers replace electronic products at no cost or refund the amount paid by the consumer to purchase the electronic product when they refuse or they're unable to provide manuals or replacement parts.

* (14:40)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) have a—no?

So any other petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Mr. Deputy Speaker, could you please canvass the House for leave to alter the Estimates sequence permanently so that in the Chamber section of the department—the Chamber section, the Department of Health and Seniors Care, will be moved down in the sequence, appearing after Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave to alter the Estimates sequence permanently so that the Chamber section of Department of Health and Seniors Care will be now moved down to the—in sequence, appearing after the Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration? Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Leave has been granted.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Could you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We'll now have the House resolve into the Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:20)

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

Before we begin, I have a leave request for this section of the Committee of Supply. Our long-standing practice is for the opposition to sit at the committee table to the right hand of the Chairperson. Because the minister is participating virtually this afternoon, I am asking if there is leave of the committee to waive this practice. This would make it much easier for the members of the opposition to see the screens that are situated in the room.

Is it the will of the the committee? *[Agreed]*

This section of Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Executive Council. As previously announced, as there is only one resolution, the discussion will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thanks for bringing forward that leave request again. Thanks in advance to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and to his staff for participating in the committee hearing today.

I wanted to begin by asking about the Manitoban who passed away after an attempt was made to transport them out of province from an ICU here in Manitoba.

I would like to begin by asking, when did the Premier learn of this incident?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Just prior to leaving my office to go to question period, and I asked staff to make sure they talked to the Health Minister to get me any information that might verify whether this was fact or rumour.

Mr. Kinew: And, you know, what can the Premier share with us that he's aware of regarding this incident?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I think I learned more from the member's preamble than I had to that point, but then again, I'm not entirely sure if that's—that preamble was based on fact or it was based—I know, later on, the member asked some questions about a CBC story.

I don't know at this point, so I don't want speak on the basis of speculation. I would rather get the facts. If a tragedy has happened here, I'm—I think we're all despondent about it. And I'd be very interested in getting the facts before I say too much more, and I hope the Opposition Leader would understand the logic of that.

Mr. Kinew: Can the Premier undertake to provide us with an update when he has more information on that incident?

Mr. Pallister: I'd be happy to do that. I had a brief, brief exchange with the Health Minister, and he's assured me that his officials are looking into this. And so I'd be happy to undertake to get information to the Opposition Leader and to all members.

This is—we're in the midst of dealing with human tragedy of an epic proportion here, and we want to make sure that we're communicating sensitively to the

families involved and to all individuals involved at every opportunity. But I would share that information as soon as it's expeditious to get it and where it's appropriate, in conjunction, obviously, with the realities of the family being informed.

I'm not sure of the timing of this. I don't really know much other than—I've now skimmed the CBC story. I think there's a—Ian Froese, I think, was the journalist who posted it. But beyond that, I—before I comment further, I'd want to know the facts of the case and have them verified.

* (15:30)

Mr. Kinew: I just want to acknowledge the answer that the Premier provided there and certainly do look forward to being able to find out more information. It is a very serious incident, we know that much, and so, certainly, additional information to help us understand what can be done to prevent a similar situation, I think, is very, very important.

So this person was in the process of potentially being transferred out of province before they were destabilized. So, to me, that brings to the forefront of my thinking the standard of care that is provided to these patients who are transported out of province. The last update I saw: 18 Manitobans. That number may have changed, I acknowledge, because I didn't have a chance to see the public health update prior to question period.

And so I just wanted to ask about the standard of care provided to those patients while they are in transport. Can the Premier tell us what that standard of care is? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable First Minister, I had not recognized you yet and I wasn't sure—I didn't see if your hand had gone up.

So you've been speaking for the—the honourable First Minister.

Mr. Pallister: I would want to get the facts before I speak to anything here. I don't want to speculate. This allegedly involves the passing of a Manitoba citizen. That would concern all of us. I want to get the facts.

And so, as far as—I was just saying earlier, there—and I'm sorry I spoke out of order, there, Mr. Chair—but just to clarify for the member, the Health Minister, I believe, is in Estimates right now would be equipped, I think, to get his staff to assist in getting any information on the transport question he just asked more readily than I can here. So just suggest,

I'm sure the Health Minister would be able to assist on that one and get him that information.

Mr. Kinew: Okay, so I'll take that answer for, I guess, what it is and we'll ask something similar in the Health Estimates when we have an opportunity to do so.

What is the Premier going to do now to ensure that something like this doesn't happen again?

Mr. Pallister: So, in respect of—I'm just waiting for the detailed information on some of the assets that Ottawa agreed to provide.

The focus, I think, of the ask from public health through me to the Prime Minister was that these additional resources would be key to assisting us in—and I won't say eliminating. I can't say that because I don't know. No one knows where the case numbers and hospitalization numbers and ICU numbers are going to go at this point. We all hope that it's to flatten down the curve.

But there's a lag, as the member well knows, on ICU need that tracks out at—after on the graph beyond the hospitalization numbers. We're seeing more and more people contracting COVID at younger ages with these variants.

And so the ICU—and again, I don't pretend to be a medical expert. I count on our medical people to give advice to us and we act on it. But our medical guys—men and women are telling us that we can expect a more sustained need for ICUs. That's why we've gone to doubling the ICU capacity; added staff; added training programs; redeployed, of course, some other areas, which does have a consequence, as the member knows.

It was alluded to yesterday by other physicians who have seen surgeries delayed, treatments delayed beyond the normal delay—if there is such a thing as a normal delay. It seems our delays have become sort of acceptable in this country over the last 25 years.

We've seen delays double, triple in many categories. We're all in—we're all experiencing this gradually so it's like we don't notice sometimes, I think. Delays in service accessibility in Canada have grown significantly over the last number of years, in particular over the last five or six years, and now with the pandemic that continues.

So on—back to the ask of Ottawa, which I'm awaiting the details but I will share with committee members in progress. I committed, I think yesterday's meeting, to share with you, as those commitments by Ottawa are kept, to give you a progress report, and I

look forward to doing that. But my understanding from health officials was that this would reduce the need for out-of-province transfers to occur because we'd be beefing up the resources we have within our province.

We have, I'm told, adequate space, but it's the staffing-related issues. We've got challenges throughout our HR category, if I can put it that way, not just in health but in other areas as well, with increased illness—not, I'm pleased to report, with increased absence. You know, people aren't taking more time off, certainly not in the health field. They're working. They're dedicated people. They deserve our respect and our admiration. But, most certainly, they would like some help.

And so I commit to the member and share with him and our colleagues the additional information, much as somebody asked for the progress report, later on as soon as I have it here.

I hope that addresses the member was asking.

Mr. Kinew: I acknowledge the answer that was provided there, and certainly look forward to additional information as it comes in.

You know, I think there's a few dimensions here. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) has talked about the staffing issues. Some of that is going to be coming from Ottawa and—well, via Ottawa, I guess, is more accurate to say—and that that will help to provide more spaces to treat Manitoba ICU patients.

We've already previously spoken to, in this committee today, to some of the standards of care around transportation, so we'll endeavour to get some answers, perhaps at the Health committee or in other venues about that, but I also wonder whether that triage protocol that has been spoken about isn't relevant in this situation.

And so will the Premier be examining those standards to guide these decisions about who it is safe to transport and potentially who it's not safe to transport, as part of the follow-up on this incident?

Mr. Pallister: Issues around transport is very important. This is a unique situation. I'm not sure if it's totally unique. I don't have the historical knowledge going back decades in respect of—despite my age—going back decades in respect of transport issues around critically ill patients, but I'm sure that we are in a situation where this is a—at least—modern-day high. This is why we asked for resources from Ottawa,

a bolster, and I—again, I await the detailed numbers there. Staff's attempting to get those for me right now.

But we acted well in advance of this with this. The member knows, we got a call to retired RNs, identifying nurses that have critical-care experience, redeploying—redeployed over 50 nurses from different service areas in our health-care system to ICUs, the critical-care nurse orientation program that we started last year. We've had 130 nurses take that orientation program so that we were anticipating on moving nurses into those capabilities well in advance.

* (15:40)

That started—I emphasize—that was over a year ago. That's not to be confused with the accelerated critical-care nurse orientation program. That's a different program, and there's 77 nurses on that one.

So between those two, over 200 nurses that received additional training, additional skills to allow them to get into the service area that we're now seeing is, over the last several weeks, posing incredible demands on our ICUs and on the staff therein.

On the—and then the further program we introduced just two weeks ago is the ICU orientation program that we just reopened for—have 104 nurses that just have completed or are in that program as we speak. So, again, you know, when you add it up, you're talking about 300 nurses that will be equipped to handle ICU tasks, which either were rusty because they had retired or have moved into that area from other areas of service—of nursing service.

In terms of the skill mix and so on, I can't—if we had Lanette Siragusa here, she'd be able to give a more detailed, capable, professional answer to the member, but I understand they're using skill-mix teams to assist—and I'm probably using the wrong terminologies—but actually working in other professionals with pharmaceutical expertise, qualified pharmacists; in addition, physiotherapists into the mix to give counsel and to work with patients as part of a care—of a team of caregivers.

So, you know, we have added significant—as the member knows, we've added—I think I mentioned this briefly yesterday—added really significant space for ICUs. Of course, it's the staffing that's the key. Not much good, as Dr. Peachey said in his report, not really that good to have poorly equipped ERs with poorly equipped ICUs where people get moved out of them after they get checked into the hospital. That was what was happening previously—no fault of the Opposition Leader, but certainly of the previous NDP

administration. After 16 years, that was a dramatic oversight on their part.

So that fact is we began that revamping and that cleanup immediately upon coming to government. The fact is that there were actually beds that weren't beds but—because they didn't have staff. So saying you have, as I noted—the member saying the beds were down. Not true, unless you count a bed without equipment and staff as a bed. ICU beds weren't available because they weren't fully staffed and equipped under the previous administration.

So, baseline, we have more than doubled the number of ICU beds during this pandemic but we've also added beds prior to that time. It's important to note that. Added staff, critical-care orientation training, nurse hires—as the member knows, significant to the casual pool—added 230 nurses as of May the 17th, so just a week ago.

So, there's approximately, now, in the casual pool, over 750 nurses, so bolstered that staff. It's good we did. Thank goodness this pandemic didn't hit in 2016, because these preparatory actions wouldn't have been taken and we would be in an extreme period of vulnerability. We are anyway, but it's not nearly as bad as it would have been.

Mr. Kinew: So the question was about the triage protocol and whether that will be—I don't want to say reviewed because, you know, we've never heard confirmation that triage protocol has been developed—but will the need for one be examined in light of this incident? Triage protocol, I guess, would help guide decisions in terms of who could be transported, who shouldn't be, different levels of care provided to them and so on.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) re-examine that policy and the potential need for one in light of the current incident?

Mr. Pallister: Any aspects of doctors' decision-making processes can be directed to the Health Minister.

I just wanted to give the member—is this the status right now? *[interjection]* A federal—I undertook to give the member an update—and members of committee—on the federal supports. Just receiving that. I'll just share with the member the ask, and then I'll go to where everything is at.

So the first ask—and this was relayed, officials had been in discussion—the member had asked about timing and so on. The formal ask from me as Premier

to the Prime Minister happened at—last Thursday in the afternoon after question period, I believe. But the officials had been in dialogue prior to that time for a few days, a week.

And so this was the ask: human resources for critical care. We asked for 50 trained critical-care nurses, up to 20 respiratory therapists, and if they were not available, as a fallback, anesthesiologists and/or clinical assistants that could work on the airways, breathing tasks in the ICUs.

So the first point being the HR ask, I would note for the members of this committee that for four years in Estimates, I asked questions, not necessarily like this, but a variety of questions and got no answers from the previous NDP administration.

So I hope, for those who don't have the historical background to understand this, that they appreciate that the approach that I've taken with the Opposition Leader, throughout our time together, working together, is to never to—if I can't get the answer to him right away, I always endeavour to get the background for him and get back to him. I hope he agrees. And I do make that point because that was not the collegial approach that was taken by the previous NDP administration—ever.

In respect of equipment, we wanted to access from the Public Health Agency of Canada's stockpile—their strategic stockpile—equipment. And this gets into technical equipment; I can't tell the members much about it except to say that it involves some 'centromedic' and cardio health equipment and that you would like more ECMO. I don't know what the acronym stands for; again, ECMO: E-C-M-O. You can find out, I'll get back to the member on what the acronym means.

In terms of public health supports, in addition, it would be helpful—I communicated to the Prime Minister it would be helpful to have one to two epis for a minimum of three months. Depending on how COVID case counts continue in a number of areas, local deployments and/or added central support would be of great assistance to balance downtime for our existing staff, so we don't—we're very concerned about the stress that's being put on our existing staff.

We also have to make this point—and have made this point repeatedly to the Prime Minister—in specific reference to health care, Canada Health Transfer, and in specific reference to the need for planning in respect of vaccine availability in Canada, that we need to think longer term as well. We're all

caught up in the present right now for understandable reasons, but the reality is that COVID could be with us for a long time, and for example, right now, I and other premiers are very concerned that we don't seem to have a plan on vaccine procurement going forward beyond this current pandemic.

For example, we don't have a strategy for how we're going to get boosters. Provinces always looked after, you know, flu shots and so on, as the members all know; it was never the federal government. Now we've got the federal government not allowing us to actually procure vaccines, so the provinces are—the federal government is in front of the provinces, the provinces aren't able to get orders from vaccine suppliers because the federal government has blocked our way. So how is that going to help us when it comes to booster shots going later in the year? We need to get clarification on that.

So the Prime Minister understands this to be an issue as well. This isn't a partisan shot. It's a reality that we have to address. We need to plan going forward for booster shots. We need to plan for additional domestic procurement to be enhanced. We're getting reports about vaccines not being available from Moderna in the coming weeks that were planned for; we're talking about—and we can't rely on offshore suppliers, we've seen that time and time again during this pandemic. So we need to move forward.

Got a couple other asks, but I see the Chairman is waving at me so I'll stop there, just—and I'll give the members an update on what's come so far in a second so they have that awareness—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable First Minister's time has expired.

* (15:50)

Mr. Kinew: So you know, I expect the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) probably going to continue on with some of those follow-up points that he was going on, but I would go ahead and pose my next question and I'll probably just pose it a few times if necessary.

So we know that prior to the publication of the incident today, that the government had been providing some updates on when people were moved out of province to—from an ICU here to an ICU in a different location. Again, we've heard about predominantly Ontario locations, first Thunder Bay and then additional ones—North Bay, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Ottawa, Windsor, et cetera, some talk

about potentially Saskatchewan being added to that list in the future.

So today, unfortunately and very tragically, we're hearing about an attempt—not the actual transportation of somebody to an ICU but the attempt to transport somebody to an ICU out of province.

So will the Premier commit that the government will update the public on other such attempts so that we can have a clear picture of what is going on with health care as we deal with this third wave?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, I'll just—I'll say to the member that I understand there are procedures and, you know, our standard procedures that are followed in the case of fatality of anyone involved in our health-care system. It involves certain procedures that must be followed, I think, out of respect, obviously, for the immediate family, the notification issues and so on and there's a protocol.

I don't have it here, but I believe it would be written down somewhere and I would undertake for the member—I'll see if I can track it down for him and he can review that, and then if he has any suggestions on how that can be improved or modified in some way, that'd be good.

I want to say to him, though: pretty harsh in question period today. I'm trying to answer his questions as best I can as he phrases them and I think when he reviews Hansard, he might on reflection recognize that I answer them honestly.

And so the accusations that he launched into, I understand, come from being angry and frustrated, as we all are, but I don't think it's justified. The member raised an issue today. I attempted to address him as best with the information I had about somebody dying, and that's a pretty important thing.

So I just want the member to know that I—and I hope he would agree—I've been—I try to always be forthright in responding to him in terms of facts and not evaded them, and I would never do that, and I hope the member would understand that.

So on the issue of the public health supports, I just say we did also—I think I mentioned this briefly yesterday but we did ask for additional health from StatsCan on the case and contact management issue—mentioned, specifically, 50 personnel if we could get them.

That represents over and above what we have—I'm going to go approximately here—I think about 5 per cent addition to what we have involved now

in Manitoba in contact tracing. So it's not big, but it's not small. But it is important, because the case management—the contact tracing is a really important aspect of how we keep a handle on COVID, and the contact information is, as I had referenced yesterday, it's critical to get it. It is critical that people share it because if they're out there associating with others in violation to health orders they need to share the information so we can help those other people to get tested quickly, not delay that can lead to an escalation in number of cases.

So the public health nurse support: we had asked for, potentially, alternate isolation accommodation personnel. This one's big. We've got people, folks living in environments in Manitoba, as are people living all across the country in environments, where once they're told to isolate, they can't. It's very, very difficult for them because they're living in close quarters or they're living in a small accommodation with other people in the hallway and are all around them.

So we've established a program of alternate accommodations for helping people to isolate. To support that second site, we had hoped to get some additional personnel to assist us with that as well because we hoped we had—well, anyways. We can get more detail on that one, too, if the member's interested.

Just to give you the status on the—where we're at. It appears discussions are still in progress on the 12 ICU nurses. We think we'll have 12 ICU nurses mobilized over this week, the week we're in. So I'll give update as soon as I can confirm. In fact, I can do it in question period tomorrow. If I can get the data, I'll share it with all members because I think this critical.

None of us wants to see Manitobans have to be transported out, and these asks being identified—and I want to say a special thank you to the federal government for accommodating this. I want to say to our regional minister, Jim Carr, thank you very much for your support and efforts on this; these are much appreciated.

Number of ICU nurses can increase—the ask could increase depending on how things look in other provinces. As the curve is bending down in other provinces, we may be able to also obtain the support of other qualified ICU nurses from our partners in the Confederation. That's how families should work, and we'd be perfectly willing to help others if the shoe was on the other foot, so I don't feel bad asking for help

from Saskatchewan or Ontario for any number of issues, and that's one of them.

Advance-care paramedics, we don't know yet. On the StatsCan staff, we believe that has been confirmed but I am not sure when they will start doing contact tracing, so I'll attempt to get a detail on that. We got three ECMO machines—and, again, I apologize to members of the committee for not knowing what ECMO means—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable First Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Kinew: You know, I do note what the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) saying, and we'll look forward to the update in question period.

I just wanted to pick up just a small detail in his answer there. He mentioned the 5 per cent increase in contact tracing, and, you know, I think I was—I just totally missed the exact number that was going on there. So could the Premier (Mr. Pallister) what—just walk me through what's the number of contact tracers that has been requested and then what is the total number here in Manitoba, if he could just provide that answer just because I caught the 5 per cent figure; I didn't catch the other figure in terms of that explanation.

So if the Premier could just walk the committee through those numbers in terms of the request—how many were requested additional, and then that goes on top of a number of how many contact tracers.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, happy to provide that.

And I was wrong. I said—I think I said 4 per cent. I think it's closer to 6.

Eight hundred and forty-seven is the number of agents we have currently working on contact traces through StatsCan, Red Cross, 24-7 Intouch and our provincial recruitment deployment team. So you got 847. We asked for 50, so you can do the math; that would get us up to around 900, so 50 of 900, there you go, closer to 6 per cent—5.7, whatever.

In addition, I have the answer to the question you've all been wanting to ask: what the heck does ECMO stand for? Extracorporeal membrane 'oxygenation.' This is, essentially—I guess I'll use a layman's term, and I hope I'm not misrepresenting this—but I think this is essentially what we think of, perhaps, as an iron lung, a device that breathes outside of your body into you when you can't.

So it's—this is an invasive technique that allows people to continue to live and maintain appropriate levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide when use of ventilators are not sufficient. So this is the backup device. So we asked for help with that. We asked for three.

What does AIA stand for? *[interjection]* Previously mentioned—sorry—I had previously mentioned the alternate isolation sites; we asked for some personnel there, and one or two epidemiologists, additional support for communities to lessen reliance on RHA public health nurses who we've been deploying to communities.

So backup staff, equipment of various kinds—I look forward to getting an update, and I can share that with members, I hope, tomorrow, depending on when the data is forthcoming.

* (16:00)

So, yes, I mean, I thank the federal government on this. I thank also our provincial partners who clearly have—you know, we were in a great position a month ago, we're in an awful position now, and we all hope that we're in a great position a month from now. I mean, that's the summation.

Right now, we need the help of our partners in confederation. And Manitoba's always been the first to offer help to others, and so now I guess we're necessarily cashing in a few chips here to get some help from others.

Ottawa has been forthcoming, and I thank them for that. I thank the Prime Minister in advance for satisfying these asks. This is not a guarantee that we don't have to transport people, we can't say that, but it's clearly an effort to make adjustments to our staffing levels and equipment levels so that that is a less likely possibility as we move forward.

Mr. Kinew: I thank the Premier for that answer there.

The—on 847 agents currently here, you mentioned a few agencies: StatsCan, Red Cross. I'm guessing, like, 24-7 Intouch is probably another one. I don't know if there's others in there.

Can the Premier just break that figure down, like, is it, you know, by each agency? Is it 100 StatsCan, this many Red Cross, so on and so forth? Can the Premier break down that 847 agents currently working and which organization or company they work for?

Mr. Pallister: I should be clearer in giving the member this information than I am. I do not have in

front of me right now the number of contact tracers working with each of the RHAs. That's in addition to this, right? So we can—I'll undertake to get that as well because that bolsters this number. It's higher than the 847: 24-7 Intouch, 466; Canadian Red Cross, 63; StatsCan, 175; our provincial recruitment redeployment team, 143; grand total, 847.

But I would emphasize some of those—these are the partner agencies. These agencies are working with the RHAs' internal personnel that are already working here. So I'll get the detailed number on the RHA contact tracing for the member so we'll have a grand total.

And I would emphasize some of these may be just in the process of training up, so they're maybe at various levels because we've bolstered the numbers. So I don't want to create the impression every single one of these people right now is doing contract tracing because there may be some that were just hired two weeks ago and they're just in a training program.

I hope that's helpful.

Mr. Kinev: I do thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister) for that breakdown there, and I take seriously that he mentioned that the RHAs do employ their own resources in the space.

So can the Premier undertake just to provide that, once, you know, they can dig that up?

Mr. Chairperson: The lead—sorry—the honourable First Minister.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, I will undertake to do that, for sure. And I'll just share with the member, this has been—this was a real challenge early on. I think some of the members will remember early days of contract tracing. This was a new experience for a lot of people.

We had to bolster—there had never been a demand like this put on our internal staff, and so this is where the outsourcing to get additional help initially—I can't remember off the top of my head, but I know that the Red Cross pitched in fairly early in the second wave and added to our number. You guys might be able to get me the date on that, if you could, on when the Red Cross came in to assist on contract tracing. What was it?

If I recall, I'm thinking it was early November they kicked in with a few people, but we'll get the detail on that for you.

But at that point in time, the issues around both testing and the contact tracing were under a really

strong demand. We developed a balanced scorecard, which I can share with the members if I can get a copy of it, to illustrate how to monitor the situation internally more effectively on an ongoing basis to make sure that we were addressing problem areas before they became a problem as much as possible—basically, you know, kind of a red-green-yellow concept where if it's in the acceptable parameters, good, but if it's slipping into the yellow, then you look to bolster with changes in either additional personnel or technical approaches that may assist to move it back in green. And then when it's red, you know, even more of a focus is required.

But for the most part, that—once that scorecard system was set up, our vaccine—our health team has been able to monitor every aspect of the service provision that they've done and to maintain the amazing services.

I'll ask my staff to pull up the number of tests, the number of contact-tracing interviews, and so on and so forth. If they could pull that up and share with you, then we'll—I think it'll impress members of the committee if we can get those numbers pulled together.

Sorry, Red Cross started right at the end of October, so I wasn't far off from the start of November. So if we could pull up those numbers for the committee members, they will find them interesting.

On the matrix, then, just talking about that for a sec. On the contact tracing, virtual call centre staffing, just to share with you the targets. First of all, for COVID-19 contact tracing, are 80 per cent of cases reached in 24 hours, 80 per cent of contacts reached in 24 hours, and total active cases that last longer than four weeks to be zero; in other words, to clear that case off.

COVID-19 contact tracing seven-day average, just to share that against the metric from—and this ends as of Monday of this week—for the previous week was—the target was 80 per cent reached in 24 hours. And remember, these contact tracers are working their tail off, so when I say they shot for 80 per cent, they got 74 per cent reached in 24 hours. They're not failing. They're facing the biggest challenge on contact tracing we've ever faced as—ever in the history of the province, and these guys are working really, really hard across the board.

But we saw this slipping into the yellow, realized we needed more people, that—hence the ask to Ottawa

for additional contact tracing support to get that up, because the faster we can get those contacts—that information and the faster we can notify people that they need to go and get tested, for example, the better.

However, their matrix for cases—contact trace within 48 hours is 94 per cent—very good. So, again, they're working hard. On—that was on COVID-19 contact tracing.

The seven-day averages are in green. We're okay. I think we're starting to slide, and so hence the need for additional staff as we saw the contact tracing demand rise with the number of cases, clearly.

I won't get as—probably too much detail here, and committee members might not be interested. It's here, though, if anybody is interested. We have that information available, if you'd like.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I would. If—whether it could be tabled or whether it can be just provided as an undertaking or something like that, definitely would. And if the Premier (Mr. Pallister) could just repeat, sorry, I just—the pen doesn't move as fast as it might.

Was that 94 per cent within 48 hours? If you could just run through that again, too, and then just either—if he can table that or share it as an undertaking.

Mr. Pallister: We just got confirmation from Ottawa that we're getting 50 contact tracers. Yahoo. So if—committee members are right here on the cutting edge of information dissemination. So they're going—they're coming in for orientation apparently June 1st and they're—and that's for 50 additional contact tracers. And the—there's—the number of contact tracers in the RHAs is 70, just to clarify that one for the Opposition Leader.

So it's 847 with the partner agencies, plus 70 within the RHAs, to give you a grand total there of 917, plus an additional 50. We're getting up to 967 of just contact tracers.

* (16:10)

I just shared the—you know, I'll say to the member, I think we'd be—I think he'd be interested to know—and we get, these numbers are updated—*[interjection]*—these numbers are updated daily. The numbers I have right in front of me here were in anticipation of him asking about this yesterday, so they're old. So I'll get him the newest numbers and I'll hand them to him tomorrow before question period, how's that.

Mr. Kinew: My mic was off, so you probably didn't hear me laughing in surprise there, but in a good-natured way, Mr. Chair.

So I do appreciate that additional late-breaking info, in terms of the 50 contact tracers just confirmed. That does sound like news you can use, to use a term from my previous line of work.

I was just wondering, while we're on that subject, is there any additional update? Like, did that news come along with anything else? Was there any additional info on the respiratory therapists or the critical-care nurses or other elements of federal assistance coming to Manitoba?

I just wonder if the Premier has anything else he can share, along with the contact tracer number.

Mr. Pallister: No, but as soon as I have anything, I'll be letting him know.

Mr. Kinew: Okay, well, I certainly look forward to some of these follow-up conversations on the health topic. It's top of mind for everyone in Manitoba these days, whether we need those health-care services right away or whether we're just, you know, waiting for that vaccine eligibility.

But I do, you know—recognizing, you know, the clock is ticking—I do want to spend a bit of time discussing Manitoba Hydro. You know, just as a starting point, there was a big jump from year to year, in terms of, I guess, projected profit for next year relative to the profit that Hydro's on track to make this year. So on track for \$111 million and forecasting 190 for '21-22.

Oh, sorry. I guess I should just rephrase that all. It was \$111 million for the past year and then on—forecasting on track for \$190 million in the current fiscal year.

So I'm just wondering, can the Premier explain where the increase from the originally anticipated amounts came from?

Mr. Pallister: Now, I'm not impugning motives, here, but I understand Crown corps is in Estimates right now, so probably the best bet is to ask the minister in charge of Hydro to get the detail on why the projections were—are looking rosier than they were a while ago, rather than asking me and catching me saying something that somehow is confusing to the member.

I'd only say this: let's put this in perspective. Because of the massive overbuild at Hydro with

Keeyask and bipole, the debt of Hydro grew exponentially, is now in the area of \$23 billion. And even with the discounted interest borrowing charges that Hydro gets by being able to piggyback on the provincial credit rating, which we've shored up through prudent fiscal management over the last half-decade, the debt service costs are in the area of \$1 billion a year.

That's the Hydro debt. So I know the member was getting excited the other day there about a profit potential of \$190 million, and it sounds great—or 111 or whatever—sounds really good except when you consider that even at 190 it's not even a fifth of the interest charges on Hydro's debt.

So at this rate, Hydro's going to be in debt for a long time, to put it mildly.

Mr. Kinew: So the Premier (Mr. Pallister) put forward the Wall report earlier this year. It was pretty significant that among the recommendations, which the Premier did commit to, was to sell off so-called non-core assets.

Just wondering if the Premier can clarify what the non-core assets are, and what does that term mean, non-core.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable First Minister.

The honourable—or, the honourable First Minister, we could not hear you. I don't know if you were muted there, or.

The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Pallister: I'm on? Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

So, yes. The Wall report points out some serious challenges that have occurred as a consequence of some of the processes around the construction of the Keeyask and bipole west line, such as the \$1.2 billion that was spent by the previous administration to proceed with Keeyask prior to approvals by the PUB.

And meant that that—of course, because you're spending \$1.2 billion before it's been approved, that that's probably something that we should look at. And that is something we're looking at with our legislative agenda—to strengthen the PUB—something which, I believe it would be fair to say, former premier Greg Selinger now understands is a great idea because he was there at the time when this was getting out of control.

There are many people at Hydro that didn't view Keeyask as needed, not in the near term, in any case. Yet—and many who also viewed it as speculative and

more of a roll-the-dice situation for Manitobans than it was core to the responsibilities that Manitoba Hydro traditionally has emphasized of providing lower cost power to Manitobans. In other words, a bill for Americans to be paid for by Manitoba children is, essentially, I suppose, the challenge here.

So it's—the preapproval of spending makes it—without any kind of objectively staged accountability—makes it very difficult to hold the current—the government of that day accountable for the decisions, and makes the decision to get into merchant dam construction by Manitoba Hydro officials of the day something that they were not held accountable to at the time.

So this is why proceeding with a strengthening of the Public Utilities Board so they get full data, full information, not partial or misleading information, is very important. The—it appears that the Hydro officials were blinkered by a bias that the government had early days to get this built and get it done—confirmation bias, it can be called—that they should—they were essentially told, go ahead and build bipole on the west side regardless of facts to the contrary that Hydro officials tried to present to them, regardless of objections by their own board appointees on Hydro board, and that they proceeded with Keeyask without regard to the declining revenue potential generation abilities that it had vis-à-vis competition in the back and in various other markets to the south of us. So in other words, no off-ramp was considered.

* (16:20)

This is the problem that we face now and future generations will face. We're going to be extremely power-heavy for the next number of years, if not decades, as a consequence to these investments. The implications are very real.

The implications to Manitoba's finances were real when it was happening. We were getting warned by credit rating agencies. The previous administration was warned that structural deficits growing in size in good times wasn't a good thing. Yet they didn't seem to consider that at the Cabinet table.

According to the Wall report, there weren't discussions, according to his interviews with senior officials. There weren't discussions at Treasury Board or at the Cabinet table for a decade on this project, and that is hard to accept and hard to understand, given the risks that that would pose to the provincial finances more generally.

If you're dealing with credit rating agencies who absolutely understand the risks associated with the debt at Manitoba Hydro and the context of the risks associated with the government of Manitoba, they're not two separate things; they don't treat them that way. And so, to not consider the ramifications of a Hydro debt that was escalating to double and almost triple its size just a few years earlier is really unbelievable.

So the member asked about privatization. I see my time's up, but I'll certainly go into that topic, if the member would like, subsequent to this response.

Mr. Kinew: I just want to acknowledge the Premier saying that selling off non-core assets is privatization at the very, very end of this answer there.

Can the Premier (Mr. Pallister) tell us when that, you know, the \$5 billion in energy sales to Saskatchewan, when was that finalized?

Mr. Pallister: Two things: (1) the member has the Crown corp. minister in Estimates as we speak, so if he wants any detail on timing on announcements, he can certainly get it there.

In respect of—I've already made it clear to him—that the debt of Manitoba Hydro is in excess of \$23 billion, \$1 billion of debt service costs, and if he wants to describe that as great news he can, but it's not good news for ratepayers of Manitoba Hydro for the next 30 or 40 years, for sure.

As far as the—obviously, speaking facetiously in reference to the privatization, every time we say Hydro, the Pavlovian response from the Leader of the Opposition is to talk about privatization, so I thought I'd beat him to it.

The fact of the matter is that Manitoba Hydro has developed—their board of management is shaping a long-term strategy to get them back to the fundamentals of looking after Manitobans first and not necessarily people in Wisconsin or Minnesota. And so their plan, as a management and as a board, is to move forward to co-ordinate their policies, their governance, their regulations, to mitigate risks and leverage opportunities.

This is the opposite of what happened under the NDP, where they actually leveraged risks and mitigated opportunities. In other words, they took Hydro down the interstate to the United States in a big orange bus and decided they wouldn't take an off-ramp even after all indications of the dangers of the trip were presented to them.

They avoided confronting the reality in the situation by not discussing it at Cabinet or Treasury Board. They decided that they wouldn't present the full information to the Clean Environment Commission on bipole, and they excluded bipole from consideration of the needs-for-and-alternatives-to analysis of Public Utilities Board, so it couldn't even be looked at.

They ignored—and this is the previous administration; no member except perhaps with the exception of the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) needs to take this personally. But the fact of the matter is that the NDP caucus wasn't elected at this point in time. They need to understand they don't need to own these decisions, and choosing to do so, I think, is a mistake, but it's their call.

I can only tell them that ignoring the realities of situation at Treasury Board is unbelievable, and it is clear that that is what happened, that ignoring these decisions at Cabinet and in Cabinet discussions is also extremely dangerous, and that is also what happened. And that them pushing through with over \$1 billion of investment without getting approval from the Public Utilities Board is, frankly, disrespectful.

But the position of the Hydro leadership at that time was apparently not listened to. Many people in senior management, according to the Wall report, were questioning the value of the Keeyask investment. The board themselves questioned why the hydro line, Bipole III line, would go on the west side, and there's never been a fulsome explanation by former political people—the government of that time—as to why those decisions were pushed forward over and above the recommendations of their own board and their own senior executives.

So what you've got now is a thing called Strategy 2040, of which Hydro has developed. It is a 20-year outlook with a strategic direction focused on Manitobans. I emphasize not Minnesotans, but Manitobans. There are five key components to this strategy that articulate Hydro's commitment to their customers: (1) to provide safe, reliable energy that meets the evolving energy needs of Manitobans; (2) to serve customers efficiently, responsibly and digitally; (3) to help all Manitobans efficiently navigate the evolving energy landscape; (4) to maximize the benefit of Manitoba's clean energy advantage; and (5) to keep costs as low as possible while making the investments necessary to serve Manitobans.

This implementation's under way. It includes realigning roles and responsibilities, but no change to overall staffing at Hydro.

There's a quick Coles Notes for the member. I think I'm running out of time on this one.

Mr. Kinew: Is there a new export contract with Xcel Energy over and above what's previously been made public?

Mr. Pallister: A perfect question to ask the minister who's in Estimates as we speak.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Just a couple different consultation questions, I guess, I have first.

In regards to the framework that was being developed for a First Nation consultation policy, I'm wondering if the First Minister can notify the committee as to where that's at.

Mr. Pallister: Sorry; I didn't quite get the question. If the member wouldn't mind repeating that, that would be helpful.

Mr. Bushie: Just in regards to the First Nation consultation policy that was being developed for a couple of years now, and my understanding is that the framework was already imminent more than a year ago.

And I'm just wondering if the Premier (Mr. Pallister) can update as to exactly where that consultation policy is at, and when will it be made public.

Mr. Pallister: I just encourage the member to direct those questions right to the minister. I'm sure he'll be helpful in getting you an update that would be more fulsome than I can. I'll only reiterate to the member that I do take very seriously the responsibilities of the consultation with our—the Indigenous peoples of our province in respect of Hydro projects and other projects as well.

And the member earlier, I remember he asked about Hydro purchase agreements and so on. I can only say that the announcements on these deals were made in consultation with the Hydro leadership and they were announced so the—I think the member had said—I think he was repeating a column in one of the daily papers that supplies him with much of his fodder for, I think, question period—about not revealing publicly the nature of the specifics of the deal—so there was somehow, and it was implied this was a cover-up on how great Hydro was doing.

Actually, the announcements were made public. They were press released. They were made in conjunction with the federal government, and I can only say they were done in conjunction with Hydro in a—to a standard that they recommended we follow while announcing Hydro deals.

So, January 16, Hydro and SaskPower signed a power purchase—can you get me a glass of water—20- to 40-hundred-milliwatt agreement requiring construction of a line to Saskatchewan.

* (16:30)

I wanted to be specific about that because we have an ICIP infrastructure—*[interjection]* It's Investing in Canada fund, but this—what's the acronym? *[interjection]*

Well, that's fine, except what's the—Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. Okay, we're back now.

So we got—our infrastructure asks are in. They've been in for months now. The ICIP program is a partnership with the federal government. We're excited about it. One of the projects that we want to see move ahead on is an east-west line called the Birtle transmission line. The member for Rupertsland might be familiar with this one, kind of an exciting project.

But this project would then facilitate transfer of power converted here near Winnipeg and moving to—moving into Saskatchewan to get them off their other sources of power that we—we think ours are better than theirs. We think our football team is better than theirs. We think our power is better than theirs, too.

Mr. Bushie: Just for a point of clarity, I am the member for Keewatinook, not the member for Rupertsland, which was the old name of the riding way back when perhaps the Premier was—last travelled up North.

Mr. James Teitsma, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

But getting back to the initial question, it was about the consultation policy, and it has been quite some time. Of course, with the pandemic going on, there was no ability to have the Indigenous relations minister answer the questions in Estimates.

So I could still go back to the initial Estimates of two years ago now where she had spoken about development of the consultation policy with First Nation communities and the framework that was now becoming imminent. And when she was questioned on exactly when that would be, she had mentioned that

it would still have to be signed off and rubber stamped by the Premier.

So again, I ask the Premier exactly where is that at within your department and within your office. As I mentioned, the minister had mentioned that that, in fact, has to be cleared and done through your office. So I'm just wondering where that's at.

Mr. Pallister: I just want to assure the member that I've been to northern Manitoba many times, but not when the travel restrictions are in place or he'd have my hide. I'm sure he would. Probably do a press release or something.

Anyway, I'm told that the Indigenous affairs minister is working on the final draft of that protocol and he'll have more information available forthwith.

Mr. Bushie: Just a little side note: we have met before on one of your travels up to our area. We met on the side of the road where there was a little bit of a sub-station going on there. You were doing a tour, and I believe that was the—one of the first and last times you were ever up in that area.

But I'm just wondering, when the Indigenous relations minister had talked about it being imminent, was very left with the impression that it was already across your desk within your department, and that was two years ago now. So I'm just, again, wondering where that's at within your department, not within Indigenous relations department, because we're assured that, on that level, that's already been passed along to your department. So I'm just wondering where that's at.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, well, I'm happy to answer the member's question. It's in process, so that's exciting.

But let's talk about the east-side road, since that's where we met. And let's remind the member of how helpful the previous NDP administration was or wasn't with respect to the construction of the road that we stood on the side of and talked on. Because while he's talking about that east-side road, I think it's important to put some facts on the record.

The fact is that the previous NDP administration took a half a billion dollars and threw it to Ernie Gilroy and virtually no road got built, as the member knows. We're talking about maybe 50 miles of road, which is awfully expensive road. And he also knows better than most of the people in the Legislative Assembly that hardly any of the money got to First Nations, either.

So, you know, the Auditor General did a scathing report on this, which I encourage the members to read. It was—if they want to read it, it's called Manitoba East Side Road Authority, community benefits and Aboriginal Engagement Strategy. It was put out by the Office of the Auditor General June of 2016. It talks about a variety of topics.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Now, the member is, you know, a member of the NDP, so I'm sure he would like to change things so that something like this never happens again. The Aboriginal Engagement Strategy was virtually non-existent. There were virtually no—according to the auditor, no comprehensive risk assessments that were made of risk. There were insufficient practices for ensuring that the East Side Road Authority met its obligations to First Nations.

They were promised, and there were construction companies who were given significant sums of money to do mentoring and training, but there were no reports of mentoring or training being done, and if they were done, they were not recorded; the equipment maintenance program was not met; the preconstruction work payments that were made didn't include support for work completed; there were gaps in monitoring compliance, insufficient practices for ensuring compliance. In other words, a ton of money wasted.

So I wanted to have a look at the road. And it was a pretty good road—I think the member would agree—but it was a pretty small, pretty expensive road given the \$500 million it took to get that highway to Bloodvein going.

Also, there were a lot of untendered contracts for preconstruction work that were awarded but not monitored. The benefits to the community were supposed to be provided; however, the benefits under the engagement strategy represented approximately 35 per cent of the overall road construction costs.

The Auditor General looked at the—and assessed whether the East Side Road Authority under Mr. Gilroy's so-called management adequately managed the Aboriginal Engagement Strategy and concluded that the strategy was not effective at assisting in adding training opportunities to Indigenous communities.

On page 3, they talk about no formal mentoring plans whatsoever in place for any of the four divisions with mentoring responsibilities. ESRA actually recorded the number of individuals that were supposed to be trained but didn't monitor and track whether

the individuals trained eventually got a job. In other words, they were given money to provide training but didn't determine if the training they provided resulted in an Indigenous man or woman getting a job.

In other words, a ton of money wasted that could've been put to better use, I think—very likely, directly into the hands of local chiefs and councils than was the case with the way this secondary giant infrastructure structure was set up to do exactly what we already have an Infrastructure Department in the government to do—duplication.

So, and seem out of time, but if the member would like more detail, I can certainly arrange to go into this in more detail with him.

Mr. Bushie: Just for a few points of clarity: it's not 50 miles of road; it's actually 120 kilometres of road which has connected more than just the community of Bloodvein. It has connected also the community of Berens River and it's, combined, over 3,000 residents.

So for members opposite—including the Premier (Mr. Pallister)—to consistently call this a waste of money and—it's disrespectful. It's disrespectful to say that any kind of investment into connectivity, health and well-being of First Nations citizens here in Manitoba is quote, unquote, a waste of money, on a regular basis is disrespectful and it's a slap in the face to Indigenous communities.

* (16:40)

But to get back to exactly—since the Premier has now alluded to the investments or the lack of investments in all-weather roads—the pandemic has also highlighted the disconnect that a lot of First Nation communities, in fact, have to just everyday things that maybe people down south take for granted.

So can the Premier, then, share with us exactly how he intends to invest in a better system, in a better road system that connects First Nation communities, whether it be all-weather road or whether it be an investment in winter roads?

Because we all know that with global warming that winter road season is getting shorter and shorter. But a lot of those communities are still surviving on contracts that are, you know, anywhere from three to five years old with no account for exactly the change in what's going on.

So can the Premier talk about what him, as the Premier and the leader of this government, does intend to do to, in fact, increase that investment?

Mr. Pallister: I am sure that the member would understand that I am in no way, shape or form meaning disrespect to him or any First Nations leader presently or formerly when I quote from the Auditor General's report of the Province of Manitoba in reference to the mismanagement of the East Side Road Authority and hundreds of millions of dollars they spent. Arguing that there needs to be roads in the North is fine. Arguing that this money was well spent is a futile exercise given the facts.

So I just encourage the member, it's not a disrespectful thing to understand and learn from the reports of an Auditor General. And that is what I'll quote from. Recommendation (1)—and this relates to Aboriginal Engagement Strategy, which I'm sure the member is concerned about, as am I: Measuring progress against targets—this is on page 10—measuring progress—and I encourage members to read this report, and it'll educate. It certainly served to educate us on how to better work on our infrastructure strategies and projects going forward to get better value for money, better tendering processes, more 'transparence'—*[interjection]*

These contracts—a number of these contracts were not tendered at all. Many of them were never posted, and we can't get answers to questions about where the money went. Auditor General says it's futile, don't know, can't get it. This—everybody should be concerned about that. That money's gone now; we can't get it back. Can't get in a Marty McFly time machine, go back in time and figure this one out.

So, you know, this is what the Auditor General says: Measuring progress against targets allows management to determine whether stated objectives are being achieved and whether any corrective action is needed. We all understand that. This process should take place on a continuous basis so management can respond to changing conditions.

The strategies related to the east-side-road project are planned general action statements and are missing measurable objectives. In other words, they didn't know what they were after. Measurable objectives would enable ESRA to assess how well it is progressing and if any corrective action is required.

Recommendation (1): We recommend that ESRA set measurable objectives, including short- and long-term targets.

You know, should you, when you've thrown \$500 million in the direction of something, have an Auditor General have to tell you to set measurable

objectives on what you're doing with the money? It's embarrassing. And the people that were most disadvantaged by it live along the east-side-road project, because we could think of how many extra kilometres—the member's corrected me, it's 62 miles, then—how many extra miles of road we could have built, how many communities we could be connecting right now with the money that was thrown away here. And the member knows that and he can read the report to remind him of that fact.

There was—there were risks identified but there was no business process for risk management. What that means is that additional costs, additional expenses were incurred as a consequence of no prep. Documented risk assessments hadn't been developed.

This is on page 11 of the report of the analysis. ESRA hired a public accounting firm to perform specific procedures in response to a disputed settlement with one community. The member may know the community. The accounting firm produced a report, including recommendations to mitigate certain risks related to the community benefit agreements. Most of the recommendations have not been implemented. This is the Auditor General talking.

In other words, recommendations around ensuring third party documentation is included as back-up for payments, tendering of subcontract agreements by community corporations, ESRA providing formal procedures for community corporations to follow, to verify invoices before they're forwarded to ESRA for payment. ESRA staff told the Auditor General's office that they conducted a lessons-learned exercise for tendered construction projects to reduce risks on future contracts. However, they do not do this for community benefits agreement contracts.

Why does that matter? Because that's where hundreds of millions of dollars is going: in the community benefits agreements, most of whom weren't—didn't involve the community, most of whom didn't benefit the community and most of which weren't agreements.

So, you know, I'm telling the member, and we—you know, I'm not trying to cry with spilled milk, here. This thing's done. It's over. The money went out and the results were achieved, but the reality is we've learned from this report, we've read this analysis, we've learned from the Auditor General's study, and we're doing, I think, a focused, better job on getting value for money—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable First Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Bushie: Well, that provides, then, a good segue. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) likes to throw shade on items that were before his tenure, and I think, in this case, he said road projects.

So let's talk about something that is now, during his tenure, and before his desk right now: the channel project and in particular with the Aboriginal engagement strategy that he touted being a champion of and wanting to promote.

So a few questions with that. One is, how much has currently been spent to date on the Lake St. Martin project?

Mr. Pallister: I'll dig the detail up on that; I don't want to give the member an approximate. I know that I've seen a document not that long ago that has an outline of the expenditures, so I will undertake—if I can't do it today I'll undertake to get that for the member.

But I do want to say, when he talks about throwing shade, look, the shady thing that happened here, you'll have to talk to Ernie Gilroy about. The shady thing here is the Auditor General's analysis shows that there were all kinds of examples where improvements could've been made to get value for money.

That value-for-money benefit would've accrued to, principally, to First Nations communities, individuals and people who live in First Nation communities along the side of the east side, where a bipole line should've been built but wasn't, which would've assisted and would've made eminent good sense, wouldn't it, to have had the bipole line—as recommended to Manitoba Hydro by senior advisers—built on the east side of Lake Winnipeg through these very communities.

And the NDP administration said—and we have to learn from these things and we have to examine so we don't repeat the mistakes of the past. So when the member says I like to throw shade, I like to learn from my own mistakes and I like to learn from the mistakes of others so I don't make them.

I think it's important to understand the previous NDP administration pushed the bipole line out to the west side, away from the very communities that he has great concerns about, as do I. At the same time, they threw money at this—at the east-side-road project willy-nilly without determining value propositions. And that is what the Auditor General of the Province is saying.

So if he's wanting to decry my willingness to learn from the Auditor General, I guess he's just done it. But the fact remains I'm interested in making sure these kinds of mistakes don't happen again because there's a lot that communities would've benefited from that \$500 million, and they didn't, and that's a shame. And I would think the member would share my concern about that.

As far as the—this capacity-building allowance stuff, I talked to—our department has examined—when we're looking at how to make sure we could continue to get value from our infrastructure organization and we wound down the east-side-road organization, we couldn't get answers to fundamental questions about where the money went from the people who were involved in handing it out, and that's what the Auditor General is examining here.

That's, in part, why the Auditor General went into these—this detailed study to see if we can learn from it and make sure it didn't happen again.

* (16:50)

Mr. Bushie: In 2018, with the channel project, it was announced that it was as a \$540-million project, of which 247 and a half federal, 247 and a half provincial, plus an additional \$45 million provincial.

Are those still the terms and what is still—and is this still the projected cost of the project?

Mr. Pallister: I'm not sure what the project the member just referred to there with those numbers. If he wouldn't mind just clarifying for me, I'd appreciate it.

Mr. Bushie: The Lake St. Martin project.

Mr. Pallister: I believe I just undertook to get the detailed numbers for the member on Lake St. Martin project. I can just undertake to do that again, as a reminder.

Mr. Bushie: So, this item has been on the books as an expense for many years without any action. So when can we expect some movement?

Mr. Pallister: Well, you know, I don't know. I'm not entirely sure that the member is talking about the same thing I'm thinking he's talking about. So I'll just say if he's talking building an outlet out of Lake Manitoba so we can get water management tactics in place so we don't ever do to Lake St. Martin or any other community in that area what happened back a few years ago—if that's what he's talking about, the No. 1 reason that that project commitment is still on the books and we aren't digging a ditch is because we

can't seem to get everybody to the table and satisfy the federal government's consultation requirements, which seem to be added to on a regular basis—almost weekly.

We have reached out every community in the area, and I can say with confidence that every community is now engaged in the consultation process—this is five years in—except the MMF I don't think is. They're not returning calls.

So I would like to see the communities of that area—and I hope the member agrees with this—taken out of peril in the event of future flood circumstances ASAP, and I would like to see the non-Indigenous and Métis residents of that region also get their lives back, but they've been held hostage by the vagaries of nature to a great degree and also by the management of mankind.

In the 1950s, Premier Douglas Campbell, who would've served at that time and been in this room presiding over a Cabinet, was given recommendations following a flood situation to enact flood-protection strategies.

And just very quickly go through them: part of that was to build a—the what we now know as Duff's Ditch. Second part was to build a reservoir upstream, which ended up becoming Shellmouth Reservoir. A third part: to dig an outlet at the Portage la Prairie-Assiniboine junction to move water into Lake Manitoba to alleviate pressure on downward communities and the city of Winnipeg. And there were other aspects to it, but those were the major aspects recommended to Premier Douglas Campbell, 1950s.

Everything was done with the exception of the outlet that was recommended in the report to him that would go out the north end of the lake. You would think, on a flat-bottom, shallow lake like Lake Manitoba, people would understand you can't dump a bunch of water in one end and not be able to take more water out the other end. If you can't do that, you're imperilling everybody who lives in that basin.

That's what happened. It was put on display a few years ago, as we all know. Two billion dollars later, we've got rebuilt communities in the North with the people disassociated from their own traditional lives, from their families, connections in that region, now move back into new communities rebuilt at tremendous expense: human suffering, fiscal expense—amazing, almost unparalleled.

And now we're set to do it again, if we're not careful. If we don't get this outlet constructed, the

same circumstances could rear their head. We're—some say we're in a dry cycle right now, it isn't a problem. That isn't—look, you don't build flood protection just when it rains. It's a little late.

The fact of the matter is we need to get at this project and we've been really pushing hard. And we've had some good support from First Nations leadership and we've had some who've been convinced, for whatever reason—Bay Street lawyer, maybe—that they can do better by delaying.

You know, I just think it's time to get at it. I think it would be in the best interests of all Manitobans, who—whatever. There's lots of people in the city of Winnipeg here that understand people in the member's riding have been sacrificed to them for a long time and they deserve to get protection. And we're prepared and committed to make that investment. It would be one of the biggest infrastructure projects in the history of the province and I think one of the most overdue infrastructure projects in the history of the province, as well.

We have yet to get solid confirmation from the Prime Minister on the financial side. We've been asking for those agreements to be signed. Our consultation work continues. It's incredible the amount of work that has to be gone to to dig a ditch.

Mr. Bushie: The First Minister had used the term reached out when he was referencing consultation, reaching out to various First Nation communities—with the exception of MMF, I might add, which he clearly specified.

I was just wondering if the First Minister can then clarify exactly what is meant by reaching out, in terms of consultation. How was that done, in what form and with which communities?

Mr. Pallister: I'll undertake—I can give the member even more detail than I'm going to share with him right now, but this is a summary. I don't see a date on this document and so I can't be assured that this is the up-to-the-minute number. So I'll undertake for the member from the area formerly known as Rupertsland to make available to him the updated number. I can only tell him this: that the formal consultation—

Mr. Chairperson: I would like to interrupt the First Minister for a second, to refer to members by their current constituency.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie), formerly known as Rupertsland—that the consultation update that I'm about to give him may not

be current as of this week and so I can only share with him—because I don't have a date on this document, I can't tell him what the actual current number is. But I think this will tell him a lot.

First of all, on the financial side, expenditures to date: we anticipate—we still anticipate a project in the area of total cost \$540 million.

Costs to date, including things like engagement, consultation, environment assessments, engineering and design, land acquisition, access road construction, internal administrative costs, total thus far, as of the end of February—and again, I apologize to the member that this is—I can get him newer information but that's as of the end of February—over \$70 million expended on the project.

Again, I think this is as of the end of February, as well: 139 meetings with Indigenous communities and groups. And this is—when I say Indigenous communities, so far we've directly communicated—departmental officials in Infrastructure have communicated with almost 40 different Indigenous communities and groups potentially impacted by the lake—not just Lake St. Martin, of course, because as the member knows, there are two outlets: Lake Manitoba outlet, then Lake St. Martin outlet. This includes 139 meetings with Indigenous communities and groups, 1,083 records of communication—that could be phone calls, emails, letters—with Indigenous communities and groups.

We have signed consultation work plans and funding agreements—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

ROOM 255

FAMILIES

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Good afternoon. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Families.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

An Honourable Member: I do. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is an honour to be here—

Mr. Chairperson: Minister Squires. Minister Squires. Sorry, I just have to recognize you.

Minister Squires, go ahead.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is an honour to be here today, as the Minister of Families, for Committee of Supply. And I'd like to, first of all, take the opportunity to thank all of my departmental staff, people who work incredibly hard, day in and day out, all throughout the year, and then have really worked exceptionally hard during the COVID pandemic to ensure that some of our people living in the province of Manitoba, some of our most vulnerable people, have had access to the support services that they desperately need and the information that they absolutely desperately need.

And I just am really grateful for my deputy minister, Kathryn Gerrard, and my assistant deputy ministers and my directors who just continue to impress me on a daily basis. And it is an honour to work side by side with these folks.

I also want to pay tribute, if I could, to all the members of our community stakeholder groups. These are people who are on the front lines working towards providing services. These are our early learning and child-care workers; these are our everyone involved in the child-care sector. These are people working in Community Living disABILITY Services, going to work every day to ensure that people have a quality of life, even at a risk to themselves. And we were very, very, very humbled to work alongside these people, as well as to offer them some risk recognition pay and to ensure that they know that they are valued and that the work that they do is incredibly beneficial and that we're thankful for the work that they do.

We know that this year has been an absolute year of transformation. Every sector has been challenged because of the pandemic. And when we come out of this pandemic, in order to have a robust economy, we need a robust early learning and child-care sector. That is why our government has made additional investments. We have made—budget '21 included more than \$180 million for the child-care sector, \$25 million more than the former government had ever invested in child care. We know that more work needs to be done in terms of getting the robust child-care sector that Manitoba families want and deserve. And we are very pleased to continue down the path of doing that work for enhancing the early learning, child-care sector. That is why we introduced Bill 47. That is why we've also made additional investments.

Earlier this spring, I was very pleased to make a \$4.4-million financial stability announcement for

the child-care sector with the COVID-19 Response Block Grant, along with my colleague, Minister Jim Carr, at the federal level. Just, again, recently, I was very pleased to offer another COVID response grant which provided additional money to child-care sectors as well as providing money for before-and-after-school programming. We know that a lot of parents right now do not have their—are not able to utilize before-and-after child care, and that is—and having to—we don't want them to have to pay their parent fees. So we're working with the sector so that parents do not have to pay their fees and that the child-care centres are not out of money.

When it comes to Child and Family Services, we know that we have—child-welfare transformation is an absolute priority for this government and for my department. And we have come quite a ways in reducing the number of children who are in the child-care system. We have ended the birth alert practice that was something that we had inherited. And we're working with our four authorities and all our agencies throughout the province and all of—everyone involved in the Child and Family Services as we go through this transformation, working with our Indigenous governing bodies, wanting to empower them to the best of our ability as we work through the transformation into C—into implementing the federal legislation, the C-92 legislation to ensure that our Indigenous governing bodies are established and positioned for success. And that is something that myself and my federal colleagues are committed to working towards when it comes to that—the child-welfare transition as outlined in Bill C-92.

We're also pleased to have redirected an—additional resources to community partners, and we're seeing amazing work from many of our community partners. Granny's House, for example, is seeing so many kids being diverted out of care because there is appropriate respite right here in the community. We certainly do believe that community intervention and community work is a great method for ensuring that more families are kept together and that apprehension rates continue to go down. Very pleased to work with Granny's House and Mount Carmel Clinic, the Mothering Project, the super dads program, Toba centre—we gave them an additional \$400,000 to ensure that they could do their work in working with—to support children who've experienced abuse, and really, really committed to ensuring that all children are well supported in the province of Manitoba.

In terms of Manitoba Housing, our government is providing over \$135 million to Manitoba Housing.

We've created 730 new units since we took office. And one of the things that we recently did—it started off as a mission 50; it's now a mission 68—where we renovated 50 vacant suites and—or, 68 vacant suites, and we found people who were either homeless or precariously housed and we got them into their homes. And then we also provided the wrap-around supports. We provided an additional 2 and a half million dollars for the wrap-around supports so that they would have the tools that they need to live independently and successfully. And we have 68 people tonight who have a home and are very successfully housed.

And I know that we have a long way to go in terms of addressing the homelessness issue. Our government invested \$28.4 million last year alone on homelessness, as well as an extra about \$5 million for the COVID response, because we know that people who are—it's hard to isolate or stay at home when you're—when you don't have a home. And so we've made additional investments and alternate isolation units for that segment of the population. Definitely a lot more work to do.

Five-point-six-million-dollar rent bank; first time in the province that we've ever had a rent bank. And we know other jurisdictions around the country have said—that have rent banks have said that this is a key to diverting homelessness. And so very pleased about that, and continuously creating these new units of housing for people who need housing.

And, lastly, I just want touch upon our support for people with disabilities. I'm pleased that, this most recent budget, we invested an additional 12 and a half million dollars for the Community Living disABILITY Services program. We recognize the importance of ensuring that adults with intellectual disabilities continue to be supported to live inclusive and meaningful lives in the community.

And I'm certain that I'm running out of time, but I do want to state that I have a bill before the Legislature that will create a new income support program for people living with disabilities. We think that this is incredibly vital. Not only will it provide additional resources, but it will provide more dignity for people who are living with disabilities and have fewer means. And this is one way that we can recognize and make life easier for people with disabilities.

We are also working towards implementing accessibility legislation enacting the standards and ensuring that they're being reviewed. There's a review—a five-year review right now on the first standard regarding customer service. That standard

has been in place since November 2015 and the—we are hearing from community as to what areas we've gotten—that are working and what areas need to be strengthened, and really wanting to ensure that that is strengthened accordingly. And the other standards will be enacted over the next year, and I'd be more than happy to talk about that in some subsequent opportunities that I have.

But in closing, I just really want to thank everybody. It is also a tremendous, a humbling opportunity to be the co-chair of the Poverty Reduction Committee along with my colleague, Minister of Education (Mr. Cullen), to really work—we know that when it comes to child poverty and poverty reduction, we've come a short ways. We've got ways to go as well, and our work won't be done until all children are out of poverty. And that is something that myself, my co-chair and this committee is committed to doing to ensure that Manitoba—there are fewer Manitoba children living in poverty.

* (15:10)

So with that, again, I want to express my gratitude to my department and gratitude to all our community partners who are helping us eradicate child poverty, increase housing and increase the quality of living for all Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: And we thank the minister for those comments.

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

Ms. Adams, go ahead.

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Before I start my opening statements, I would just like to confirm that you're able to see me properly. I know during committee that there was some issues with you being able to see me.

Mr. Chairperson: No, we're good.

Ms. Adams: Thank you so much for confirming that for me, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, life has become less affordable for renters and low-income Manitobans during this pandemic as this government has cut the Portable Housing Benefit, clawed back EIA and cut operating funding for nursery school programs across Manitoba.

This government continues to sell off social housing units. They don't renovate the housing units,

and the wait-list is growing. Like homes on Planet *[phonetic]* road this past week is just one example. This government has sold off 1,500 social housing units since 2016, and while the wait-list for 'socio' housing continues to grow, they do not have an answer how to address this.

Homelessness has increased under this government. In Winnipeg alone, there are up to 1,500 people unsheltered every single day, and that is just unacceptable and it needs immediate answers.

Manitobans with disabilities are struggling through this pandemic with limited programming available and not enough investments from this government to support them.

This government continues to fail to invest in the public for–non-profit child care, leaving parents and providers with few supports and lots of questions and growing number of concerns.

These, along with many other issues, are just a few issues I am hearing from Manitobans every single day.

Manitobans want answers and they deserve answers from this government on this issue and many others that impact them, like child care, housing, inclusion supports and many more. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss these issues further and ask—that I am hearing from Manitobans and work through Estimates debate over the coming days.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: And I thank the member for those comments.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 9.1.(a), contained in resolution 9.1.

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

An Honourable Member: Global discussion, please.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. If it is agreed, then, that questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner, with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

Therefore, the floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Adams: The question I've got is, the Families Department underspent by six–\$36 million in '20 and

2021. In the Estimates books, this underspending is attributed to un-expenditures by adult and children disability services.

What is the child-care subsidy program and housing reflected reduced services during the pandemic? Why—was these underexpenditures reallocated to people with disabilities?

Ms. Squires: Very pleased to put some information on the record in regards to our CLDS budget for 2021. It was \$473 million. The year before, in '19-20, it was 461, so I believe that the member should be corrected, in that there hasn't been a reduction in the budget but rather an investment in the budget because 473 over 461 is an additional \$12 million.

Now, that is just in the regular budget. We also did have a number of initiatives for COVID relief because we know that our sectors were hit hard. We know that people experiencing disabilities had exceptional needs during this time of a pandemic. And the people that work in that sector also had exceptional circumstances and they went to work every day, and we wanted to provide some benefit for—and recognition for that pay.

* (15:20)

So, the one initiative that we announced last May of–May 26th, exactly one year ago today, the Disability Economic Support Program. That was worth \$4.6 million and it was for—all EIA participants in the disability category had received a one-time support of \$200 in early June of 2020. This payment is not considered taxable income and will not affect any other benefits received. And it was just to certainly help out with some additional dollars for people living with disabilities.

We also had the Risk Recognition Program, which was \$121.7 million to date, which—some of that money was a one-offered—a one-time payment to eligible front-line essential workers who took extraordinary steps to keep Manitobans safe by working over 200 hours in the periods of March 20th, 2020, to May 29th of last year's pandemic, and this included many of our workers in the CLDS sector.

And then we also had a \$35-million Caregiver Wage Support Program that provided a \$5-per-hour wage supplement to eligible front-line workers that provide direct patient or residential care to vulnerable Manitobans between November 1st, 2020, and January 10th, 2021, which definitely included many of our workers in that sector.

I'd like to just highlight that those expenditures did not come from our CLDS budget that had seen an increase of \$12 million between 1920 and 2021. Those were additional COVID-related enhancements that we had made to ensure that people living with disabilities was supported.

I'd also like to highlight a recent announcement that I made in end of March about establishing an accessibility trust with the Winnipeg Foundation. It was \$20 million that will provide an annual revenue stream for individuals, municipalities, organizations or non-profits who are wanting to enhance their accessibility, whether that's renovating their bricks and mortar, whether that's ensuring that they've got better technology, websites, information; whether it's more reading materials that are available to a broader segment of the population.

That money will be available for those entities to apply for year over year over year. This is in perpetuity so that each year we can ensure that more businesses, more individuals, more non-profits, more organizations are able to comply with our accessibility legislation and even go further and enhance accessibility features so that all Manitobans can live freely and with dignity in the province of Manitoba.

So again, really, again, very pleased to have enhanced that budget for our Community Living disABILITY Services. And we know that there is more work to be done, and our government is certainly up to the challenge and very pleased to have the partnership of many businesses, organizations, non-profits and municipalities when we had announced that accessibility fund and look forward to another year of serving people with disabilities to ensure that they get the services that they need.

Ms. Adams: I thank the minister for the response. However, that was not my question, and I do apologize if my question was not clear. I do talk fast, so I will work hard on slowing down.

My question was pertaining to—about the \$36 million that was left unspent by the government, and it was attributed to under-expenditures in adult and children's disability services.

So why was that not money reallocated and spent to support adults and children with disabilities if it was left unspent?

Ms. Squires: I thank the member for the clarification. But I do have to say that the \$36 million figure that she's citing is not something that we have confirmed. We're still working through our closeout of last year,

so we certainly don't have that \$36 million figure that she is citing as something that is confirmed.

We do know that there were fewer services, based on the pandemic, that were offered throughout the year. Because of the requirement for social distancing, the requirement for some self-isolation and the requirement for compliance with some of our public health orders, that some day programs and some of the transportation associated with those day programs saw some decreases in their budgets.

We are still finalizing those numbers. I'll be very happy to report to the critic and to all members of the Legislature those final numbers when they are confirmed, but we know that there was some reductions in expenditures in that regard. However, those were offset—or, where we made more increases in the past year was spending in residential services—that we had more people staying at home and, where it was safe to do so, that we took the programming into their own homes. So there was increased in expenditures in our residential services for people living with intellectual disabilities.

* (15:30)

And we also did give an additional \$1.1 million to Abilities Manitoba so that they could also help us with the initiative of ensuring that services are being delivered to our clients in the CLDS program in different manners. And, again, we do know that there was some day programming and transportation that didn't occur—transportation costs that weren't incurred because more people were staying at home and some of the programming was not being offered in the traditional manner.

But again, I will be more than happy to confirm for the House the official expenditure in that category. But, like I said, my department is still working through a lot of that—those—that information right now.

Ms. Adams: I would like to thank the minister for that response.

Could the minister provide us with an updated and further breakdown of organizational charts with staff names and positions?

Ms. Squires: Thanks to the member for the question.

As she's probably aware, we do have a significant number of employees in the Department of Families and a fairly large org chart. Instead of me reading it out right now, I would ask if it would be sufficient if

I sent her a copy of that flowchart, and all members of the House.

I see she's giving me the thumbs up. That's excellent.

I'll just put this on the record right now, in advance of any—potentially her future question. For '21-22, the Department of Families has 2,436.4 FTEs. That is an increase of 478.5 FTEs. And as soon as I get that org chart, I will send you an electronic copy.

Ms. Adams: And I thank the minister for sending the org chart when she has it.

As of March 31st, 2020, there were 440 vacant positions at the Department of Families, and the minister said on February 2nd, 2021, that there were 357 vacant positions in the department, including 102 at the department—Manitoba Developmental Centre due to their closure.

Could the minister provide a current vacancy rate for the Manitoba—for Manitoba Families?

Ms. Squires: I do want to start by talking about MDC.

As members of the committee will know, our government is moving towards closure of MDC and we're working to successfully transition all of those residents into community. And one of the things that we really—that was really important when we announced the three-year closure was that we had a staffing stabilization plan in place.

* (15:40)

Now, members will know that we do have 102 vacant FTEs at MDC, but we also have—we have appropriate staffing levels at the centre right now, with that stabilization plan in place so that until that very last resident transitions out of MDC, there will be an appropriate number of staff in place at MDC.

Now, further to the member's question about the vacancy rate: it is 11.8 per cent as of March 31st, '21, for vacancies in the Department of Families. That means that there are 365.2 FTEs that are vacant. However, we do have 134 staffing approvals in place, which means we're actively recruiting for those positions, which means we have 231 net vacancies.

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Minister and Mr. Chair.

Now we'll move on to child care.

With nearly 19,000 children on the wait-list for child care in our province, we need investments in public not-for-profit child care is evident more so than ever now than before.

What is the minister's plan to invest the remainder of the money from the money that was allocated to the chambers that has gone unspent by almost 8 per cent to the non-profit child-care centres immediately?

Ms. Squires: So, just to the point about the search tool, I know the member referenced the search tool that was [*inaudible*] from very many members of the community, from the parent advisory committee, as well as several individuals—we had hundreds and hundreds of Manitobans provide us with advice through EngageMB when we were consulting on child care, tell us that that search tool was not—and that wait-list that was created by the former government was not something that was working in the way that they would like it.

Parents have said to us that they want a search tool that is more flexible, that also allows them to see the vacancies, and the ability to find child care by their specific area. And so one of my top priorities is to modernize that, that ability for parents to be connected with the child care that they want and that is specific to their family needs.

And so we are in the process of revising and modernizing a child-care wait-list. That is something that I've promised the community that I will deliver on in the very near future, because we know that the current wait-list that was established by the NDP, that had people putting their names on multiple lists—a lot of families were putting their names on their child-care-centre-of-wish wait-list as well as registering with that centralized database, and were working more directly with their child-care centre of choice and not really hearing back from that centralized wait-list as to what their status was, what the availability was in their community and so forth.

So we certainly want to take a more direct approach and be able to give parents a lot more information and connect them more quickly and—with the—with child-care options of choice in their community.

We know that right now we have a solution that we put in place in the early days of the pandemic for people to find child care. It is an online tool called the child-care finder, and that is allowing parents to quickly find out if there is child care available in their, you know, preferred place and they can register on that wait-list accordingly.

We know that right now we have an anomaly in child care. I don't think ever before in the province's history have we had 4,170 vacancies in child care—in the child-care sector as a whole, like we have as of

May 7. That was our vacancy number. And we know that that is a result of this pandemic. And as I've said earlier in some of my comments, we know that a key to having a robust economy in the post-pandemic era is having a robust child-care sector.

And so we look forward to working with all of our child-care centres and all Manitoba families to ensure that everyone has child care when they need it, where they need it so that they can go back to work and resume their lives once this pandemic is in the rear-view mirror.

* (15:50)

We know that we've also been able to provide child care and prioritize those who are critical services and essential workers to ensure that our firefighters, our front-line emergency personnel, our doctors, our nurses and everyone who needs child care to work in the pandemic is able to get child care. And so, the child-care finder has been an essential tool, helping people get that information and register.

In relation to the money that was provided to the Chambers of Commerce, that was in the—at the onset of the pandemic, where we did provide \$18 million for the quick—rapid creation of new child-care spaces. And we have—to that end, we—in the early days of the pandemic after the \$18 million endowment was provided to the chambers, \$3.52 million was spent as—to create child-care spaces.

And we're incredibly grateful that there were many people who developed child-care spaces in wake of the onset of the pandemic when there was so much uncertainty. And yet we did see so many people come forward and provide child-care spaces to ensure that our doctors, nurses, critical service employees were able to get that child care.

Further to the expenditure of the \$18 million that went to the chambers, we diverted \$9.5 million out of the chamber fund into the child-care sustainability—

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

Ms. Adams: The minister speaks of vacancies. Could she please provide a detailed breakdown of where these child-care vacancies are located, and whether or not they are public or private spaces?

Ms. Squires: Just to wrap up what I was saying earlier about the \$18-million expenditure that we—or, endowment with the chambers, we did divert \$9.5 million to the Child Care Sustainability Trust that went to The Winnipeg Foundation.

Now that trust is at \$11 million. And this will create an annual and—intake for child-care centres to apply to get discretionary or 'auxillary' items that may be outside of their budget and a new revenue stream for them and an intake that they can apply to each year to get additional dollars into their centre.

And we are currently working—\$4.7 million is unspent of that \$18 million and that is currently—we're working with the Winnipeg chamber to create ethnically diverse and culturally appropriate spaces and that work is ongoing. It's delayed because of COVID, of course, but it will be creating new child-care spaces, and I will be very pleased to provide the member and all members of the Legislature an update as soon as possible.

In regards to the 4,170 vacancies, I'd like to also just point out that any vacant space that is public in a non-profit continues to be funded whether they are vacant—whether it's been vacant or it's being utilized. Our government has flowed the operating dollars to all of our funded spaces regardless because we know this pandemic has been incredibly hard on our child-care centres and our families. And so that money has continued to flow uninterrupted from the Province of Manitoba, even though those spaces have been vacant.

I'd also like to just remind the member that 90 per cent of all spaces in Manitoba are non-profit—upwards of 90 per cent. Fewer than 10 per cent in this province are for profit. And so she can surmise that—I don't have the breakdown of private versus profit—non-profit of that 4,170 vacancies, but we can estimate that there would be fewer than 41 of those spaces being from the private sector and the remainder being in the public based on the ratio that we know is true here in the province of Manitoba.

And we know that the member and many others have advocated for a system—a universal system such as what they have in Quebec. And I would also like to just highlight that in Quebec, it's 20 per cent for-profit and 80 per cent non-profit. We certainly don't strike that balance here in Manitoba. Our ratio is 90-10. And the [*inaudible*] in Canada is 26 to 74.

So again, we know in Manitoba we have the lowest number of private, for-profit child-care spaces and the highest number of non-profit spaces in Manitoba. And, of course, that is something that our government is committed to. That is why we've enhanced our budget for our for-profit spaces. And that is why we'll continue to build the child-care sector.

But when I chat with parents, what's important to parents is they want affordable, accessible child care, and that is what our government is committed to doing. We're not interested in taking an ideological approach. I'm—we're interested in creating child-care spaces in the province of Manitoba.

Ms. Adams: Would the minister commit to taking it as an undertaking to provide the numbers for the vacancies for a non-profit—how many spaces are available that are private and public?

* (16:00)

Ms. Squires: So, in our child-care finder right now, we do not have the opportunity to search by the category that the member's asked for, but I—what I will commit to her is that, as we're modernizing the registry for families to find affordable, accessible child care, we will make sure that we have greater flexibility in the search options so that information can be determined very quickly and easily to have the—that data and statistical analysis of our spaces that are vacant versus non-vacant.

Ms. Adams: I thank the minister for that.

Early learning and child care will see an increase of \$3.8 million attributed to incremental operating grants for newly created child-care spaces, but financial assistance is the same for sub-appropriations we'll actually get.

Will the minister explain how this cut will actually impact child-care centres?

Ms. Squires: One of the things that our government has been committed to is creating additional child-care spaces.

We know that families have expressed very loud and clear that they need affordable, accessible child care, and that is the No. 1 priority for us. And so the quickest way for us to ensure that we've got more spaces is obviously to fund more spaces.

I can say that in the last—since we've formed office, our annual five-year average for space creation is 1,045 new spaces a year. It fluctuates a little bit; I know in 2016-17 we created 1,184 new spaces.

What I can say is under the NDP's time—and I just want to highlight this for—to compare and contrast: we had a backlog of unfunded spaces when we formed office, meaning there was a lot of spaces that were not able to offer affordable child care under those regulated rates that go with having a funded space, which meant more parents were having to pay greater fees

under the unregulated fee schedule that an unfunded space can charge.

So we wanted to bring more spaces into the system by funding them. What I can say is that there were years under the NDP that they funded fewer than 500 spaces a year; 429 spaces in one particular year; 391 spaces in another year; 92 new funded spaces in another year.

What created—what that created was pressure in the system because it was being chronically underfunded, that new spaces were not being funded under the NDP. When we formed office, we had major—a major backlog in unfunded spaces.

So we have increased the number of spaces that we're bringing into the system to fund them and then we've created some additional revenue streams, such as the Child Care Sustainability Trust, 11 and a half million dollars with the Winnipeg chamber and other initiatives for the child-care sector.

And I would also note that we are currently in the process of working with our federal partners on a bilateral agreement for stabilizing the child-care sector; very grateful for some of the co-operation that we've had thus far.

And like I said earlier, in March we were able to give \$4.4 million through that bilateral initiative to our child-care non-profits that were struggling in the province because of the pandemic. But for us, the priority—the first priority was funding more spaces, which we've accelerated at a greater pace because we had that backlog to address.

Now that we're starting to see where we may be caught up to the need, then we can also shift priorities. But right now we will continue to be bringing more spaces into the system than was created under the previous government, address that backlog and work to ensure that we've got the second lowest—maintaining the second lowest parent fees in the country so that all families can have affordable, accessible child care in the province of Manitoba.

Ms. Adams: The government has claimed 96 out of the 2,992 licensed nursery school spaces in Manitoba will see an increase in their operating funding under the province's new funding formula.

What is the number of licensed nursery spaces that will receive a cut?

* (16:10)

Ms. Squires: So, we know that we have 96 nursery-school programs that were receiving \$545 per week, and now they are receiving \$1,045 per week if they're offering five sessions. There's a rather complex formula for determining this, but ultimately, if you're a nursery-school program and you offer five sessions per week, we're now getting—giving you \$1,045 per week. So that's nearly double the amount that we were giving the—these 96 programs, to equalize that.

On the flip side, there was other—all programs now are receiving the \$1,045 per week. There were 66 that were receiving a different amount that was created by the former government. They had initially rolled out a program to say that all nursery schools would be enhanced, yet they stopped making that option available to other nursery-school programs and closed the intake several years ago.

It has been at least seven years before—since any nursery school was able to apply to enter into an enhanced program. So, ultimately, what it was is it was a two-tiered system; it was never income-tested. So we had a lot of spaces that were receiving a much different rate in other areas of—that were offering nursery school at rates that were not—to families and not having it income-tested.

So we had inequities in the system and we needed to create a more equitable system in that all our nursery-school programs now in the province are receiving that \$1,045 per week. I know that there are—several families have been able to now afford nursery school because of this, and that there is more equities in the system.

Ms. Adams: I wonder if the minister could explain why they chose to cut funding to those 66 programs. Instead, they could have had the choice to have all of the programs in Manitoba receive the same funding that the 66 centres are receiving, instead of cutting those 66 centres.

Ms. Squires: Our government recognizes the need for affordable, accessible child care and nursery school. That is why we have a child-care-subsidy program and—so that we have families that we're working with that need supports from government to access the services that they need. And that is why we're working with them [*inaudible*] which is available to all low-income families in the province. And we are maintaining second lowest parent fees in the country and working towards creating additional spaces and having affordable, accessible child care throughout the province of Manitoba.

Ms. Adams: So I'll ask the minister again.

The minister asks about equalization, and they did this so that all the centres will be funded the same. But instead of going to the higher dollar amount, they went to the lower dollar amount.

So I wonder why—I wonder if the minister could please explain why they chose to not go to the higher amount and they chose, which was an active choice, to go to the lowest bottom dollar.

Ms. Squires: Here we have a consecutive pattern with the member opposite, who continues to put misinformation on the record and doesn't check with her facts before she speaks. And we've seen that time and again with this member when she talks about our investments in—whether it be in the child-care sector, whether it be in housing or other programs.

And we—one thing that we can all agree on is that we need to build more affordable, accessible child-care in the province of Manitoba. And the dollars speak volumes in the sense that our government is creating more spaces than the NDP ever did. The rolling five-year averages speak for themselves, where we're creating more spaces every year, year over year over year, than the NDP ever did. Where they were funding—some years, funding 300 new spaces, we're funding 1,000 new spaces on average every year because we know that the need is there.

And so it's important to get the facts straight. And the member had said that—something about the lowest number. Well, the fact is is that we took 96 nursery programs—96 nursery programs—that were also serving children in some low-income neighbourhoods and in some low-income families. I know of some low-income families who were—who, for all intents and purposes, should've been receiving a spot in the enhanced nursery program, but they were not able to access that and therefore they were paying a higher rate because their nursery school program was only receiving, under the NDP, \$545 per week.

What we did is we doubled the amount that those 96 programs were receiving. So we went from \$545 per week to \$1,045 per week. That's not the lowest. The lowest is what the NDP funded. What we funded was double that, at \$1,045, so that the low-incomes families—it doesn't matter if you're living in my constituency of Riel, in the member's constituency of Thompson, in any other constituency in the province of Manitoba, that parents and families with need, regardless of where they lived, could access affordable, accessible child-care or nursery programs.

And we doubled the funding for 96 spaces in the province of Manitoba.

* (16:20)

Ms. Adams: Well, Mr. Chair, I'm going to move on to the recent federal budget that pledged over \$30 billion over the next five years to reduce child-care fees by 50 per cent with a plan for a 50-50 cost share with the provinces and territories. This is a significant federal investment.

Can the minister share if the Province plans to step up and fund their part of this plan?

Ms. Squires: So I'd be more than happy to clarify for the member that there is a process when it comes to a bilateral agreement, and really appreciate the co-operation and the collaboration that I do have with my federal counterparts.

And I have met and spoke with Minister Ahmed Hussen several times on a variety of issues concerning child care and early learning in the province of Manitoba. And we are negotiating the details through a bilateral. These are certainly things that need to be negotiated, and terms of agreement need to be drawn up and we need to have agreements in place. So when the federal government is ready to present that opportunity to Manitoba, we'll certainly be in negotiations with the federal government.

And I can share with the member, since I have had the opportunity to work through some bilateral agreements with the federal government, whether it's on housing or whether it's on other initiatives in some of the other portfolios I've had, it is a fairly detailed process that must be undertaken to ensure that all parties are certainly aware of what they're signing on to.

So, to that end, I can say Manitoba—right now, we've increased our budget. Budget '21 had—offers more investments in child care than ever before. We've invested \$25 million more than the NDP ever invested in child care, and that was based on budget '21's commitments.

We're going to continue to be making our investments on our end and really looking forward to the federal government providing supports for affordable, accessible child care in the province of Manitoba because we know that in order to build a robust economy in the province, we need to have a robust child-care sector.

And so we're proud of the fact that we're maintaining the second lowest parent fees in the country. We believe that it was important to give parents that

stability and that assurance that, for the next three years, as we're coming out of this pandemic and in a post-pandemic recovery, that we are offering stability and—to families as much as possible. And so that's why it was important to offer that three-year parent freeze and to maintain those second lowest parent fees in the country.

Who knows what's going to happen in the next couple of years. Maybe at the end of the three-year term, we'll have the lowest fees in the country. And that would be certainly great as well.

What's important to us is that we have a robust, affordable, accessible child-care centre with a lot of funded spaces. That is why we're committing—we've created more than 4,500 spaces since we formed office.

And, like I said, our average number of spaces that we're creating each year is significantly higher than what was funded under the NDP. It's unfortunate that we had inherited a backlog of unfunded spaces that we needed to work towards creating opportunities so that families could access that child care when they needed and make it affordable. And we're interested in working with all partners to ensure the sustainability of that child-care sector.

Ms. Adams: So is the minister, then, going to commit to a plan that steps up and funds their part as the federal government says that that they would like to see child-care fees cut by 50 per cent?

Ms. Squires: Of course, the member's asking a rather hypothetical question, so I'll try to answer it as concretely as possible. As I'd explained to her earlier, that there is a negotiation process where we need to work with our federal counterparts to sign on to this bilateral agreement.

What I can say is that they've—and the member had just repeated it—the federal commitment is to decrease parent funding by 50 per cent. And so, 50 per cent of what? If you're in—if you live in Ontario—and the federal government of course is issuing this statement country—you know, nationwide—so if you live in Ontario and you're paying \$1,600 a month for child care, 50 per cent of that is \$800. Whereas here in Manitoba, you're already paying—the most you'd be paying for that space—a comparable space—would be \$400.

So if 50 per cent of a child-care space in another part of our federation is the formula, then it means something entirely different for Manitoba where we are already paying the second lowest parent fees in the

country. And I just use that example to illustrate to the member the complexities that need to be negotiated at the table.

When we're talking about targets such as that—and I think that it's a lofty goal and a great target—but it means something different in every province because, as you know, in the—there is no one set fee in the country of Canada.

We have the second lowest parent fees in the province, and there is concern among some that Manitoba will be penalized for already having those second lowest parent fees by way of receiving fewer of those federal dollars that are coming in, or that potentially will be coming in through the bilateral agreement. Because, like I said, if they're looking to bring those parent fees—in certain parts in Ontario, for example—in line with what we have in Manitoba, as the member knows, we charge \$400 for a space in our regulated centres, and if they need to backfill the amount in Toronto to make those spaces comparable, well Manitoba's not going to be getting any of that share. And so, one of the questions that we have is how to make sure that Manitoba gets its share of dollars.

* (16:30)

But the—to answer the member's question, are we going to be at the table negotiating with the federal government to build a greater child-care sector in the province of Manitoba [*inaudible*] going to be working with the federal government, we're going to be working with any of our partners who can help us build affordable, accessible child care for all Manitobans.

Ms. Adams: That was an answer to a question, just not my question.

Through a FIPPA we recently learned that \$8.5 million was pledged towards creating a—home-based and workplace child-care spots. Only 1.7 of that—million was spent.

Can the minister please provide an update on the breakdown of what has been spent on creating new home-based and workplace child-care spots?

Ms. Squires: In my response to the last question, it was an answer specifically to the member's question when she asked me, are you going to be working with the federal government on the bilateral agreement.

And my answer is yes. So I'm not sure what her misunderstanding is, but I certainly do hope that it's clarified and that she has the assurances that Manitoba will be negotiating with the federal government on

building more affordable, accessible child care in the province of Manitoba.

To her most recent question—which is a reiteration of a question that she'd already asked about the money that we had provided to the chambers at the onset of the pandemic, and I'd explained to her that \$3.52 million has gone towards creating child-care spaces in the province of Manitoba—her FIPPA date would have been a snapshot in time. There were applications that came in after that, according to the year-end cycle, and so there have been greater expenditures. And I can share for her that that number is now \$3.52 million instead of the number that she had recently cited.

And then we have, again, just to give the breakdown on the \$18-million expenditure, 3.52 for building new child-care spaces, 9.5 went to the Winnipeg Foundation for the Child Care Sustainability Trust that—to create that new revenue stream for our child-care centres, and then \$4.78 million is in development right now with the Winnipeg chamber to create those culturally appropriate, ethnically diverse child-care spaces that our government will be very pleased to be announcing and providing an update to the member in very short order.

I would also like to point out that our government is very excited to be working with our Manitoba-based partners at creating, whether it be culturally appropriate child-care spaces or whether it be in creating initiatives for families to take advantage of.

I would like to compare this stark contrast to what the former NDP government did when they wanted to go out and provide additional supports. They had contracted with a private, for-profit company out of Australia, and they had acquired—or procured services under the banner of Triple P parenting.

And I remember when I was a reporter in this building and I would talk to the NDP minister at the time, who was very excited to be unveiling and announcing this Triple P parenting program, and there were billboards all over the city announcing Triple P parenting program, and this is services that the NDP had acquired from a for-profit, private Australian company to get help for parents in Manitoba who needed it the most.

Contrast that to our government's position where we are working with a made-in-Manitoba solution with the Winnipeg chamber to create culturally appropriate, ethnically diverse, made-in-Manitoba child care. Our money is staying in Manitoba to get better

results for Manitobans, unlike the NDP who had to go to a for-profit, private company in Australia.

Ms. Adams: The KPMG child-care review and the Province's newly introduced legislation on Bill 47, and the government is taking the perspective that child care is like a business, when in reality it is an essential public service and should be treated as such and funded as such.

This government has a plan to open up child-care market to private, for-profit child-care providers and drastically reduce the operating grants for licensed child-care centres. The Province will be eliminating the enhanced nursery grant on July 1st and will dramatically impact the amount of funded-child-care funding per child in an organization receiving many of these cuts, the provincial government's proportion by 50 per cent.

Mr. Brad Michaleski, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

In response they have been told that the Province may double the parent fees from \$5 to \$10.40.

Manitoba cannot build a child-care sector up as essential public services under this government's proposed funding model.

Can the minister provide any research or evidence that would suggest that a move towards a for-profit child-care centres would improve accessibility, affordability and quality child care in Manitoba?

Ms. Squires: So what I can provide the member is evidence that investing in affordable, accessible child care is what our government is committed to.

The evidence is in budget '21, where we invested \$25 million more than the NDP ever spent on child care. The evidence is in the numbers that I have provided earlier, when we saw the NDP creating 300 new spaces a year in child care versus our government's 1,000 spaces. So 300 spaces funded by the NDP in comparison to 1,310 spaces. That's evidence.

When we look at 92 spaces—one year they funded 92 spaces—or brought 92 new spaces into the system. Compare that to 1,310, 1,184. That is the evidence that our government is invested in building affordable, accessible child care.

Let's look at some other evidence and where we're talking about our government is working with our community partners right here in Manitoba for a made-in-Manitoba solution; where we're partnering

with our Winnipeg chamber to create ethnically diverse child care in Manitoba, made by Manitobans.

What was the NDP's solution? They went with an Australian for-profit, private company to create a Triple P parenting program that they spent millions on and advertised it on billboards all throughout the province and had the thought that that was the solution to providing parents with greater opportunities to achieve their destinies.

We don't believe in that approach. We are taking the approach that we need to fund more child-care spaces, that we need to offer greater funding revenues and sources to our child-care sector, which is why we've created the Child Care Sustainability Trust, which is why we're working with our partners to ensure that we've got affordable access to child-care spaces that we can—and that we can stabilize the sector.

We're going to continue to invest in Manitoba, invest in Manitoba families, invest in Manitoba child-care sector. And while the member might be wanting to defend her government's decision to invest in a Triple P parenting program that they bought out of a foreign country and paid public dollars for a private service in Australia, our government is going to continue to work with Manitobans to get child care to the state that it needs to be in.

* (16:40)

Ms. Adams: Can the minister provide any research or evidence that would suggest a move towards a for-profit child-care centre would improve accessibility, affordability and quality of child care in Manitoba?

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Ms. Squires: The member opposite wants to talk about evidence about things that actually work in building affordable, accessible child care for all.

One of the things that our government is very, very committed to is the inclusion support program in our child-care centres. There is plenty of evidence that shows that when we offer inclusion support programs in our child-care centres, that they get results because children with disabilities are able to access child care and get supports that they need.

We know that in 2019-20, for example, the budget for the inclusion support program was \$13.5 million, but we overexpended it by \$1.9 million so that our actual expenditures in last fiscal for the inclusion support program was \$15.47 million to support 1,516 children that required these services. There

is strong evidence that this program works and that it is effective and that we can—need to continue to fund it.

Our policy is that we don't turn children away from the inclusion support program. Any child who applies and needs it gets the service, and that is why we have overexpenditures in that budget. And there is evidence that this program works.

This is a program that we have enshrined in legislation, in Bill 47, the requirement for an inclusion support program. This is also the program that the member who—for Thompson voted against. All the NDP caucus, they voted against the inclusion support program being enshrined in legislation.

What part of this program does the member opposite not agree with? Does she not agree that 1,516 children who required services under the inclusion support program last year didn't deserve it? Does she believe that the \$15.4 million that we spent on this program was unnecessary? And does she believe that the \$1.9-million overexpenditure in that budget was an unnecessary expense? Can she explain to the committee and the families in the province of Manitoba who depend on these services why she voted against this being enshrined in legislation?

Ms. Adams: There is nothing in Bill 47 which would explicitly improve wages or working conditions for child-care professionals in Manitoba, 97 per cent of whom are women.

What are the minister's plans to ensure these working—those working in child-care sectors will have a fair wage, safe working conditions and access to opportunity, development and growth?

Ms. Squires: I can inform the member that, when we formed office, we knew that recruitment and retention of our early child-care workers was an incredible challenge and that the sector needed to be stabilized.

And we also know that we had a significant backlog in terms of funded spaces, and so working towards funding those spaces, maintaining those second lowest parent fees in the country.

And right now I can also inform the member that we are working with our partners, specifically our federal counterparts, who are—to stabilize the sector and to have an employee enhancement initiative of some sort. Working out the details with the federal government and more details to follow when I have those details, but our government is very committed to ensuring that the sector is stable.

And one of the priorities in ensuring that the sector is stable is looking at some of those issues that pertain to recruitment and retention and ensuring that there are barriers and obstacles that are removed so that people will want to stay working in that sector.

Ms. Adams: What is the minister's plan to ensure those working in child-care sectors have access to fair wages, safe working conditions and access to growth and development?

* (16:50)

Ms. Squires: Of course, our government is very committed to building a safe workforce for all of our people who work in the child-care sector, whether they're ECEs or child-care aides or directors. We know that having a safe workplace is very important.

That's why I—and I thought that there was agreement amongst all members of the Legislature that having a safe workplace would be something that we could all agree upon and support, and that is why I was very surprised to see the member vote against Bill 47, which enshrines in legislation the committee that ensures the standards and the quality and the training of the sector. That is enshrined in legislation. That is something that she voted against, and one can only surmise that the safety that she's now speaking of is not something that is important to her because she did take a stand against enshrining that in legislation, which was very unfortunate to see.

I will also point out an additional—touch upon something else that the member had shared with me at a different opportunity, and that was telling me about the apprenticeship program that is happening in her home community of Thompson right now that is working very effectively. I have reached out to many others in this sector and exploring further initiatives with our post-secondary institutions to ensure that we can have an even more robust apprenticeship program.

And so I do want to thank the member for speaking very passionately and very eloquently about the benefits of that program and impressing upon me the need to really examine further opportunities to expand the sector through a potential apprenticeship.

And—so, when we're talking about safety, I do want to pivot right now just to some of the measures that we have taken to ensure that everyone who works in the sector is safe during COVID. That is why we upgraded the masks that—all our ECEs and aides that work in child care are receiving level 3 grade—medical-grade masks, and that we've increased

the number of masks to 1.1 million masks per month, which equates to four masks per day per worker for anyone who is working in the sector.

In addition, we are giving 7,580 eye protection pieces and we'll continue to work to ensure that everyone who goes to work in our child-care sector has the equipment necessary and to be safe.

We think that training is safe, that is why we enshrined that component in our legislation and apprenticeship is also another key factor, in terms of getting people trained and so that they're confident and capable in all regards to conduct their duties on a regular basis when they're working in child care.

And so, I do also—I'd be remiss if I didn't say how fortunate we are to have so many people in the sector who are going to work, even now as we see we're in the third wave and there's challenging circumstances. And I want to take a moment to many—to thank many of those who are in the sector for going to work and doing that job of watching the children of our critical services workers day in and day out.

And I've heard from many of them and I had an opportunity to thank many of them personally and will continue to do so in all the channels that I have available to me, given the pandemic. But I want to say in committee, for the record, that we are incredibly grateful for the service that they are providing each and every day to our critical services workers.

Ms. Adams: The minister touches about safety and talks about how it's so important for safety and talked about the masks that were going to the child-care centres.

I wonder if the minister will take it upon herself to do an investigation on how expired masks made it into our child-care sector. Because I can—I'm sure we can all agree that did not promote a safe working environment and we don't want to see something like that happen again.

Ms. Squires: I see that we're almost coming to our end of our time and I must admit that that time flew by very quickly. Given that I have probably under a minute to respond, I'll try to be quick in my response.

But our government is very committed to ensuring that—the safety of the sector. That is why we announced that we were upgrading to the level 3 medical-grade masks and that we have expedited the shipment of those masks to all of our child-care sector.

We know that right now we're dealing with a variant that is incredibly contagious and the transmission rates are certainly escalating and of concern. That is why we've increased the amount of masks that we're sending out to the sector to 1.1 million masks per month, with a total of up to four masks per day per—

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

CHAMBER

CROWN SERVICES

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Piwniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of Committee of Supply is now considering the Estimates of the Department of Crown Services.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): Just a test, can you all hear me?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, we can hear you.

Mr. Wharton: Okay, great, thank you.

Certainly great to be here today to talk about our Crowns and Crown Services. And just before we get started, I just wanted to briefly introduce the team with me here today: joined by our deputy minister, Bernadette Preun; also joined by Rob Marrese, executive director of Crown Services and Carlos Matias, who is a senior financial officer; also, my executive assistant, Madhur, is here and my SA, Eidan, as well. So we're all ready to go and I know that we're anxious to have some good dialogue and good discussions for the betterment of all Manitobans.

So, thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity and certainly look forward to our discussion this afternoon.

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

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Pleased to have an opportunity to ask some questions today about Manitoba Hydro. And before we do that, I just want to thank all the staff who are involved here today in helping to make sure that everything runs smoothly.

So, thanks to all for your work in helping to make this happen.

So, of course, we're here to talk about Hydro and ask some important questions. Hydro is clearly incredibly important resource for this province. Manitobans understand just how important Hydro is to our economy, to our ability to get to a greener and cleaner energy future and Manitobans understand the importance of making sure that Hydro stays public so that we can have access to reliable and affordable energy on an ongoing basis in this province.

But, unfortunately, of course, we know that that is being put at risk through a lot of the decisions that we've seen from this government over the last year in the middle of a pandemic. So, certainly, a lot of really important questions to be asked and very pleased to have an opportunity to do that today.

So I thank the minister for being here today and I thank him and his staff for making time for this discussion.

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

Under the Manitoba practice, debate for the ministerial statement is the last item considered for the department of the Committee of Supply; following, we shall now defer consideration for line item 5.1(a) contained in resolution 5.1.

Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion? Any—global? What about the minister? What do you agree with—global? *[Agreed]* Okay. Thank you.

It is agreed that the question of the department will proceed in a global manner and all resolutions be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Sala: I'd like to ask the minister if he'd undertake to provide the current organizational chart with the names of those in the positions for the department.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister? Just for clarification, I guess the best thing because everybody's on—like, if the minister's on Zoom, if you can just put your hand up and unmute, then I'll know that I'm to call you.

Mr. Wharton: Yes, and I was just going to mention that. I'll just wave my hand at the Chair, of course, with all due respect: I'm waving at you, not—to you, not at you, so.

Mr. Chairperson: That's great. So then we have an indication of it. Thanks.

Mr. Wharton: And that—to that point too, with the mute and unmute, I assume I have a hundred per cent control of that, Mr. Chair, or do you have some control of that as well? Just to make sure we're able to communicate on a good basis.

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, you can mute and unmute if you—when you wish. Yes, so—but it—knowing that you're unmuting, that means that you're—you want to speak. So then that's an indication that we'll call for you, okay?

Mr. Wharton: Yes, just want to make sure that either you're controlling that or myself, Mr. Chair. So, thank you, thank you for that.

And certainly, to the member's question: we would be more than happy to provide him with that chart, certainly, absolutely, a hundred per cent.

Mr. Sala: I'd like to dive into this year's budget. We know Hydro is set to profit \$111 million this past year and is forecasted to profit \$190 million in '21-22. These are huge jumps in profit than what was originally forecasted for this past year.

Could the minister explain where these large increases in profit than originally anticipated are coming from, and is it because rates will again go up in BITSA?

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

And just going to—working on some precise—more precise numbers and a response for the member. But I—you know, I will talk about—you know, the member talks about \$111-million profit and certainly, you know, as a business owner—and the member knows too, as well, that, you know, businesses can't continue to be—to thrive and be sustainable without profit.

However, in the case of Manitoba Hydro, we know that past decisions made by the former NDP government are going to and will continue to put profit and the viability of Manitoba Hydro—Manitoba Hydro, owned by Manitobans—in risk and at jeopardy over the coming years with respect to projects like Bipole III and Keeyask. We know that billions of dollars were spent on those two projects and over—actually over budget, Mr. Speaker—or, pardon me, Mr. Chair. And we know that generations of Manitobans are going to have to take on that burden going forward for a number of years.

So, you know, certainly we're—we were elected in 2016 to fix the finances, repair the services and rebuild the economy, and part of that mandate includes Manitoba Hydro and cleaning up the mess left behind by the former NDP government, and that's exactly what our government is doing and will continue to do to protect Manitoba Hydro, the once Crown jewel that will be returned to the Crown jewel and again owned by Manitobans.

* (15:10)

So, with that, we'll certainly endeavour to get more deeper into a discussion with respect to profit, but I'm looking forward to more discussions on that as we go forward this afternoon.

Mr. Sala: Could the minister please explain where these large increases in profit are going to be coming from?

Mr. Wharton: Again, on that line of questioning, glad to enter into a further discussion on rates, Mr. Chair.

We know that, you know, under the former government—the NDP government—rates went up by over 40 per cent to Manitobans. We know that that certainly puts a challenge on Manitoba ratepayers, and we know that under their leadership at the time, they've put more pressure on Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Hydro ratepayers with respect to the hundreds of millions of dollars, to the tune of billions of dollars, in investment that wasn't necessary, Mr. Chair.

We know that Manitoba Hydro relies on and, again, supplies green, clean energy to Manitobans at some of the lowest rates. And, again, Manitobans are very proud of that. But we're concerned, again, when we formed government in 2016 that the unsustainable path that the NDP—the former NDP government—put Manitoba Hydro on could affect rates on a go-forward basis and, in turn, affecting Manitoba ratepayers and generations of ratepayers.

So we know that we needed to clean up that mess, and that's exactly what our government is doing with respect to ensuring that Manitobans can rely on that clean, green energy that they've relied on for a number of years, for decades, Mr. Chair. And we also know we need to protect Manitoba ratepayers from concerns or issues and projects that were undertaken by the former NDP government, like Bipole III and Keeyask, that puts rates and puts Manitoba ratepayers at risk.

So, certainly, we're well on our way. We've got a lot of work to do, and Manitobans know that and they want us to continue on that path to ensure that we're protecting Manitoba Hydro for generations to come.

Mr. Sala: You know, we're only two questions in here and it seems as though the minister isn't even responding to questions and he's already reading prepared statements that he has in front of him to the simplest of questions we have today. And I really encourage the minister to consider your responses already and the way this is coming across to Manitobans, especially in response to such a simple question that I think Manitobans have a right to know the answer to.

So I'm going to ask for a third time and see if we can actually get a response to the question and not a prepared statement from the minister.

Can you please explain where the projected increases in profit, which are going to be much higher than anticipated for this year and next—where those increases in profit are coming from?

Mr. Wharton: I was just about to go ahead and scratch my ear, but I'll certainly answer a question. This is the joy of being not live where we can't really engage the entire Chamber, and certainly, it makes it a bit of a challenge from this end.

But again, the member from St. James mentions that Manitobans have a right to know. They absolutely do have a right to know the issues that surrounded some of the decisions made by the former NDP government and why Manitoba Hydro today—even though the member alludes to profits this year and next, the member knows full well that the challenges for Manitoba Hydro, with billions and billions of dollars of debt coming online over the coming year to two years with respect to Bipole III and Keeyask, the challenges going forward to ensure that they have the cash flow and the availability to ensure Manitobans are protected, the rates are protected and Manitoba Hydro is protected on a go-forward basis.

So, you know, it's great that, you know, the member—I'm glad the member has now a concern for rates and profitability because, certainly, under the former NDP regime, there was no concern for that. And Manitobans know, and certainly, we don't have to remind them that we know what happened during the process of the building of bipole and Keeyask.

We know that the NDP—former NDP government bypassed many channels that are put in place for the reasons to protect Manitobans and Manitoba

ratepayers with respect to the PUB, for instance, Mr. Chair, where we know that decisions were not made at the Cabinet table, nor were they made at the Treasury Board table.

We know that decisions were made in silos by separate ministries throughout their tenure, Mr. Chair. Certainly, there was no uniformity or, certainly, adherence to structure when it came to making decisions, and ultimately, no concern for Manitobans.

It was simply an agenda led by the NDP to favour, you know, a few of their union bosses, Mr. Chair. And certainly, we know that the greater Manitobans would not benefit and—from their decisions, and that's why in 2016, Manitobans elected a new PC government to ensure that we can clean up that mess left behind by the former NDP government.

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, just as a good reason why—to be on a Zoom when it comes to an auction. If you touch your ear to scratch it you might be called out.

Mr. Sala: Well, we could see—you know, so much for third time's the charm; give it a shot. Clearly not going to get an answer, and I think we know why. It's because any sense that Hydro is profitable completely undermines this government's entire argument around Hydro.

I know the minister's comments about Hydro's financial state and overall his entire government's approach to characterizing Hydro's finances is problematic, and the reason is because while he likes to talk about Hydro being in a supposedly poor financial position, Manitobans don't know because his government is refusing to allow a general rate hearing to go forward that would allow for transparency around Hydro's finances.

So he can talk all he wants about how the last NDP government supposedly put Hydro into a bad financial position, and yet Manitobans have no ability to understand the truth of the matter because his government is blocking a general rate hearing from going forward at Hydro. We're going to continue to ask those questions regardless.

Speaking about obfuscating Hydro's financial situation, we know that the Wall report was released earlier this year, and one of its most notable recommendations that was made by Mr. Wall was to sell off, quote, non-core divisions and subsidiaries of Manitoba Hydro.

I'd like to give the minister an opportunity today to clarify what, quote, non-core includes so that

employees of Manitoba Hydro and subsidiaries can have their minds put at ease.

* (15:20)

Mr. Wharton: Again, certainly appreciate the question from the member from St. James.

It is a bit of a replay on our last discussion when we sat around this table and talked about Manitoba Hydro. And certainly, you know, the answers that the member is going to get are the same as I gave him at our last discussion at Estimates with respect to Manitoba Hydro. But certainly, you know, for the record, we'll ensure that we get the answers back in Hansard to—for all Manitobans. And that's exactly what we're going to do.

So, you know, the—I know the member is concerned about—was concerned about the Wall report outcomes and continues to have some concerns about that, as it shed a very dark light on Manitoba Hydro and in particular, Manitoba—or, the Manitoba NDP with respect to their handling of these two projects, in particular Keeyask and Bipole III.

You know, as I mentioned earlier—and again, it's worthwhile to again highlight it on the record that, you know, Bipole III and Keeyask were projects that weren't necessary. They were politically motivated with ideology from the NDP. And certainly, we know that, you know, that the Brad Wall report has certainly shed a light and brought Hydro back into the light and as far as what not to do.

Certainly, Manitoba Hydro has—and their team and their staff have great experience and knowledge throughout their organization. We, as a government, and our—certainly our department, Crown Services, respect that and work in collaboration with Manitoba Hydro and their team and their board, Mr. Chair. We know what governance is. They understand what governance is, and we all row in the same direction to ensure that we protect Manitoba ratepayers on a go-forward and certainly not allow things like the NDP ran Manitoba Hydro down into such as bipole and Keeyask.

So, you know, Mr. Chair, we—we're going to have another hour and half to talk about this, so I don't want to provide too—all my answers at once because I know the member will pick up a copy of Hansard from our last discussion and be able to catch right up. But certainly, I'll look forward to some additional questions.

But I will leave him with this, though. He talks, again, about Manitoba Hydro profiting. Well, we know that Keeyask will be coming online this year, and it's starting to come online. And we know once that hits the—our—the financial sheet of Manitoba Hydro, that their numbers are going to take a drastic turn for the worse. We know that currently, Hydro is borrowing money at the provincial government interest rate. We know that interest rates are going to be going up.

And we also know that money lenders are keeping a very close eye in particular to Manitoba Hydro and their growing and ballooning debt. We also know that their debt to equity is not sustainable. You know, the member from St. James is a former banker, chose to get out of the banking industry and get into politics. Good for him. I commend him for putting his name on a ballot and doing that.

You know, I've been a politician for a number of years and ran in two different levels. As the member knows, I was a municipal councillor and a deputy mayor, and now super thrilled to be a minister in the Conservative government for Manitoba, serving Manitobans in the constituency of Red River North. So certainly, I commend the member for putting his name on a ballot and certainly look forward to additional questions as we go forward this afternoon.

Mr. Sala: Can the minister clarify what non-core assets refer to in the Wall report?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Mr. Wharton: Oh, thank you, Mr. Chair. I wasn't sure if we'd lost you there for a minute or not, but got you back. Super, thank you.

Absolutely appreciate the question from the member from St. James. And, of course, he would probably know and have a very good understanding of what Manitoba Hydro does. And what they do—their core mandate is very clear: to provide Manitobans with reliable, green, clean energy at—renewable energy at very cost-effective and low rates, which is exactly what they do. The challenge, I think, that has happened, you know, according to what we've learned since we formed government, is Manitoba Hydro is now in the process of moving back to that because what happened was—and the member should well know this; I know he will because he's—he does his homework, so certainly he'll have an idea where I'm going with this, but I'll just get it on the record anyway. But certainly he knows that Manitoba Hydro moved, you know, over the last two decades or so,

moved away from that particular core of their business and lost their focus a little bit under the last two decades during—well, as a matter of fact, during the NDP 17 years, Mr. Chair.

We know that a number of—they endeavoured to go into a number of areas that other large, publicly owned hydro supplying companies like in Newfoundland and in BC learned early on that, no, look, this is not what we do; this is not what we, you know, what we signed up for, essentially. We know that we need to get back to—it's simple: get back to the basics. We do it in business all the time, Mr. Chair. We, you know, sometimes we want to grow and we want to continue to build and—but you know what, sometimes we take a, you know, we take an off-ramp that maybe wasn't the right one. We end up going down an avenue that doesn't quite mesh with what our core mandate is, you know, as a company, in this case as a, you know, as a Crown corporation, in particular to Manitoba Hydro.

So, you know, kudos to the executive team, the CEO, and the board chair and the board for recognizing this over the last four to five years, understanding that the challenges of the past two decades have now come to light and they know that they need to pivot in order to protect Manitoba ratepayers, and that's exactly what they're doing, Mr. Chair. They're ensuring that they protect their core mandate, and that is providing, again, reliable, green, clean, renewable energy for Manitobans.

* (15:30)

So, you know—and, again, the member from St. James knows this. And I, you know, again, I apologize if I'm rambling, because it's an exciting topic because, really, I—coming from business, I know what our core mandate was in the moving business. That was to pick up furniture from a customer's home and deliver it to their new home.

Well, exactly right, but don't make a stop along the way and, you know, pick up a photocopier because that's not what we were paid to do. We were paid to go out and pick up that furniture from a residence and take it to a new residence for that customer, and do it in a reasonable fashion and do it under our mandate of ensuring that, you know, the customer gets their shipment in the same way that they—we picked it up; so they received their shipment the same way.

And certainly, you know, those fundamentals in business are exactly what Manitoba Hydro is applying to their core going forward. They know what the

fundamentals are; they know what their core operation is, and kudos to them for doing that.

Mr. Sala: I'll take that answer to mean that a number of Hydro subsidiaries—Centra Gas, Manitoba Hydro Telecom, Manitoba Hydro International—nothing's off the table in terms of what this government is willing to eliminate.

A couple points in response to what the minister shared. He suggested that Manitoba Hydro International was somehow a deviation from the core business of Hydro that was initiated under an NDP government. I have to inform the minister that it was actually driven by the last PC government, and senior members of that last PC government—specifically Jim Downey and others—were responsible for helping to drive forward what became Manitoba Hydro International which, by the way, has made \$80 million in revenues—sorry, \$80 million in profits for Manitoba Hydro ratepayers.

So the minister talks about that as, you know, a deviation, a stopping by to pick up a washing machine or—I can't remember the example he used. I'd suggest that that \$80 million in profits are meaningful and that those lines of business that have been created, taking advantage of our historic investments in Hydro and that knowledge, have served Manitobans incredibly well. And to dismiss them as nothing more than a deviation is certainly demonstrating a lack of connectedness to the meaningfulness of those profits and how that has helped to keep our rates low.

So I'm clearly not going to get a better answer on that. But, you know, moving on in terms of the Wall report and its content, I'd like to ask the minister: when did your government direct Mr. Wall to limit his investigation to the 2014 Preferred Development Plan?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly—yes, it was a photocopier, just for the record; wasn't a washing machine, but ah, what the heck. They both plug in, so I guess that's fair—fair ball.

You know, and just to drive back that comparison again, I wanted to just share with the member, you know, a little bit more detail on, again, that core. And I'll give him another example, coming from the business sector, and it's certainly, you know, our business in particular, when we growing our company, we had full-service storage and self-service storage, and this'll be easy for the member to comprehend. I'm sure he'll get this one for sure. We'll leave the washing machine out of it.

But—so what we did was we actually—we expanded into the self-storage business, into another facility, and we wanted to grow that area and, in turn, have the full service within our core business. So, you know, for a couple years we thought that was working really well. And then we started to do some internal audits and found that, quite frankly, you know, the costs of overhead were suffocating the—that self-storage entity of our company. We found that the margins just weren't filtering out the way we anticipated and our business plan just wasn't performing, you know, the way that we had laid it out. So what we did was we took one of our off-ramps that we put in place. We said, look, we've got to get back to our core business and make sure that we protect, you know, the core of our company.

So what we did was—and again, this is really easy for the member to understand—we actually ended up winding down that section, we closed down that facility, but, in turn, brought over the business to our core operation where, then, we also moved our staff over and incorporated them back into our core company. So we brought everybody under one umbrella to ensure that we could protect those margins, protect that sustainability and the liability of our company on a go-forward basis.

And I can tell the member—and I know he's got experience with this, I'm sure. He's run a business and I'm sure he's even signed a paycheck here and there, but I can tell you that that made all the difference in the world. Just, you know, just understanding the core basics of your business and seeing that, oh my gosh, you know what? We went down the wrong road. We need to take this off-ramp, bring it back into our core—brought our staff over, you know, ensured that we continued on to protect the business, protect the employees and protect the integrity of that company.

That's exactly what Manitoba Hydro is doing, Mr. Chair. And I know the member appreciates that, because look, Manitobans own Manitoba Hydro and they want to protect it, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

Mr. Sala: In regards to Mr. Wall's review, when did your government direct him to limit his investigation to the 2014 Preferred Development Plan?

Mr. Wharton: Again, I just—I need to continue on with this core discussion because it is so important. The member brought it up and I know he jumped ahead quickly, but this is just an important area and I know the member will appreciate it.

You know, with Manitoba Hydro, again, you know, essentially there are, you know, five key components to, you know, to ensuring that they move forward in a sustainable fashion. And it's a commitment to Hydro customers, Mr. Chair, that Manitoba Hydro has made. And some of those commitments are to provide safe, reliable energy that needs—that meets the evolving energy needs of Manitobans.

* (15:40)

We know that there are a number of other opportunities coming forward. As a matter of fact, the member and I had a discussion just after he got elected, actually. We met in our office and we talked about hydrogen, which I know the member has a real interest in, and certainly, there's been some inquiries about hydrogen energy and it certainly is an evolving, exciting renewable energy option that—probably going to be coming to Manitoba likely soon, as it's coming to other jurisdictions.

We know that, certainly, it is going to be an option down the road, and Manitoba Hydro knows that. So, to ensure that Manitoba Hydro continues to evolve to meet the energy needs of Manitoba with hydroelectricity is important, of course, to Manitobans; to serve customers, again, efficiently, effectively and again, digitally.

I mean, we know that—and COVID has really showed us that, you know, we need to—everybody needs to step up their game instead of waiting five or 10 years for good connectivity. We've moved forward with increasing connectivity for Manitobans in rural and northern areas of the province, and actually all areas of the province with partnering with Xplornet going forward to ensure that Manitobans have good connectivity and good cell service.

And that also affects how our Crown corporations can continue to provide services to Manitobans throughout the entire province. You know, the days of dial-up are gone but in some areas of our province, they still exist and in some cases, there is no connectivity.

So, you know, Manitoba Hydro's got their eyes on a whole bunch of fronts and it includes good connectivity for their customers as well, as we go online to pay our bills and to ensure that we are engaged with Manitoba Hydro to help Manitobans efficiently navigate the evolving energy landscape.

So, again, I alluded to this in hydrogen but there are other things. I mean, solar's been there for a while.

You know, we know that solar is very popular; wind power is also there. We also know there's a number of turbines here in Manitoba and certainly, those are other options to generate clean energy and renewable energy.

So, you know, those are a couple—I mean, I could go on, actually—to maximize the benefit of Manitoban's clean energy advantage. So we know we have an advantage because other—like other areas in Canada, they still rely on fossil fuels to provide energy for their ratepayers. So we know that there's an advantage there.

We know that Manitoba Hydro is getting well organized and ready to provide and grow their ability to procure—or to sell, pardon me, energy to other folks that want to ensure that they protect the environment on a go-forward basis with Manitoba's clean energy. And Manitoba Hydro has to also position themselves for the onset of these new evolving energy options that are coming to Manitoba.

So, good on them. Certainly, we commend the team at Hydro for doing what they're doing and, again, the board for their leadership. And certainly, we look forward to a much better future for Manitoba ratepayers.

Mr. Sala: I recognize the minister is doing his level best to avoid answering any questions, and I can say that I have yet to receive one single clear answer to a question and I don't know how much time has been spent. And I think Manitobans deserve better, Minister. So I hope you can take a different approach as we go forward here today because this is bordering on the absurd.

I will ask you again: when did your government direct Mr. Wall to limit his investigation to the 2014 preferred development plan? This was stated by Mr. Wall when asked about why he avoided disclosing that there had been a \$5-billion electricity sale to Saskatchewan. He stated that your government directed him to limit his review to the 2014 preferred development plan.

All I am asking is to get clarity on when that direction was given.

Mr. Wharton: You know, certainly, the member from St. James can draw a conclusion on whether he thinks that our discussion has been bearing fruit, and I believe it has because it's our job as elected officials to frame the situation based on facts, and that's exactly what I will do and will continue to do on a go-forward

basis. And certainly, I won't speak for the member from St. James, but I'll leave that up to him.

The member would also know that the terms of reference for the Wall report are—were public and are public, and certainly he would have the opportunity to review them, but for the case of Manitobans that are on—listening online today, I'm more than pleased to provide them for them, and certainly, we'll do that over the next couple of questions. I know the member would be—will be anxious to hear them. I'm sure he's got a copy of it. But I will read out some of the terms of reference just on the record, Mr. Chair, to ensure that Manitobans are fully aware of Mr. Wall's—part of Mr. Wall's mandate.

So Manitoba Hydro proceeded with developing the Keeyask Generating Station Project and the Bipole III transmission line and converter station project, Bipole III, during a time when the market price for energy was declining. Continuing with these projects has required Manitobans to deal with the costs and the billions in related cost overruns through increases in electricity rates that far exceed the expected rate of inflation.

So, Mr. Chair, as a result of that, the commissioner is to—and again, this is in the terms of reference, public information that's out there, but I'm more than pleased to read it into the record for Manitobans that are listening online today. (1) With reference to the actual or proposed in-service dates of Keeyask and Bipole III, to what extent did Manitoba Hydro pursue these two projects when they were not necessary or not necessary at the time to meet the province's then-anticipated electrical needs in a timely and cost-effective manner? (2) With reference to Keeyask and Bipole III, to what extent did the directions that the government gave to Manitoba Hydro, subsection 1, promote economic—pardon me—to promote economy and efficiency in the generation, transmission and distribution and supply of power in the province and, subsection 2, result in Manitoba Hydro having to address matters beyond its statutory mandate?

* (15:50)

So I'll leave those two up there for now, Mr. Chair. I know the member probably wants to continue on with his questioning, so I'm more than happy to take another question but I also am more than happy to continue to share some of the terms of reference, all of them, as a matter of fact, because they are public, with Manitobans.

Mr. Sala: In the introduction to Mr. Wall's report, he stated that his review, quote, attempted to quantify the impact of the Bipole III and Keeyask projects on Manitoba Hydro's financial health and more importantly, on the present and future customers of Manitoba Hydro. End quote.

Would the minister agree that a \$5-billion export contract that is a direct result of those projects would impact the health and customers of Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, the member knows a little something about going out and procuring business; we know that. We've had those discussions before.

And, you know, in our business, again, if you don't go out—business doesn't come to you, Mr. Chair; you've got to go out and get the business. And we know that, and I'm sure the member from St. James knows that because as a former banker. You know, I don't know if he was doing too many outbound calls, but I could bet that people were coming into the—to the bank or the institution to perhaps get some advice and certainly look at maybe getting a loan or somewhere along those lines. So we can appreciate that.

You know, look, we encourage Manitoba Hydro to continue to engage in export markets, whether it be foreign or domestic. I mean, we know that. And like any business, you know, we need to continue to grow our firm in a sustainable way and sticking to our core mandate and, again, ensuring that, you know, we remain profitable and not, you know, do the slippery slope of getting off mandate and, you know, not—and obviously putting a jeopardy, the risks—long-term risks and sustainability of our company, in this case, the Crown corporation.

So by far, we would—we encourage Manitoba Hydro to simply go out and procure. Yes, sell, sell, sell, sell. Those are the—you know, the first rules we say in our sales meeting every morning at our office. It's sell, sell sell. I mean, that's what we need to do, and that's exactly what Manitoba Hydro's going to focus on and ensuring that they can provide the energy and sell the energy to better all Manitoba ratepayers.

Mr. Sala: The minister is suggesting that the question at hand here is whether or not we're supportive of Hydro's continued success in selling or exporting more energy to other jurisdictions. That's clearly not what's up for debate here.

What we're probing here is whether or not this government intentionally misled Manitobans and that this very expensive report that was produced by their friend and political ally deliberately hid a \$5-billion

export sale to Saskatchewan, which very clearly impacted Hydro's bottom line and very clearly should've been included within the output that was released some months ago.

So I understand why the minister doesn't want to answer the question and why this creates some embarrassment for him and his government, but it really does speak to the deception and the grand deception that this government continues to try to perpetrate here, which is that Hydro is in a worse financial position that they are. And Manitobans deserve clarity on Hydro's financial state.

And that's why it's so disturbing to see this pattern of, ultimately, deceit and this failure for this—of this government to disclose this piece of information, which so very clearly should have been included in the Wall report.

That Preferred Development Plan discussed export contracts, including those to Saskatchewan, as being a vital piece of Hydro's future. So regardless of Mr. Wall's clear parameters in his directive, both would have touched on export contracts. So I'd like to give the minister an opportunity to clarify, again, why such a vital piece of Hydro's financial future was deliberately excluded from the Wall report?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, we know that Commissioner Wall's report uncovered a number of very serious issues that are very concerning to Manitobans; we know that. And we—that's why we will continue to ensure that all 51 recommendations in the Wall report are going to be acted on, Mr. Chair.

I know the member will support that. I mean, he knows full well that were a number of mistakes, very serious mistakes, made in judgment by the former NDP government, and certainly he would understand and appreciate that those mistakes cannot happen again. And to his point, again, we talk about going out and ensuring that Manitoba Hydro can continue to sell our green, clean energy to markets throughout Canada—and North America for that matter, Mr. Chair—and we know that's clear and will continue to be. And, again, we encourage it. It's absolutely the right thing to do to ensure that, you know, we can remain in a very sustainable fashion when it comes to Manitoba Hydro.

But we do know that the commissioner made it clear that when Keeyask was being reviewed by the Public Utilities Board, the Saskatchewan Power was not part of the business case Manitoba Hydro presented to the needs for alternative to—the NFAT

process, Mr. Chair—that panel, nor part of the rationale for its final approval.

So any revenue gained through exports is welcome, of course, as I mentioned in my preamble, as it helps reduce Manitoba Hydro's debt. So we know that we want Manitoba Hydro to continue to do that, you know, foster more sales to—whether it be Saskatchewan or, for instance, northwestern Ontario where we know energy—electricity in northwestern Ontario is three, four, five times the rates that Manitobans enjoy here currently in Manitoba. And we want to ensure that we protect that so it remains current, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

* (16:00)

Mr. Sala: Could the minister tell us when the \$5-billion sale of energy to Saskatchewan was finalized?

Mr. Wharton: Thank you, and certainly, technology is a great thing. So, good to be now live again, and certainly we are going to put this on the record, as I alluded to in my unmiked moment.

This is a document I'd certainly gladly provide the member, that I've just dug up in my notes here. It's a 2018 October 29th Manitoba Hydro news release. Manitoba Hydro to sell 215 megawatts of renewable hydro-electricity to SaskPower. Glad to get a copy to the member for his records.

And just in short, just for Manitobans that are listening, term sheet providing for a new long-term power sale has been signed between Manitoba Hydro and SaskPower which will see up to 215 megawatts of renewable hydroelectricity flow from Manitoba to Saskatchewan beginning in 2022.

So, certainly glad to get a copy of this for the member from St. James. I'm happy to provide it. And again, encourage Manitoba Hydro to continue to go out and procure more deals to ensure that we can sustain Manitoba Hydro for the long run.

Mr. Sala: The minister knows full well that the \$5-billion sale wasn't finalized when his government put out a news release.

Can he answer the question and let us know when the \$5-billion sale to Saskatchewan was finalized? Not the date—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for St. James. *[interjection]* The honourable member for St. James, you mic was off too.

Mr. Sala: For the entire question, or?

Mr. Chairperson: Last part.

Mr. Sala: Yes. So—thank you very much. So again, to clarify: not the date of the news release which was put out but the actual date of the finalization of the sale of the \$5 billion worth of energy to Saskatchewan.

Mr. Wharton: I guess I'll just take it that the member didn't want me to provide him a copy of the Hydro news release, October 29, 2018. So that's fine. I'll hang on to that.

Certainly, it's powerful information, too, to kind of map it out for him, but I will tell him that, again, in August 2020, SaskPower and Manitoba Hydro signed the 215-megawatt power purchase agreement, PPA, for an up-to-30-year firm power sale from 2022 to 2052.

Certainly, that's great, and again, we encourage Manitoba Hydro to continue to go ahead and look for other markets because it's important. I mean, it's obviously—helps the sustainability of our Crown jewel. Also in March 2020, for the member's information, too—and I'm sure he's aware of it—the federal government announced in collaboration with the provincial government \$18.7 million in funding to support the construction of that new transmission line required to carry the electricity sold in this agreement.

* (16:10)

Again, it basically will provide that power from Manitoba Hydro to Saskatchewan residents and this it so—good process, great progress on ensuring that we can open up markets throughout Canada and North America.

And we also know that commissioner Wall believes that, you know, export sales to other provinces and again, we need to include some federal support as we did through the Bipole III process, and we continue to look at avenues with the federal government through investing Canada or the ICIP project to ensure that Manitoba ratepayers are protected, as well.

But we can also partner with our federal partners and OUR municipal partners to get this energy to market to protect Manitobans.

Mr. Sala: Would the minister be able to provide, broken out by year and export jurisdiction, the quantity and value of export contracts since 2016?

Mr. Wharton: And certainly wanting to ensure that we provide Manitobans with the information that we can because we are and will continue to be the most

transparent government that Manitobans have elected and we will continue down that road.

So, I can tell the member that certainly there would be confidential information that would be between the purchaser—the customer—and Manitoba Hydro that wouldn't be public. But I can tell you that in the annual reports at Manitoba Hydro that there is export sales information provided there that is public without getting into the deeper details of the contracts which, obviously—you know—we know, as business owners, that certain things we need to protect, and I'm sure Manitoba Hydro is no different. And—but there is public information available on export sales in the annual reports for all Manitobans to see.

Mr. Sala: I'd like to ask the minister: What's the aggregate value of all firm export contracts?

Mr. Wharton: I know that the member will have his pen ready, but, again, he can pick it up on Hansard. But certainly happy to provide the information to the member. And over the last 10 years, export revenues have provided Manitoba Hydro with 22 per cent. Again, that's 22 per cent of its electric revenue, totalling \$4 billion, currently at 21 per cent with 58 per cent firm and 42 per cent spot-market sales.

So, again, almost 50 per cent of our sales is on the spot market, which is not as reliable and not as dependable but certainly is an option for Manitoba Hydro. They need to—again, the revenues are generated from the sales of surplus spot-market electricity and long-term firm power not needed for use in Manitoba.

So that surplus power or spot power sold on the spot market, again, not the ideal scenario, but it certainly prevents, you know, water spilling over our dams, resulting in lost revenue or opportunity again and leaving Manitoba ratepayers and our customers on the hook for those operating costs of the utility. So it is one way of protecting that to a certain degree, but certainly not where Manitoba Hydro would want to be. They would probably want to be looking a lot more along the lines of securing these long-term contracts on a go forward, knowing that they can have reliability and dependability and rate stability here by ensuring that we know what that return on investment is and not relying solely on the spot market to turn a profit.

So Manitoba Hydro, again, is active in short- and long-term export markets. Current activities in the short term are designed to maximize the value and surplus energy available from existing systems.

So, again, it's a tool in the toolkit, but, certainly, we know that Manitoba Hydro, you know, in their strategy project, will be revisiting this tool to ensure that it is the right way to go. Again, waiting and watching—not waiting, but watching and preparing for emerging clean energy coming to Manitoba, like hydrogen and, again, the growth of the solar and wind power technologies.

So with that, I hope that answers the member's question.

Mr. Sala: I thank the minister.

* (16:20)

Could the minister provide an update on where construction is at with Keeyask, and more specifically, could you provide an update on when you anticipate each of the remaining units to be in service?

Mr. Wharton: I thank the member from St. James for the question. Certainly, we know that two of the turbines are up and running. The latest information we have—again, there are seven in total. For the sake of Manitobans, there are seven turbines at the Keeyask Generating Station: two up and running, five more to go. However, we are aware that, again, there are many factors that play into when a turbine can be watered up and fired up.

So, certainly, we will rely on more information from Manitoba Hydro, and when that information is provided, certainly Manitobans will be the first to know. And I'd be more than happy to share that information with the member from St. James as well.

Mr. Sala: Thank you, Mister—or, Minister. Manitoba Hydro and SaskPower provided a notice of a joint interregional planning exploratory study to increase the transfer capability from Manitoba to Saskatchewan by up to 1,000 megawatts.

I was wondering if the minister could explain what findings came from that study.

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

Certainly, the information that we have is that, again, we'll continue to monitor this study. I think it's a federally led \$2-billion funding support Canada's transition to clean economy. I—we understand that, of course, and Manitoba's a leader in green, clean energy. So, certainly, we'll continue to monitor that still.

According to our team, that is still in discussion, so I appreciate the member bringing that forward. And, certainly, we will provide information as that continues to evolve.

Mr. Sala: I thank the minister.

An emergency contract with Manitoba Hydro was granted in March for \$25,000. Could the minister explain what that emergency contract was for?

* (16:30)

Mr. Chairperson: I wasn't quite sure if your hand was—the honourable minister.

Mr. Wharton: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll give you the full wave next time. Sorry about that.

So just for clarity, if the member from St. James can provide—are we talking March 2021? Just to be clear.

Mr. Sala: Uploaded March—it's a contract for \$25,304, contract number 4501208933. Rationale: emergency services required to mitigate damage to property.

Mr. Wharton: Again, thank the member from St. James for that question: \$25,304. This was a contract with a third-party supplier to provide stand-by fire coverage while the IBEW strike was in place. Again, this was put [*inaudible*] Manitobans during the IBEW strike.

Mr. Sala: I thank the minister for that answer. How often does the minister speak with the CEO of Hydro, and how does he communicate with her? Is it by email? By phone? Any clarification would be appreciated.

Mr. Wharton: As I've alluded to—and I've been on record many times—we don't get directly involved, unlike the NDP, with our board—or, pardon me, our CEOs with our Crown corporations. We know that they're hired and they have a mandate to certainly run their corporation. And my job is to ensure that they follow a mandate set out by government, and that's exactly what we do.

I'm very pleased to have discussions with mar board chair, who, in turn, will keep us involved in what—certainly the issues or any concerns. And I look forward—again, any conversations with the CEO are dealt through the bureaucracy through my deputy minister. And it's a great working relationship where there's a mutual respect, there's transparency and certainly—it certainly is working and—we've been told—working a heck of a lot better than it did for decades under the NDP.

Mr. Sala: I think it's important for the record just to clarify that your government has interfered frequently in Hydro and were caught in the act in an email that we have made public that we obtained through FIPPA,

of your head of Treasury Board giving direction to the CEO of Hydro to avoid bidding on a contract. And we know how that turned out.

So, important just to make sure that that's on the record, just to clarify that this government does directly interfere in Hydro's affairs and has been caught doing so in secret.

Your government recently posted an RFP for an energy consultant. Could the minister please explain what work he expects this energy consultant to do?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, the member still hasn't, I guess, learned any lessons and hasn't and probably will never apologize for essentially bullying a civil servant out of a job, and that's exactly what he did. So Manitobans know that, Mr. Chair, and it's shameful that he would continue to bully a civil servant and particularly one that is now not—no longer working because of that bullying, and it's absolutely shameful.

And you know, the member, when he reads back Hansard tomorrow, will likely look in the mirror and say darn, you know what? I was wrong. And he was wrong, because he asked me a question whether I communicate with our CEO, and how often, at Manitoba Hydro. And I answered that question that I do not communicate directly with the CEO; our deputy minister does, and I communicate with our board chair.

So, you know, I hope that the member can certainly take a moment to retract that statement and apologize to all Manitobans that are listening today online, again, for his behaviour—continued behaviour and lack of respect for our fine civil servants during a pandemic that are working their tails off to keep Manitobans safe, Mr. Chair.

I am just appalled by this member. You know, the member knows better. Come on, let's get on to the business here of talking about Manitoba Hydro and protecting Manitobans. Enough of this bullying.

Mr. Sala: I'm glad that little statement is over with.

The government recently posted an RFP for an energy consultant. Can the minister please explain what work he expects this energy consultant to do?

Mr. Wharton: The consultant—the energy consultant was procured by Conservation and Climate.

Mr. Sala: Is the minister responsible for Crowns and Hydro saying that he doesn't have any idea what is in an RFP for an energy consultant that has been put out by his government? I'm just looking for clarification there.

* (16:40)

Mr. Wharton: Certainly not going to get into a he-said, she-said moment with the member from St. James, but again, certainly, we are aware and we respect our colleagues and their portfolios, and CNC procured the RFP, and we will continue to work with our colleagues as a whole of government, unlike the members opposite, who worked in silos and is very, very evident during their 17 years in power.

Mr. Sala: Manitoba Hydro already owns half of the fibre required to expand broadband services to rural and northern communities in Manitoba. Often, private ISPs costs more money and mean more expensive bills for customers.

Was there a cost analysis done prior to the RFQ and RFP that was put out, as recently announced, about the difference in keeping it in-house or outsourcing the delivery of broadband? So to repeat that question: Was there a cost analysis done prior to the RFQ and RFP being released about the difference of keeping that in-house or outsourcing the delivery of broadband?

Mr. Wharton: I'm not sure what hat the member's wearing today but again, this is—again, it's a whole-of-government approach and we're certainly—Manitoba Hydro is certainly very pleased to provide some dark fibre in this process.

But again, Central Services is the procurement arm; the member knows that. And they're responsible for the RFP and the RFQ. And, again, we'd like to thank the minister for his dedication and hard work to get this across the finish line.

Quite frankly, we know that under the NDP this process was piecemealed for almost 20 years, and we know that many, many areas of the province, particularly First Nations communities and northern communities, have been in the dark, literally, when it comes to connectivity and cell service.

So we are very excited as we know that Manitobans are very excited to ensure that over the next two to three years under the RFP that Manitobans will be connected throughout Manitoba and in—particularly our First Nations and northern communities.

So, again, a great announcement made by the Minister of Central Services (Mr. Helwer): a whole-of-government approach, a real team effort and very pleased Manitoba Hydro is taking an active role as well in ensuring that we can now provide Internet services for Manitobans in a more broader spectrum.

And not only that, Mr. Chair, we know that COVID has really shed a light on this particular issue with more kids now turning to remote learning, of course, more moms and dads and families working from home. I know my wife works at home now, and the Internet is a welcome asset to what she does every day and certainly is able to provide support for her customers as well, so. And we're only in the Interlake, south Interlake. So I can only imagine the challenges that, you know, for the last 20 years, in particular, the last 14, 15 months, that Manitobans have had with no opportunity to hook up to the Internet.

So, very exciting announcement made by the minister. Again, we're excited about moving this forward and getting it done, unlike the former NDP government who simple piecemealed the process and left many people in the dark, many many Manitobans in the dark for many years.

Mr. Sala: It's very disappointing to hear that the minister won't speak to this question about broadband and that he's unwilling to speak to the RFP and other topics here and is, you know, forcing us to speak with a variety of people, obviously, who I'm unable to speak with today.

Very disappointing, especially given that this contract that they've announced and that they're celebrating is effectively celebrating the shutting down of a Hydro subsidiary, which is under his—happening under his watch, in Manitoba Hydro Telecom, which, up to now, has done an incredible job in expanding access to broadband services across the province and could have been used as the tool to do that and to go even further into northern and rural communities.

But instead, as with everything with this government, they've chosen to hand over that asset to a private company to make money off of instead of helping Manitobans to profit to keep our Hydro rates low.

I'm going to start talking here a bit about the PUB and our—with our remaining time. I'd like to ask the minister a bit about some of their government's failure to support this request for a general rate application.

Manitobans have waited several years for clarity on Hydro's financial position, and yet your government still refuses to move forward with a general rate application with the PUB. Clarity in Hydro's financial position would offer Manitobans confidence that Hydro rates are being set in accordance with the financial needs of the organization.

Can you share why this general rate application isn't being supported?

* (16:50)

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry, we had some technical difficulties.

Mr. Wharton: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, again, I didn't know if I'd lost you there or not, but we're back. So, certainly, thank you and again, thank the member for the question.

And again, you know, Bill 35 was introduced by the Finance Minister, but certainly, as you—as—he can really see that is a kind of a process here that, you know, this whole-of-government approach really does work. You know, when you engage other departments to ensure that you're collaborating in a way that—to better Manitobans, and certainly, that's exactly what our government is all about.

And I just—I will speak to Bill 35, to this—to the respect of the Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Public Insurance, who are involved in the general rate application annually at this point. And again, we know Bill 35 looks at multi-year. But for the member and for Manitobans online, certainly, I'm really, really excited about the collaboration again we're getting from Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Public Insurance during this process, to the point where they actually wrote a letter on April 27th to the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), which I'd be happy to put on the record today, in support of Bill 35.

You know, before I get into the letter, though, I just wanted to again put on the record that both Hydro and MPI understand that it—the millions of dollars that are spent on annual GRAs could be saved and help to mitigate rates, whether it be on your vehicle or whether it be for lighting up your home, Mr. Chair, that can be spent—well, better spent on the kitchen tables of Manitobans than annual GRAs. So that's exactly what the intent is with Bill 35, and also rate stability going forward, too, as well.

So, just for the member from St. James and all Manitobans that are listening on the line, I'll read through this letter. I've got about five minutes. I should be able to get through it, but I'll start now.

Dear minister: On behalf of Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Public Insurance, we are writing you today to voice our support for Bill 35, the public utilities rate protection and regulatory reform act, currently before the provincial Legislature. As you know, both Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Public Insurance were consulted during development of the proposed

legislation. We strongly believe that Bill 35 will create value and reduce costs for customers of both Crown corporations by increasing the efficiency of the regulatory process as well as creating more clarity for the roles of government, the boards of our respective organizations and the Public Utilities Board.

While the legislation will affect each of our companies in slightly different ways, the benefits are similar in broad terms. For Manitoba Public Insurance, the proposed rules for approving or varying auto-insurance rates will result—pardon me—in a greater regulatory focus on those matters most material to the rate-setting process and legislating capital requirements. Less time and resources will be spent on reviewing programs or activities that have little or no consequences on rates. The expected results will be shorter, more efficient reviews by the Public Utilities Board on specified factors that determine rates paid by customers. The improved efficiencies and reductions in associated costs, which are currently approximately \$2.5 million per year, will be passed on to all Manitoba Public Insurance ratepayers.

Mr. Chair, Bill 35 also provides the Public Utilities Board the ability to take a more in-depth look at Manitoba Public Insurance's operation and financial management strategies every five years or at any time the government determines it is appropriate to consider a particular matter. This provides a regular review of Manitoba Public Insurance beyond mere rate setting.

That was for Manitoba Public Insurance. Manitoba Hydro goes on to write, the proposed amendments establishing a multi-year rate-setting process where the Public Utilities Board approves electricity rate changes at five-year intervals bring the Crown corporation's regulatory approach more closely in line with other jurisdictions in Canada. Most provinces already have multi-year rate-setting mechanisms in place. More importantly, the changes will increase the efficiency of the regulatory process and lower costs man—to Manitoba Hydro customers—

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

Mr. Sala: So, wasn't able to get an answer to my question there, which was quite clear, which was to ask about why this government is failing to support

the request by the Public Utilities Board to move forward with general rate application.

The entire argument that's been made by this government about Hydro's supposedly poor financial situation is just not trustworthy. And the entire purpose of moving forward with a general rate application is to offer Manitobans clarity on Hydro's financial state.

This minister, this government continue to talk about Hydro's finances in a certain light, and yet, Manitobans don't have any idea about the state of Hydro's finances because we haven't been able to see any—or obtain any clarity for years.

And, you know, it's clear why the minister doesn't want to answer this question. It's because he knows and his government knows that moving forward with a general rate application and creating actual clarity in Hydro's financial situation would create significant risks for his government's agenda, which is to continue to raise Hydro rates, which is to continue to sell off what they're calling non-core assets, and it serves their argument.

And frankly, it's a huge disservice to Manitobans who deserve clarity on that simple question, so they can make a decision as to whether or not they want to support a bill like Bill 35, which the minister has alluded to in his answer.

I'll ask the minister again: will he ensure that Hydro complies with the order that's been put forward? The PUB has currently ordered Hydro to hand over their most recent financial forecast to begin this process of moving towards a general rate application. Will the minister ensure that Hydro complies with the order?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly I'm looking forward to picking this up tomorrow, but we certainly anticipate that Manitoba Hydro's working—

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., the House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 26, 2021

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