

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALTomARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
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, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINew, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan, Hon.	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	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg, Hon.	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
REYES, Jon, Hon.	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew, Hon.	Lagimodière	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Kirkfield Park	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 6, 2022

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 (Andrew Micklefield): Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

Orders of the day—no, that was this morning.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Committee—or introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Standing Committee on Social
and Economic Development
Sixth Report**

Mr. Dennis Smook (Chairperson): I wish to present the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on October 5, 2022, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 13)** – *The Social Services Appeal Board Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Commission d'appel des services sociaux*
- **Bill (No. 14)** – *The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment, Highway Traffic Amendment and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les conducteurs et les véhicules, le Code de la route et la Loi sur la Société d'assurance publique du Manitoba*

- **Bill (No. 24)** – *The Real Property Valuation Board and Related Amendments Act / Loi sur la Commission de l'évaluation des biens réels et modifications connexes*
- **Bill (No. 208)** – *The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la pension de retraite des enseignants*
- **Bill (No. 240)** – *The Jewish Heritage Month Act / Loi sur le Mois du patrimoine juif*

Committee Membership

- *Mr. Altomare*
- *Hon. Mr. Goertzen*
- *Ms. Morley-Lecomte*
- *Mr. Sandhu*
- *Mr. Smook*
- *Hon. Ms. Squires*

Your Committee elected Mr. Smook as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Ms. Morley-Lecomte as the Vice-Chairperson.

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- *Hon. Mr. Ewasko*
- *Hon. Mr. Helwer*
- *Ms. Lamoureux*
- *Mr. Schuler*
- *Mr. Wiebe*

Public Presentations

*Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 24)** – The Real Property Valuation Board and Related Amendments Act / Loi sur la Commission de l'évaluation des biens réels et modifications connexes:*

*Tangi Bell, Private citizen
Ernie Nathaniel, Private citizen*

*Your Committee heard the following three presentations on **Bill (No. 208)** – The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la pension de retraite des enseignants:*

*William Cann, Private citizen
David Harkness, Private citizen*

Linda Blair, Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following two written submissions on **Bill (No. 208) – The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la pension de retraite des enseignants:**

James Bedford, Manitoba Teachers' Society
John Sushelnitsky, Private citizen

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 13) – The Social Services Appeal Board Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Commission d'appel des services sociaux**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 14) – The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment, Highway Traffic Amendment and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les conducteurs et les véhicules, le Code de la route et la Loi sur la Société d'assurance publique du Manitoba**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 24) – The Real Property Valuation Board and Related Amendments Act / Loi sur la Commission de l'évaluation des biens réels et modifications connexes**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 208) – The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la pension de retraite des enseignants**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 240) – The Jewish Heritage Month Act / Loi sur le Mois du patrimoine juif**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Smook: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Seine River (Ms. Morley-Lecomte), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

**Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food
First Report**

Mr. Ian Wishart (Chairperson): I wish to present the first report of the Standing Committee of Agriculture and Food.

Clerk: Your Standing Committee—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food presents the following as its First Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on October 5, 2022, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 254 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 22) – The Environment Amendment Act (Pesticide Restrictions) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'environnement (restrictions applicables aux pesticides)**

Committee Membership

- Mrs. Cox
- Hon. Mr. Johnson
- Ms. Naylor
- Hon. Mr. Wharton
- Mr. Wiebe
- Mr. Wishart

Your Committee elected Mr. Wishart as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Mrs. Cox as the Vice-Chairperson.

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- Hon. Mr. Gerrard

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following 10 presentations on **Bill (No. 22) – The Environment Amendment Act (Pesticide Restrictions) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'environnement (restrictions applicables aux pesticides):**

Shirley Forsyth, Private citizen

Katharina Stieffenhofer, Private citizen

Anne Lindsey, Private citizen

Steve Rauh, Private citizen

Glen Koroluk, Manitoba Eco-Network

Wendy Buelow, Private citizen

Cameron Wilson, Neudorff North America

Nicolas Sourisseau, Private citizen

David Hinton, Manitoba Nursery Landscape Association

Josh Brandon, Social Planning Counsel of Winnipeg

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following seven written submissions on **Bill (No. 22) – The Environment Amendment Act (Pesticide Restrictions) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'environnement (restrictions applicables aux pesticides)**:

Denys Volkov, Association of Manitoba Municipalities

Joanne Seiff, Private citizen

Murray Cunningham, Environmental Health Association of Manitoba

Ben Raber, Private citizen

Vicki Burns, Private citizen

Meg Sears, Prevent Cancer Now

Randall McQuaker, Private Citizen

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 22) – The Environment Amendment Act (Pesticide Restrictions) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'environnement (restrictions applicables aux pesticides)**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to table the Legal Aid Manitoba Annual Report for the fiscal year 2021-2022.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No other reports? Ministerial statements? I believe there are none.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**Rick Chrest**

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services): I rise today to speak about a good friend who has chosen to retire from public life. His honour Rick Chrest, the current mayor of the City of Brandon, is not running for re-election this October. Rick served two terms as Brandon's 32nd mayor, first being elected in 2014. He had previously served three terms on Brandon City

Council and that experience served him very well as mayor.

Mayor Chrest worked hard to create a collegial and co-operative style in-of government. He was well regarded by councillors, by the citizens of Brandon and by his peers at the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. As with many elected officials over the last few years, Rick faced many challenges and had many difficult decisions, but he seemed to take it all in stride, although I know his compassion and caring always shone through despite the sometimes negative environment.

Rick has a passion for Brandon, Westman and Manitoba, but I know his heart is with his family and they are very close. Karen is his rock and he always has much to learn from Kaitlin, Dylan and Brett. Rick and Karen recently added the grandparents title to their achievements and I know that Charlotte has taken centre stage in their lives. I know they would love be with us here today but I can neither confirm nor deny that Rick may have been drawn away to Kamloops with an opportunity for a hug and snuggles with Charlotte.

Rick's hugs are legendary and I know the last couple of years have caused them to be somewhat rare. Thank you for your service, my friend. Hugs on your retirement.

Pembina Curling Club

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): The Pembina Curling Club celebrates its 75th anniversary this year, after growing from a group of 36 citizens in a church hall to a club of more than 1,000 members.

In May of 1947, a group of volunteer community members set out to build the first curling club in Fort Garry, led by Art Elders. The club began raising funds by selling \$50 shares to community members in order to build a four-sheet curling club on the same lot which still houses the club to this day. In December 1947, they held the first junior bonspiel on the new-minted ice, and now, almost 75 years later, the club is honoured to host the upcoming 2022 Canadian Masters Curling Championship from November 13th to the 20th.

The club continues to innovate and serve the Fort Garry community. It's recently opened an outdoor beer garden this past year, adding a new community gathering place where Fort Garrians can meet and enjoy live music. The club also regularly hosts learn-to-curl nights, where those unfamiliar with the game

can come to learn the ins and outs of the game while meeting new people.

These efforts are helping the club to achieve its goal of having a diverse and representative membership from the community, as the club actively pursues more women and newcomer members from the Fort Garry and south Winnipeg area. Fort Garry Curling Club has become the beating heart of that community.

In the gallery today, we have club members Tom Price, Scott Ross and Terry Vopni. Please join me in thanking them for their efforts to build a warm and welcoming community that shares the love of curling.

Thanksgiving

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I'm pleased to deliver this private member statement today on your behalf. Yes, indeed, the sentiments that are about to follow I give full credit to the member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield), although I must say I wholeheartedly agree with them.

This weekend, Canadians will celebrate Thanksgiving, gathering with family and friends for food and fellowship.

But aside from the usual traditions of pumpkin pie and turkey, Thanksgiving weekend causes us all to pause and to consider what we are grateful for.

Canadians, including myself, can sometimes be more prone to complain than compliment, to grumble than be grateful, to be thankless more than thankful, but the Thanksgiving holiday invites us to give thanks for the many blessings of living in our beautiful province of Manitoba, in this beautiful country of Canada.

We're not on the brink of war or starvation. Law and order are the rule, not the exception. We benefit from education, health care, roads, police, fire and ambulance services, the rule of law and democracy. These are not perfect, but they are still very much intact and for this we can be grateful. We should also be thankful for free speech; it remains legal to criticize, disagree and argue without fear or favour.

The thought of devoting an entire holiday to gratitude is almost unthinkable by today's standards. Cynicism, criticism, entitlement—those are the emotional default settings much of the time.

* (13:40)

But gratitude: gratitude offers us a chance to change our perspective. It displaces negativity and it reminds us that the glass is often far more than half

full. In light of history and the world around us, we who live in Canada, in Manitoba, have so, so much to be grateful for. We should not take that for granted. I believe being truly thankful can transform your heart.

So I would like to take this opportunity on behalf and together with the member for Rossmere to wish all members, legislative staff and all viewers a very happy Thanksgiving and to put on the record that we thank God for the many ways that Canada is a blessed country, even as we work together to make it better for our children and their children after them.

Marilyn McGonigal

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Marilyn McGonigal was a remarkable Manitoban. Over her career she helped shape laws in Manitoba and push for women's rights and economic fairness. She did this important feminist work as a co-founder of the first all-women law firm here in our great province.

She was a trailblazer in this respect, and it couldn't have been easy. Marilyn was actually trained as a teacher. She got married, she started a family. But then in the 1970s she decided to go back to school. She got her law degree and was called to the bar. She did all this while raising three energetic children.

In addition to the legal profession, she served as a president of the Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba and was active with the John Howard and Elizabeth Fry Societies.

She advocated publicly for increases to the minimum wage, against family violence and in favour of improved conditions for those incarcerated.

A careful student of history will see her name in the proceedings of this esteemed Chamber, speaking thoughtfully at committee on these issues of human rights.

She always found time to be a devoted grandmother to her grandchildren Jordan, Micaela, Kelsi, Megan and Hannah. Marilyn told me that she enjoyed having them over for get-togethers at the pool in her condo building. I know this because she used to host our Fort Rouge NDP association meetings in the sunroom next door. She was a tireless volunteer and an incisive participant in policy discussions.

Sadly, Marilyn left us in June after a battle with cancer, joining her son Tom. On July 17th a large crowd of Manitobans from all walks of life joined to celebrate her life. Her sons Dan and Larry spoke well on that day, and they surely did their mom proud.

Marilyn McGonigal made Manitoba a better place. To her we say we remember you, miigwech, merci and thank you. Her family joins us today in the gallery.

Vincent Williams

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'm happy to rise this afternoon and speak about some very special guests who are up in the gallery.

First off, you'll see 40 grade seven students from Stanley Knowles School. They had an educational tour this morning of the Legislative Building, ate some pizza and created a question that I have the honour of asking to our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) later today in question period.

But right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to recognize Mr. Vincent Williams.

Mr. Williams taught at École Stanley Knowles School from 1990 until his recent retirement this past June. He served in our education system for 30 years.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke with some faculty at Stanley Knowles, and a few of their remarks about Mr. Williams included how he truly made connections with kids and believed in the ability of every student. He stood out for his grace and diplomacy that he brought into his classrooms and he is a true gentleman, a fine educator and so thoughtful and kind with all of his colleagues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Williams has dedicated so much to our province, and he even set such a strong example in the field of education that his daughter, Sonya Williams, has become a vice-principal.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, everyone I spoke to reminded me how Mr. Williams does not like the spotlight. So I'm going to turn it to his family who have joined him today in the gallery. We have up in the gallery right now his wife Elnor Williams, his daughter Sonya Williams and, very shortly, I am sure, we will have Christopher Williams, his son; Shanice Williams, his daughter-in-law; Isaias Williams, his grandson; and Arzaria [*phonetic*] Williams, his granddaughter. And, of course, the man of the hour himself, Mr. Vincent Williams.

Thank you for your 30 years of service in our education system here in Manitoba. And I would like to ask my colleagues to help me recognize him for this honour.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And just before we move forward with oral questions, I do want to acknowledge some students in the gallery. As the member for Tyndall Park just mentioned, we have seated in the public gallery, from Stanley Knowles School, 40 grade 7 students under the direction of Torrie Vicklund. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Tyndall Park.

We welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Home-Care Services Care Hours Available

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Acting Speaker, for many Manitobans, home care is an essential part of a good quality of life. Yet, the government's own record—which I will table today—show that their cuts mean that there are more Manitobans than ever who need home care, and yet there are fewer and fewer hours of care available.

In the Prairie Mountain Health region, covered by those documents, there are 1,125 more people seeking care in the last five years, but there's nearly 90,000 fewer hours of care available to serve them. It's because home-care workers are stretched too thin to give each client the attention they deserve.

Will the Premier admit her government's cuts have hurt home care?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): The Leader of the Opposition is just plain wrong, Madam Speaker. In fact, we are investing more than \$1 billion more than the NDP ever did in our health-care system.

I also just want to mention and thank the Minister responsible for Seniors, Madam—or, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the work that he is doing in working with stakeholders in the community to develop a home-care strategy for the province of Manitoba so we can look at improving home care for those who choose to stay at home and need that extra help at home.

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

Mr. Kinew: More Manitobans are looking for home-care services so that they can live a good life, so that they can stay in the community, so that they can age in place. Yet, we just saw in western Manitoba and in the Parkland, while there are more than 1,100 more patients, there are 90,000 fewer hours to care for them.

The situation is similarly dire in the Southern Health region. The number of people there seeking care has gone up by 340 patients just in the last five years. And yet, there are 96,000 fewer hours of care to serve them.

That means more people waiting in pain. That means more people having to go without essential services like meal prep and laundry. It means worse care for Manitobans.

Will the Premier please stop cutting home care?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, the Leader of the Opposition puts false information on the record in this House. More than \$1 billion more than the NDP ever invested in health care, Madam—or, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And, certainly, when it comes to home care and within our health-care system, we know that there is a shortage of workers right across the system. That is nothing that's unique to Manitoba. The Leader of the Opposition knows that, but he refuses to recognize it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But it's a reality of what we're facing, not just here in Manitoba, but right across the country when it comes to the shortage of staffing with respect to health care and for home care, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So those are challenges that we're taking on. Of course, we're developing that home-care strategy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I'll remind Manitobans that the Leader of the Opposition has no plan, no vision whatsoever about home care in the province of Manitoba.

* (13:50)

If he has one, please table it today.

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

Mileage Rate Increase for Workers

Mr. Kinew: Let's cut through the PC talking points. These cuts began five years ago—five years ago. And they are cuts. When a government takes a decision to reduce funding, and it results in fewer hours of care at the bedside, that is a cut. We saw that in Westman; there are more than 90,000 fewer hours of care.

In the Southern Health region—and I'll table this document to prove the case, perhaps not to the First Minister, but definitely to the people of Manitoba—there are 96,000 fewer hours of care. We're talking about home-care workers who are helping very vulnerable people in our society. As the price of gas goes

up, these folks haven't even gotten a mile—mileage increase.

We know that the First Minister is not going to cut home care—is not going to stop her cuts to home-care services, but will she finally increase the mileage rate for these people—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, the Leader of the Opposition got one thing right, Mr. Deputy Speaker: that we are not going to cut home care in the province of Manitoba.

Once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the Minister responsible for Seniors, who is working diligently with stakeholders in the community to ensure that we make improvements to our home-care system, something that the NDP never did when they were in power. For 17 years, they did nothing.

And the Leader of the Opposition stands in this House, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, puts false information on the record, and he continues to do that without announcing what his plan is for home care. So, again, I ask him: Would he table his home-care plan for the people of Manitoba?

We would like to know what his plan is.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition with a second question.

Increase in Project Nova Costs Impact on MPI Ratepayers

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Manitobans want good online services from Manitoba Public Insurance, and that's why MPI launched Project Nova. It was supposed to make life easier and more convenient for families. Now this project could have been done a long time ago. That is, if the PCs hadn't interfered.

Now we learn from MPI board minutes, which I will table today, that just because of PC interference, the cost of Project Nova is skyrocketing. This document shows that it's going to cost ratepayers more than double the original price. We're talking an increase—lately—from \$128 million to now \$300 million.

Will the Premier admit that her government's interference will cost drivers more?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I do want to thank all of those who are working diligently at MPI and offering those services for Manitobans.

We know that affordability is an issue. MPI stepped up, and they actually gave out rebate cheques to Manitobans. We want to remind Manitobans it was upwards of \$700 'por'—per vehicle. That is making life more affordable for Manitobans.

I want to thank MPI and the board for moving in that direction to make life more affordable for Manitobans.

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

Mr. Kinew: Project Nova was supposed to take two, maybe three years, tops. Originally, the price tag was named at \$82 million. Then, after PC interference, that increased to \$128 million.

But now, after further interference by this PC government—began under Mr. Pallister, but continuing under this First Minister—we see that the price tag has now ballooned from \$128 million to \$300 million. And that timeline of a couple years has now been stretched to more than five years, Mr. Speaker.

A \$300 million project over budget at MPI will mean more pressure on ratepayers to make up the difference.

Will the Premier tell the House how much MPI rates will go up because of her government's interference?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I'll remind madam—Manitobans, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the vehicle registration fee that see—the NDP interfered in MPI and got them to introduce a vehicle registration fee.

And to—again, on the theme of making life more affordable for Manitobans, we made three reductions to that vehicle registration fee, making life more affordable for Manitobans.

We want to thank MPI for making that decision, for moving in that direction towards making life more affordable for Manitobans.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, as is typical, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we don't see the Premier engage with the question because there is no defence.

Just as with the health-care system, where their mismanagement has made a mess of things, now their mismanagement is costing people more at MPI.

This project was already over budget when it was pegged at \$128 million. Now we see, because of the meddling of this minister and this First Minister, that costs have more than doubled. We're talking about from \$128 million to \$300 million. That's mismanagement and it's a result of PC interference.

How much more of Manitobans' money will the Premier waste before providing simple online services to the people?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the piece of paper that the Leader of the Opposition tabled in the House does not back anything, and doesn't have anything to do with the questions that he's asking. Does—there's no evidence here to suggest that—the accusations from the Leader of the Opposition.

But what I will say when it—when we're talking about interfering in Crown corporations, I'll remind the Leader of the Opposition that when the NDP were in power, the bipole line, the Keeyask Generating Station these things were over budget by almost \$4 billion.

That's what they did. They interfered in Manitoba, created significant cost overruns, which is also making life less affordable for Manitobans. We will continue to make life more affordable for Manitobans.

Increase in Project Nova Costs Impact on MPI Ratepayers

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): The price of Project Nova has more than doubled in price. Initial price was \$82 million, then it increased \$128 million to nearly \$300 million now. This project could have been completed a long time ago, but this government interfered.

Why is the minister costing MPI drivers more?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation): My friend across the way might need to be reminded that drivers' insurance have been continually going down over the last number of years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not going up.

He may also be well to be reminded that this is a 30-year-old legacy system that the drivers renewal system, the technology system that is in the different brokers and at MPI languished for nearly 20 years under the NDP without any sort of revival or renewal, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

If he wants to know why this system is so outdated and why there needs to be such refurbishment,

he may want to speak to, for example, one of his colleagues who sat and did nothing for 20 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sandhu: Brian Pallister intervened in the operation of MPI on behalf of his friends in the insurance industry.

Project Nova was supposed to be done long time ago. Now, it has more than doubled in price to nearly \$300 million. The time has been—delays. This cost us more.

Why did the PC government interfere in the operation of MPI and why are they costing drivers hundreds of millions of dollars?

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, interference would be defined as going to a Crown corporation and saying, instead of building a hydro line on the shortest route possible, as was recommended by many, many experts, including experts in the NDP—instead having ministers say, no, we're going to go across the entire length of the opposite side of the province and cause more than a billion dollars more. That would be interference.

* (14:00)

What the definition of languishing would be is doing nothing to upgrade a computer system and technology system at MPI for more than two decades and then waiting for another government to have to take on that task. So, that's the definition.

He now knows what interference is; he now knows what languishing is. I'm happy to give him further definitions in the next answer, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Sandhu: The government's interference costs us all more. The costs of Project Nova have more than doubled to nearly \$300 million. The timeline has been extended for years.

Will the minister explain why their government's interference is costing MPI drivers so much more?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I was reminded by my friends in this side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about something called FleetNet. I'd almost forgotten.

This was the emergency system, of course, that our emergency responders were communicating with across the province where there were fires or other sorts of things. We came into government and we

realized that FleetNet was so old that they were having to buy parts off of eBay to keep it going.

Now I don't know that MPI was quite that desperate, Madam Speaker. I don't—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —think that—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't know that they were using Commodore 64s still at MPI, but if the NDP had still stayed in government, that might have been the case.

We had to renew FleetNet. We had to renew MPI computer systems. That's the government that did nothing to ensure that those things were redone.

We're not interfering. We're actually trying to get things done—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Provincial Carbon Pricing Timeline for Plan

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, climate change is a threat unlike any other we've faced before and urgent action is needed to avoid the worst outcomes. We've had six years of inaction from this government, and they've spent hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars in two years fighting the federal government's price on pollution.

Thanks to public pressure, the PC government backtracked and committed to developing a carbon-pricing plan before December 31st of this year.

Will the minister confirm if his government will meet this deadline?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks): I certainly appreciate the question on climate and environment when it comes from members opposite.

We know that the NDP climate plan existed on the back of a napkin. We know that, how? Well, none of us have seen it.

But I can tell you, our government has a plan. As a matter of fact, we're already moving forward with a low-carbon economy-finding efficiency trucking program, Efficiency Manitoba residential natural gas efficiency programs—\$18 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Stay tuned, I've got more.

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

Ms. Naylor: After losing two court cases, widespread public pushback and wasting hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars, this government finally abandoned their challenge of the federal price on pollution. Nearly a year ago, they committed to developing and implementing a carbon-pricing plan by December 31st of this year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that this government is not fond of deadlines. Fortunately, they still have time to deliver on this one.

Will the minister confirm whether a carbon-pricing plan will be announced by December 31st of this year?

Mr. Wharton: The member opposite talks about deadlines and pollution. Well, let's look at their record on deadlines.

(1) Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that one of the largest freshwater lakes in this beautiful country is Lake Winnipeg, just north of us, which I happen to reside on. We know that for almost 20 years, the NDP did nothing, nothing on the North End treatment plant in the city of Winnipeg, the largest polluter to Lake Winnipeg and our waterways.

We will take no lessons from the members opposite when it comes to pollution.

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

Ms. Naylor: Manitobans want a government that takes action on climate change and not one that wastes taxpayer money on failed court cases. They also want a government that takes action and doesn't interfere in the building of the North End water treatment plant, as this government did for six years.

Thankfully, they've abandoned the court appeals after losing two cases and pushback from this side of the House. They've committed to developing a carbon-pricing plan, but we have heard nothing. The government has until December 31st of this year; that date is coming quickly.

Can the minister confirm whether he will actually meet this deadline?

Mr. Wharton: We certainly know that members opposite had no plan, no plan at all, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We certainly know that the members opposite would never have a plan other than the back of a napkin.

Let me tell you, for members of the House, what our government is doing, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We've—increasing the ethanol content in gasoline from 8.5 to 10 per cent, in biodiesel, 2.5 to 5 per cent. The efficiency truck program saves 25 million litres, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of GHG emissions over a life cycle of equipment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have no plan. We're just getting started.

Post-Secondary Education Issues with Student Aid Program

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): My office continues to receive complaints from students about this government's poorly run Manitoba Student Aid program.

Students have faced extreme delays in accessing funding that they need to go to school. This has resulted in students having to pay out of pocket, to take on debt as funding for their education because their payments did not arrive before deadlines.

This debt is detrimental for students who have—already struggling with increasingly high rising costs of living.

This government needs to take action to ensure that students receive their funding in a timely manner.

Will the minister commit to doing so today?

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): We are continually enhancing our processes and products. That includes Manitoba Student Aid.

I know that staff are working hard each and every day to ensure that application inquiries from clients are addressed in a timely manner. I can share that in 2021-2022, Manitoba Student Aid helped over 16,000 students, including Indigenous students and low-income students, in access to post-secondary education.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Moses: The continuing issues with Manitoba Student Aid are simply unacceptable. I wrote to the minister months ago to share stories of students who have concerns and urged him to take action.

In the fall semester, over 200 students had delays with their—receiving their student aid. And he had time over the summer to fix it, but he didn't. That's why it's so disappointing to hear that students are now still coming to my office with complaints because they're not receiving their student aid money in time—students such as a mother of six, who contacted my office after

extreme delays and now she's considering dropping out of school.

The minister should take urgent action on this to resolve problems with Manitoba Student Aid.

Will he do so today?

Mr. Reyes: Let me share with the House that during 2021-2022, Manitoba Student Aid provided approximately \$217 million in both federal and provincial student loans, grants and bursaries, including \$51.9 million in Manitoba student loans and \$19 million in Manitoba bursaries to help post-secondary students receive a high quality education in Manitoba.

The financial supports that our government provided these students will help them not only receive a quality education but gain the right skills and knowledge to stimulate our growing Manitoba economy.

We have a plan; they do not.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (14:10)

Mr. Moses: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't think the minister quite understands how much Manitoba students rely on Student Aid. It's why these persistent issues, when it comes to Manitoba Student Aid, is such a huge issue.

Issues like low turnaround time, poor-performing website, inadequate phone supports and general lack of organization with Manitoba Student Aid are the complaints that I hear all the time from Manitoba students. They reach out to my office over these concerns, and they want to hear action from this minister. They're missing out on thousand dollars, and it's forcing them to go into debt.

Will the minister commit to fixing issues with Manitoba Student Aid and help students in our province today?

Mr. Reyes: Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government is providing students with record levels of financial support in the form of scholarships, bursaries and loans, unlike the previous NDP government, who didn't know how to run a Manitoba Student Aid system and wasted \$15 million on outdated student aid software, resulting in delays in student applications and 'disparance' of funds.

We're still cleaning the mess. They have lack of action; we are—have a plan of action. They have no plan. We're cleaning up the mess; we're continuing to

clean up the mess, and we're going to get it right, unlike the NDP.

Northern Health-Care Services ER Closures and Patient Transfers

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): When the Leaf Rapids Health Centre's ER closed on July the 13th, residents were told the move was temporary, for only six days. It's now been more than two months.

More than 80 days later, and the region is still saying it'll be—it will be closed for an indeterminate amount of time. Likewise, cuts at Lynn Lake and Snow Lake have resulted in disruptions.

Will the minister address and reverse the cuts her government has made to northern health care?

Hon. Reg Helwer (Acting Minister of Health): Well, I'm pleased to talk to about the investments that our government has made in health care, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have \$50 million that have gone into the HSC Operation Excellence to increase HSC surgical and diagnostic capacity by 25 per cent. I was pleased to be at HSC with the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) not that long ago for a \$750,000 investment to HSC Children's Hospital in-patient monitor 'upgrades'—upgrades to support 26 in-patient monitor beds. This will enable nurses to spend more time at the bedside, less time monitoring those patients in person, serving more patients.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$2 million for the Swan River CT scanner: That was very well received in the Swan River area. People were coming up and telling the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) that they had never anticipated training—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Bushie: I did not hear the word North at all in any of that response.

Patients are being moved across the North and far from family. My colleague, the member from Thompson, raised the issue of transfer from Thompson to Flin Flon. At Lynn Lake, all the long-term patients were sent to Flin Flon without notifying family and community. This is an eight-hour drive. This is such an undignified way to treat our seniors.

Why won't the minister ensure there is care available for our seniors close to home in the North?

Mr. Helwer: Well, in order to continue about, you know, portions of investment in Manitoba in—not just in Winnipeg but also in northern Manitoba, we just talked about the Swan River CT scanner where people were coming up and talking to the Premier, thanking her for this announcement, saying that, I had never anticipated training as a CT technician, and now I have that ability to do that, to perform CT scans in Swan River, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So we also have 700,000–\$200.5 million in the Russell CancerCare site redevelopment. CancerCare in Russell, Mr. Deputy Speaker, something the NDP ignored for many, many years.

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

Mr. Bushie: Well, the minister tried to drop the word North in that answer in some capacity, but there are still less and less surgeons available in the North. Consequently, more and more people have to travel south.

Unfortunately, under this government, the northern patient transfer program is inadequate. We have heard from constituents who have missed appointments because they simply could not afford the cost of their attending their appointments down south.

When will the minister address and reverse the cuts they have made to the northern patient transfer program?

Mr. Helwer: Well, we've lost count of how many emergency rooms the NDP closed—20, 30, pick a number, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Constantly closing throughout their inactivity.

Recently, the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) was up at a summit in Thompson listening to health-care professionals there, listening to the community about things that needed to change, Mr. Deputy Speaker. She's listening. We're getting things done.

We have—they—we know they have no plan whatsoever.

Domestic Violence Shelters Funding for Secondary Housing

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I recently attended the AGM for a women's shelter that runs secondary housing, transitional housing where women and children who are escaping violence can stay for up to year. They're about to mark their 30th anniversary, and for half that time—the last 15 years—their provincial funding has been frozen.

How can it be, given what we know about domestic violence in Manitoba—where women face violent partners at eight times the national average and Indigenous women are 2.7 times more likely to be murdered, and when we know things got worse in the pandemic—how can it be that there has been no increase in provincial funding to make sure that women and children have secondary housing to get out of an emergency shelter for this long?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): If the member opposite was paying attention, Budget 2022 did bring in significant increases, as well as a modernization strategy to improve the funding formula for all women's shelters in the province. Our government is also working with women's resource centres so—and those providing transitional housing and long-term housing for women who have been fleeing domestic violence and need to have housing.

In fact, earlier this year, our government stepped in and worked with the North End women's resource centre after they'd learned that Ottawa—the Liberals in Ottawa—was cutting funding for eight beds at the North End women's resource centre for transitional housing. That member sat by. He did nothing. He didn't call his friends in Ottawa to ask for that funding to be reinstated.

It's this government that responded—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member—minister's time has expired.

The honourable member for St. Boniface. *[interjection]* Order, please.

Mr. Lamont: Here are the numbers—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: —which I table, from page 91 of the Department of Families' annual report. Since 2019, calls to women's shelter crisis lines have been growing by more than 1,000 per year, but this year funding is \$241,000 less than it was two years ago.

Second-stage funding has been frozen at \$571,000 every year for the last three years. And when it comes to specialized programs, while the number of clients has soared by 50 per cent from 2,297 to three hundred and—3,485, the funding has dropped from one point—from \$2.5 million to \$1.8 million this year.

I have people who are calling me who are desperate for help, who have no place to go.

Will the Premier act immediately to increase funding to provide women fleeing domestic violence

a safe place with supports, even if it means renting hotel rooms?

Ms. Squires: Madam—Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government recognizes that intimate partner violence was certainly a shadow pandemic in the last few years.

We have seen situations escalate because people were spending more time at home and that was not a safe environment for a lot of women. That is why we've made significant investments in our women's shelters and our resource centres. That is why we've established permanent funding for hotlines for people to reach out to receive supports.

And if the member wants to do something constructive, he can come in this House and he can vote in favour of Budget 2022, which has significant investments and increase in funding for women's shelters and women's initiatives throughout the province.

Stanley Knowles School Student Questions for Premier

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Today, I get the opportunity to ask a question on behalf of the grade 7s from Stanley Knowles School, who are—have joined us here in the gallery today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these students have many great questions—even what the Premier had for breakfast this morning. They also touched upon issues including: how do we get rid of laws that are not working for us? Why do people who immigrate here have to answer such a long test? And what is our Province's debt?

So based on these topics, I'd like to ask the Premier: What will the future of Manitoba look like?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Great question. *[interjection]*

* (14:20)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable First Minister.

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank all of the students who are here today and for the member opposite for asking those great questions on their behalf. So, thank you, to all of you.

I can tell you that the future in Manitoba looks bright because of many of the initiatives that we have taken on this side of the House and our government, over the course of the last number of years, to make life more affordable for Manitobans, to make life—to also tackle some of the surgical and diagnostic wait

lists in the province of Manitoba. These are all the exciting things.

And, of course, education. Yesterday was World Teachers' Day, which was a great thing, and I see your teachers here today. We thank you for the incredible work that you do, but thank you to all of you for being here today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The First Minister's time has expired.

Manitoba Hydro and Public Utilities Board Information Regarding Bill 36

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I hate to spoil the fun, but there has been much debate about Bill 36—a lot of it, unfortunately, focusing on some pretty blatant misrepresentations of the facts.

For the sake of this House and members opposite, can the Minister of Finance briefly explain the explanatory note he tabled in the House last week?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Mr. Deputy Speaker, these students from Stanley Knowles and their teachers know the value of reading for comprehension. The NDP has done less well at this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the NDP, bipole and Keeyask came in almost \$4 billion over cost, the debt of Hydro tripled, 40 cents on every dollar now goes to pay bankers, and that puts at risk the fundamental advantage to ratepayers, which has been low rates.

And that is why Bill 36 sets hydro on a path to stability by setting a limit, a cap on the rate of any increase. And the bill reads the general rate increase for a fiscal year cannot exceed 5 per cent or the rate of inflation, whichever is less.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time has expired. *[interjection]* Order.

Prairie Mountain Health Region Home-Care Hours Available

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Mr. Deputy Speaker, documents provided to us through FIPPA show that, despite increasing demand for home care, the number of hours being provided is going down. And I'll table those documents.

In prairie region, despite more costs and more clients, there are less hours of care being provided.

Why are those living in Brandon and Westman paying more for home care while getting nearly 100,000 less hours of care?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I share the member's concerns.

We are in a process of establishing and reviewing our home—our whole home-care strategies to ensure that the needs of Manitobans will be met in the future, and I continually liaison with my colleague, the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon), and we are looking for input from Manitobans to come to terms with this, and we will be providing solutions.

MLA Marcelino: Mr. Deputy Speaker, home-care clients are very, very frustrated. This government is nearing the end of its second term, and they're still requiring input and consultations even at this point.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government's explanations don't add up. One thousand more people need home care in Westman compared to five years ago. The cost of this care is up, but the hours of service delivered is way down—100,000 less hours of care than what it was five years ago.

When people say that they can't get the home care they need, that is why, and it's because of this government's cuts.

Why is the government cutting home care for Westman residents?

Mr. Johnston: Our increase to the needs of Manitobans regarding health is well-documented. We continue to increase the amount of money in terms of things that haven't been done in this province before and we will continue to do that.

As I mentioned, we are certainly studying this question. I, along with the Minister of Health will continue to do it, and we will find solutions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Notre Dame on a final supplementary.

MLA Marcelino: Mr. Deputy Speaker, instead of increases to home care, what we've heard is increases in workload for less pay and less benefits for home-care workers, so we're not hearing from the same folks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this week, we have heard terrible stories from Manitobans not being able to get enough hours of home care. The number of those needing home care continues to climb. In prairie region, the hours of care continue to decline while the overall cost has gone up.

Why are those living in Brandon and Westman paying more for home care while receiving nearly 100,000 less hours of care? I've tabled the documents

for the minister, and I'd like him to address those documents.

Mr. Johnston: The circumstances that exist basically worldwide is that there is staffing shortages within the health-care system. And our Minister of Health, supported by our government, is continuing to look for solutions to try to enhance the numbers to support health-care needs in Manitoba. And we will continue to do that.

I mean, the Leader of the Opposition continues to challenge this government, regards to agency staffing to ensure that the needs of Manitoba are met, and yet, they criticize the fact that we are trying to find solutions. So, Madam Speaker, we will continue to do—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time has expired.

The time for oral questions has ended.

PETITIONS

Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly. The background of this petition is as follows:

The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys has been served notice by the Red River Valley School Division to vacate the premises currently situated in the auditorium of École Héritage school, by March 31, 2023.

The auditorium was originally built in the 1960s by renowned Manitoba architect Étienne Gaboury, and it has been home to the JRL for 48 years.

A photo of the auditorium captioned, the regional library, is published in a 2008 document titled, heritage buildings in the RM of De Salaberry and St. Pierre Jolys. It is marked as an important modern building that could attain the status of heritage site.

JRL and Red River Valley School Division have flourished from a mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding for 54 years.

Their shared collection boasts over 50,000 books and has the fourth largest collection of French-language literature in rural Manitoba.

Students that are bused in from the neighbouring municipalities that do not have a public library, such as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleefeld, are provided with free access to the public library and its fourth largest collection of French books in rural Manitoba, during the school year.

Therefore, we petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To request the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services to consider granting the auditorium to the JRL by March 1 of 2023.

(2) To request the Minister of Education to recognize the value the JRL provides to the student population of ÉHS, as well as the communities of St. Pierre Jolys and the RM of De Salaberry.

(3) To request the Minister of Education and Minister of Francophone Affairs to recognize that an MOU between the Red River Valley School Division and the JRL is mutually, financially and culturally beneficial.

* (14:30)

(4) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to recognize the heritage potential of this important building and its status in the community; and

(5) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to prevent any renovations to the auditorium that would destroy and devalue the architectural integrity of the building.

This petition is signed by Greg Walters, Sara Ringinaco [*phonetic*] and Barbara Walters.

Thank you.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library has been served notice by the Red River Valley School Division to vacate the premises currently situated in the auditorium of École Héritage school by March 31st, 2023.

(2) The auditorium was originally built in the 1960s by renowned Manitoba architect Étienne Gaboury, and it has been home to JRL for 48 years.

(3) A photo of the art-auditorium, captioned the regional library, is published in a 2008 document titled heritage buildings in RM De Salaberry and St. Pierre Jolys. It is marked as an important modern building that could be—that could attain the status of a heritage site.

(4) JRL and RRVSD have flourished from a mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding for 54 years.

(5) Their shared collection boasts over 50,000 books and has the fourth largest collection of French-language literature in rural Manitoba.

(6) Students that are bused in from the neighbouring municipalities that do not have a public library, such as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleefeld, are provided with free access to the public library and its fourth largest collection of French books in rural Manitoba during the school year.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To request the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services to consider granting the auditorium to the JRL by March 31st, 2023.

(2) To request the Minister of Education to recognize the value of—JRL provides to the student population of ÉHS, as well as the communities of Village de Saint-Pierre-Jolys and the RM De Salaberry.

(3) To request the Minister of Education and the Minister of Francophone Affairs to recognize that MOU between the RRVSD and JRL is mutually, financially and culturally beneficial.

(4) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to recognize the heritage potential of this important building and its status in the community.

(5) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to prevent any renovations to the auditorium that would destroy and devalue the architectural integrity of this building.

And this has been signed by Chris Hartin, Ryan Cox, Margaret Neville and many other Manitobans.

Louise Bridge

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Over 25,000 vehicles per day cross the Louise Bridge, which has served as a vital link for vehicular traffic between northeast Winnipeg and the downtown for the last 110 years.

(2) Current structure will undoubtedly be declared unsafe in a few years as it has deteriorated

extensively, becoming functionally obsolete, subject—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Maloway: —to more frequent—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Maloway: —unplanned repairs—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Maloway: —and cannot be widened to accommodate future traffic capacity.

(3) As far back as 2008, City of Winnipeg has studied where the new replacement bridge should be situated.

(4) After including the bridge replacement in the City's five-year capital budget forecast in 2009, the new bridge became a short-term construction priority in the City's transportation master plan of 2011.

(5) City capital and budget plans identified replacement of the Louise Bridge on a site just east of the bridge and expropriated homes there on the south side of Nairn Avenue in anticipation of a 2015 start.

(6) In 2014, the new City administration did not make use of available federal infrastructure funds.

(7) The new Louise Bridge Committee began its campaign to demand a new bridge and its surveys confirmed residents wanted a new bridge beside the current bridge, with the old bridge kept open for local traffic.

(8) The NDP provincial government signalled its firm commitment to partner with the City on replacing the Louise Bridge in its 2015 Throne Speech. Unfortunately, provincial infrastructure initiatives, such as the new Louise bridge, came to a halt with the election of the Progressive Conservative government in 2016.

(9) More recently, the City tethered the Louise Bridge replacement issue to its new transportation master plan and eastern corridor project. Its recommendations have now identified the location of the new Louise bridge to be placed just to the west of the current bridge, not to the east as originally proposed. The City expropriation process has begun.

(10) The Premier has a duty to direct the provincial government to provide financial assistance to the City so it can complete the long overdue—this vital—long-overdue, vital link to northeast Winnipeg and Transcona.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the new Premier to financially assist the City of Winnipeg on building the three-lane bridge in each direction to maintain this vital link between northeast Winnipeg, Transcona and the downtown.

(2) To urge the provincial government to recommend that the City of Winnipeg keep the old bridge fully open to traffic while the new bridge is under construction.

(3) To urge the provincial government to consider the feasibility of keeping it open for active transportation in the future.

And this petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Je désire présenter la pétition suivante à l'Assemblée législative.

Le contexte de cette pétition est le suivant :

1) La Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library a été avisée par la Division scolaire Vallée de la rivière Rouge de libérer les locaux actuellement situés dans l'auditorium de l'École Heritage School d'ici le 31 mars 2023.

2) L'auditorium a été construit dans les années 1960 par le célèbre architecte manitobain Étienne Gaboury, la B-R-G y est installée depuis 48 ans.

3) Une photo de l'auditorium intitulée la bibliothèque régionale est publiée dans un document de 2008 intitulé : bâtiments patrimoniaux de De Salaberry et Saint-Pierre-Jolys. Il est indiqué qu'il s'agit d'un bâtiment moderne important qui pourrait atteindre le statut de site patrimonial.

4) La B-R-G et la DSVRR ont prospéré grâce à un protocole d'entente mutuellement bénéfique pendant 54 ans.

5) Leur collection commune compte plus de 50 000 livres et possède la quatrième plus grande collection de littérature de langue française dans les régions rurales du Manitoba.

6) Les élèves qui sont transportés par autobus des municipalités voisines qui n'ont pas de bibliothèque publique, comme Niverville, Grunthal et Kleefeld, ont accès gratuitement à la bibliothèque publique, et à sa quatrième plus grande collection de livres en français

dans les régions rurales du Manitoba pendant l'année scolaire.

Nous présentons à l'Assemblée législative du Manitoba la pétition suivante :

1) De demander au ministre du Travail, de la Protection des consommateurs et des Services gouvernementaux d'envisager de concéder l'auditorium à la B-R-G d'ici le 1er mars 2023 ;

2) Demander au ministre de l'Éducation de reconnaître la valeur que la B-R-G apporte à la population étudiante de l'ÉHS, ainsi qu'aux communautés du Village de Saint-Pierre-Jolys et de la MR De Salaberry ;

3) Demander au ministre de l'Éducation et au ministre des Affaires francophones de reconnaître qu'un protocole d'entente entre la RRVSD et la G-R-L est mutuellement bénéfique, financièrement et culturellement ;

4) Demander au ministre du Sport, de la Culture et du Patrimoine de reconnaître le potentiel patrimonial de cet important bâtiment et son statut au sein de la communauté ;

5) Demander au ministre du Sport, de la Culture et du Patrimoine d'empêcher toute rénovation de l'auditorium qui détruirait et dévaloriserait l'intégrité architecturale du bâtiment.

Cette pétition a été signée par Carole Beaudry, Danie English et Janique Gauthier.

Translation

I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library was notified by the Red River Valley School Division to vacate premises currently located in the auditorium of the École Heritage School by March 31, 2023.

(2) The auditorium was built in the 1960s by famous Manitoban architect Étienne Gaboury, and it has been home to the G-R-L for 48 years.

(3) A photo of the auditorium captioned the regional library was published in a 2008 document titled significant heritage buildings of De Salaberry and St. Pierre Jolys. It is described as an important modern building that could attain the status of heritage site.

(4) The G-R-L and the RRVSD have flourished by means of a mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding for 54 years.

(5) Their shared collection boasts over 50,000 books and includes the fourth largest collection of French-language literature in rural Manitoba.

(6) During the school year, students who are bused in from neighbouring municipalities that do not have a public library, such as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleefeld, are provided with free access to the public library and its fourth largest collection of French-language literature in rural Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services to consider granting the auditorium to the G-R-L by March 1, 2023.

(2) To urge the Minister of Education to recognize the value that G-R-L provides to the student population of ÉHS, as well as the communities of Village of St. Pierre Jolys and the RM of De Salaberry.

(3) To urge the Minister of Education and the Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs to recognize that a memorandum of understanding between the RRVSD and the G-R-L is mutually, financially and culturally beneficial.

(4) To urge the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to recognize the heritage potential of this important building and its status in the community.

(5) To urge the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to prevent any renovations to the auditorium that would destroy or devalue the architectural integrity of the building.

This petition was signed by Carole Beaudry, Danie English et Janique Gauthier.

* (14:40)

Home-Care Services

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the background of this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This has been signed by Cole Beres [*phonetic*], Angeleigh Manaois and Demi Manaois and many other Manitobans.

Hearing Aids

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

A hearing aid is a battery-powered electronic device designed to improve an individual's ability to perceive sound. Worn in or behind a person's ear, they make some sounds louder, helping people hear better when it's quiet and when it's noisy.

People who suffer hearing loss, whether due to aging, illness, employment or accident, not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, family or colleagues, they can also experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

Hearing loss can also impact the safety of an individual with hearing loss, as it affects the ability to hear cars coming, safety alarms, call 911, et cetera.

A global commission on the state of the research for dementia care and prevention released an updated consensus report in July 2020, identifying 12 key risk factors for dementia and cognitive decline. The strongest risk factor that was indicated was hearing loss. It was calculated that up to 8 per cent of the total number of dementia cases could potentially be avoided with management of hearing loss.

Hearing aids are therefore essential to the mental health and well-being of Manitobans, especially to those at significant risk of dementia, Alzheimer's, a disorder of the brain affecting cognition in the ever-growing senior population.

Audiologists are health-care professionals who help patients decide which kind of hearing aid will work best for them based on the type of hearing loss, patient's age and ability to manage small devices, lifestyle and ability to afford.

The cost of hearing aids can be prohibitive to many Manitobans, depending on their income and circumstances. Hearing aids cost an average of \$995 to \$4,000 per ear, and many professionals say the hearing aids only work at their best for five years.

Manitoba residents under the age of 18 who require a hearing aid, as prescribed by an otolaryngologist or audiologist, will receive either an 80 per cent reimbursement from Manitoba Health of a fixed amount for an analog device, up to a maximum of \$500 per ear, or 80 per cent of a fixed amount for a digital or analog programmable device, up to a maximum of \$1,800. However, this reimbursement is not available to Manitobans who need the device who are over the age of 18, which will result in financial hardship for many young people entering the workforce, students and families. In addition, seniors representing 14.3 per cent of Manitoba's population are not

eligible for reimbursement despite being the group most likely in need of a hearing aid.

Most insurance companies only provide a minimal partial cost of a hearing aid and many Manitobans, especially retired persons, age-old pensioners and other low-income earners do not have access to health insurance plans.

The Province of Quebec's hearing devices program covers all costs related to hearing aids and assistive-listening devices, including the purchase, repair, and place-replacement.

Alberta offers subsidies to all seniors, 65 and over, and low-income adults 18 to 64 once every five years.

New Brunswick provides coverage for the purchase and maintenance not covered by other agencies or private health insurance plans, as well as assistance for those for whom the purchase would cause financial hardship.

Manitobans over age 18 are only eligible support for hearing aids if they're receiving Employment and Income Assistance, and the reimbursement only provides a maximum of \$500 an ear.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

1) To urge the provincial government to consider hearing loss as a medical treatment under Manitoba Health.

2) To urge the provincial government to provide income-based coverage for hearing aids to all who need them, as hearing loss has proven to be an essential-to Manitobans-as hearing has been proved to be essential to Manitoba's cognitive, mental and social health and well-being.

Signed by Ron Halbesma, Elizabeth Toews, Ken Wilks and many others.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

A hearing aid is a battery-powered electronic device designed to improve an individual's ability to perceive sound. Worn in or behind a person's ear, they make some sounds louder, helping people hear better when it's quiet and when it's noisy.

People who suffer hearing loss, whether due to aging, illness, employment or accident, not only

lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, family or colleagues, they also experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

Hearing loss can also impact the safety of an individual with hearing loss, as it affects the ability to hear cars coming, safety alarms, call 911, et cetera.

A global commission on the state of the research for dementia care and prevention released an update consensus report in July 2020, identifying 12 key risk factors for dementia and cognitive decline. The strongest risk factor that was indicated was hearing loss. It was calculated that up to 8 per cent of the total number of dementia cases could potentially be avoided with management of hearing loss.

Hearing aids are therefore essential to the mental health and well-being of Manitobans, especially to those at significant risk of dementia and Alzheimer's, a disorder of the brain affecting cognition in the ever-growing senior population.

Audiologists are here—are health-care professionals who help patients decide which kind of hearing aid would work best for them, based on the type of hearing loss, patient's age and ability to manage small devices, lifestyle and ability to afford.

The cost of hearing aids can be prohibitive to many Manitobans, depending on their income and circumstances. Hearing aids cost on average \$995 to \$4,000 per ear, and many professionals say that hearing aids only work at their best for five years.

Manitoba residents under the age of 18 who require a hearing aid, as prescribed by an 'otolaryngologist' or audiologist, will receive either an 80 per cent reimbursement from Manitoba Health or a fixed amount for an analog device, up to the maximum of \$500 per ear, or 80 per cent of a fixed-income amount for a digital or analog programmable device, up to a maximum of \$1,800. However, this reimbursement is not available to Manitobans who need the device who are over the age of 18, which will result in financial hardships for many young people entering the workforce, students and families. In addition, seniors representing 14.3 per cent of Manitoba's population are not eligible for reimbursement, despite being the group most likely in need of hearing aids.

Most insurance companies only provide a minimal partial cost of a hearing aid, and many Manitobans, especially retired persons, old-age

pensioners and other low-income earners do not have access to health insurance plans.

* (14:50)

The Province of Quebec's hearing devices program covers all costs related to hearing aids and assistive listening devices, including the purchase, repair and replacement.

Alberta offers subsidies to all seniors 65 and over and low-income adults 18 to 64 once every five years.

New Brunswick provides coverage for the purchase and maintenance not covered by other agencies or private health insurance plans, as well as assistance for those whom the purchase would cause financial hardship.

Manitobans over age 18 are only eligible for support for hearing aids if they are receiving Employment and Income Assistance, and the reimbursement only provides a maximum of \$500 an ear.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider hearing loss as a medical treatment under Manitoba Health.

And to urge the provincial government to provide income-based coverage for hearing aids to all who need them, as hearing has been proven to be essential to Manitobans' cognitive, mental and social health and wellbeing.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are there any other petitions? Seeing none, we will move along.

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Wednesday, October 12th, 2022, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 233, The Engineering and Geoscientific Professions Amendment Act; and Bill 237, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Poppy Number Plates).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Wednesday, October 12th at 6 p.m. to consider Bill 233, The Engineering and Geoscientific Professions Amendment Act; and Bill 237, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Poppy Number Plates).

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: In co-operation with the honourable Opposition House Leader, I am pleased to table the revised Estimates order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, would you be so kind as to resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader that the House will resolve into the Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

SENIORS AND LONG-TERM CARE

* (15:00)

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. Is there leave to allow the opposition to sit at the other side of the table to allow them to see the screens that are situated in the room? *[Agreed]*

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care. Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

The member for Union Station.

Does the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care have something he'd like to say?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I just, as per yesterday's meeting, I would like to provide further information to the member, as well as a clarification, if you'll allow me.

Mr. Chairperson: Proceed.

Mr. Johnston: As of April—this is in regards to the personal-care-home beds that the member had asked about yesterday. As of April the 1st, 2022, there were 9,513 licensed personal-care-home beds, and I believe I gave that answer accurately yesterday. With the addition of 36 beds with the opening of Rest Haven in the summer, there are 9,549 licensed beds. As of October the 4th, 2022, there were 9,462 beds available for occupancy.

Beds may not be available due to factors like repairs to infrastructure or outbreaks. As of October the 4th, 2022, there was a 99.4 per cent occupancy, or 9,405 beds were occupied. So I believe that answers the member's question on that particular item.

And just for clarification, I would like to also clarify for the member in regards to my answer yesterday on equity and diversity, I am personally interested in and will endeavour to look into this matter further.

* (15:10)

As well, I will raise the issue with my colleagues, as it is my understanding that there are areas such as privacy and process that need to be considered. However, I indicated to the member that I will certainly take the remarks of the minister under consideration.

Mr. Chairperson: Before we continue on, I'd just like to inform the committee that we are having some technical difficulties with the clocks. The clock that I have in front of me is working, but the one that the members see is not. So when the member's or minister's time has come down to one minute remaining, I will wave my little yellow pad in the air to remind you that there's one minute left in your speaking time.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I thank the minister for providing that information right off the hop, and for providing the clarification around the benchmark data that he will be pursuing. I think that that's a good approach. And I look forward to hearing more from the minister in terms of ensuring that representation is reflected in the data.

I'd like to ask about personal-care-home beds that were promised by this minister's government. So, many Manitobans will remember that this government promised 1,200 new personal-care-home beds. Based on the data the minister has just provided, it's very clear that they have fallen well short of that goal.

Can the minister explain why there are less beds now that are available for occupancy in our health-care system than when they started?

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member's question, the reduction is based on the closure of Parkview personal-care home.

MLA Asagwara: Given that Parkview—Revera's Parkview Place has closed, has the minister received notice that any other personal-care homes have also closed or intend to close? And if so, how many beds are involved in those potential closures, or if they've already happened, bed losses due to those closures?

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member's question, to my knowledge, my department has not received any notice of further closure.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response. I'll presume that he's also meaning that he hasn't received notice of any pending closures or any closures that are going to be happening in the future, near or otherwise.

Mr. Johnston: Yes, I have not received any notice of further closures.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for providing that clarity. I appreciate it.

In July, the minister launched engagement on personal-care-home standards. That engagement has since closed.

Can the minister tell us when he might put forward regulatory changes as a result of that specific engagement?

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member's question, the standards review was actually an initiative by the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon). I will indicate that the Stevenson review recommendations that I indicated have been adopted by the government, and my department will be implementing.

* (15:20)

Our department will be working closely with the Department of Health to ensure that the standards that we adopt will be implemented.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response.

I just want to make sure that I'm clear. I'm speaking specifically to an announcement the government made in July. The release was sent out July 12th over the summer, saying that they would be engaging citizens regarding the standards of personal-care

homes. They were—you were inviting—rather, the minister and the government were inviting Manitobans to provide feedback on personal-care-home standards to help the government better understand their perspectives on this topic.

Can the minister clarify if he's saying that the—that engagement is specifically being dealt with by the Minister of Health or is this engagement something his department was also involved with? Thank you.

Mr. Johnston: Further to the member's question, upon reviewing the July 12th news release, it states that Minister Gordon is initiating the engagement on personal-care homes, and as I'd indicated in my earlier answer, our department is very interested in the results of that engagement and work very closely—as I'm sure the member can appreciate our department's relation to Health—and I'm very much looking forward to the results that that engagement delivers.

As well, as I have indicated to the member, we are very aggressive in establishing the recommendations from the Stevenson report. We do have a steering committee and we are following through on the—all of the recommendations that have been made and are being adopted.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for providing that clarification. The minister actually answered a question for me in his response and provided a great deal of clarity, so I do appreciate that.

I have a question now about staffing in personal-care homes, and I've got a few questions around this area that I'd like to put forward to the minister, but I'll start with the fact that the minister announced over the summer that there would be 400 more staff at personal-care homes.

Can the minister tell us how many additional staff have been added? And to be clear, it's really important to clarify the additional staff that have been added, since the minister identified that 400 additional staff would be incorporated into personal-care homes in Manitoba.

Thank you.

* (15:30)

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member's question, my department is certainly following the progress of the Stevenson steering committee, and I am anticipating hearing an update in November on the staffing situation.

MLA Asagwara: Yesterday, the minister provided me a bit of a breakdown on how the funds—two pots of dollars were spent in regards to personal-care homes: the \$32 million in grants and the \$21 million in other expenditures.

And in his response in regards to the \$32 million in grants, he talked about \$15 million being allocated for infection control and \$16 million being allocated for other items, staffing included. And he did make mention of nursing positions and other staffing positions.

So, given that the minister does seem to have a sense that those funds were allocated to address staffing and to bolster health-care human resources, I'm hoping he can give me a sense, even an approximation, of how many additional staffing positions, nursing or otherwise, have been added. If he can't clarify if the 400 more staff target has been achieved, I can appreciate that. But if the minister could provide some clarity on just—approximation on how many positions they believe have been added, and perhaps a breakdown on what types of positions. That would be great.

Mr. Johnston: And as I indicated earlier, I am expecting an update in November from the steering committee. The regional health authorities are mobilizing actively to recruit various positions.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister provide us with staffing number information for personal-care homes in Manitoba? So, for example, a number—the number of health-care aides, the number of nurses, number of vacancies, et cetera. If the minister could provide that information for personal-care homes across the province, that would be greatly appreciated.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My arms were getting a little tired there, I—thank you.

In answer to the member's question, in order for the member to receive the most accurate information in regards to the data that the member is asking for, it would be my suggestion that this question be referred to the Health Department. The accessible data, the member would be best served to receive the information directly from Health.

* (15:40)

MLA Asagwara: My understanding, given the minister's mandate and responsibilities, are that he should have access to this information. While I can appreciate

that perhaps the minister does not have or might not have access to exactly, you know, perfect information at this time, I would hope that the minister would have access to information and data that would at least give him an approximation of what is going on in terms of staffing in the personal-care homes that are—that—where the seniors that he is responsible for leading their health care and their needs are living and residing.

So, if the minister is able to provide, again, even approximate data, as much information as possible in this area, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Johnston: As our department reviews, certainly, various issues, we do certainly have access to information.

However, I would indicate to the member that my initial answer is still my recommendation to the member: to ensure that the information that is required by the member is best ascertained by the Health Department.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response.

It is concerning that the minister will simultaneously acknowledge that he does, in fact, have access to information as the Minister for Seniors and Long-Term Care, but is unwilling to provide it because he believes I am best served to get that information from the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon).

The minister has an opportunity to provide the information he has available in order to alleviate concerns and questions that are being brought forward on behalf of Manitobans, and this is an area of significance given that we know our health-care system is facing a human resource crisis, one that, during this pandemic, resulted in some catastrophic health-care outcomes for seniors residing in personal-care homes.

So I don't really understand the minister's approach to this question. If he has the information available to him, which he's indicated he does, it would, in my mind, serve him very well and his department well to provide the information he does have available. And certainly on my own end, I can pursue further information from the Minister of Health if there are any other gaps.

So, again, we are asking these questions on behalf of Manitobans and it's disappointing that the minister is choosing to withhold this very important information regarding staffing information for personal-care

homes. But I am going to move on because the minister has made clear he's going to continue to withhold that information.

In June, the minister and the Minister of Health said that the Protection for Persons in Care Office would open an investigation into Oakview place Extendicare—a direct quote—upon the conclusion of the criminal investigation. End quote.

Can the minister provide us an update and—in terms of where things are, if they have any information in regards to the investigation and the status of Oakview place?

* (15:50)

Mr. Johnston: I can advise the member that there is an ongoing investigation into the situation that the member references.

The Protection for Persons in Care Office will be giving a report to the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) which will be shared with this ministry, and upon receiving that report, further initiatives may, in fact, be taken. The Licensing and Compliance branch is also, too, doing an investigation, and we'll be looking for the conclusions of that investigation also.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister provide clarity, I—and thank you for that; I thank the minister for that response. The minister says that the PPCO will be providing a report.

Can the minister clarify if that means that the PPCO is doing their own investigation and will provide a report to the Minister of Health which will then be shared with the minister in terms of the results of that investigation? I just want to make sure that I'm very clear and that I understand whether or not the PPCO is doing their own investigation.

If the PPCO is not doing their own investigation, can the minister clarify then what that report actually is and will be, and why they are not, therefore, doing their own investigation at the same time as the criminal investigation.

Thank you.

Mr. Johnston: I can indicate to the member that the PPCO is conducting an investigation, and upon the finalization of the investigation, there will be a report going to the Minister of Health, who will be sharing it with the Minister of Seniors.

* (16:00)

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for providing that clarification.

I do appreciate it and I apologize if I missed it in his first response when I initially asked the question, but can the minister provide a timeline for when he anticipates that report will be completed?

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member's question, I'm not really prepared to speculate on the timing of the results of the investigation. I would not try to suggest a minimal or maximum time frame. I will look forward to reviewing the results when it ultimately is brought to the attention to the Minister of Health.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for providing that response.

That information is very important, as he is well aware. There are families that have been incredibly harmed by what happened at Oakview place and are certainly deserving of answers to their questions, accountability and a path forward that we all hope ensures no seniors or elders will ever be subjected to the harms that we've heard reported.

So, that concludes my questions, and I want to thank the minister for his time in this committee.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions. At this point, we will allow virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the questions I will now call.

Resolution 34.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$53,668,000 for Seniors and Long-Term Care, Seniors and Long-Term Care, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 34.1.

The floor is open for questions.

An Honourable Member: I move that line—

Mr. Chairperson: The—I'm sorry, the member for Union Station.

MLA Asagwara: I move that line item 34.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care's (Mr. Johnston) salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Hearing no questions, is the committee ready for the question?

Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

The motion has been defeated.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 34.1.

Shall the resolution pass? *[interjection]* Oh, sorry, I got to read in the act.

Be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$662,000 for Seniors and Long-Term Care, Executive, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care.

We will take a—the next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply are for the Department of Environment, Climate and Parks.

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

The committee recessed at 4:06 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:10 p.m.

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE AND PARKS

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Environment, Climate and Parks.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks): I do. Great to be here this afternoon. It's my pleasure, again, to be here as the Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks, and the department's programs that we deliver, talk about the department's programs we deliver within this year's budget.

I want to state how pleased I am to be the minister of this very diverse department that serves Manitobans in numerous ways. I would also like to acknowledge the senior staff of my department that are here with us today, Mr. Chair. And they are Jan Forster, my deputy minister; Matt Wiebe, the executive financial officer and assistant deputy minister of Finance and Shared Services Division—that is a long name; Colleen Kachulak, the assistant deputy minister of Parks and Trails Division; Shannon Kohler, the assistant deputy minister of environment stewardship division; Neil Cunningham, assistant deputy minister of Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office; Elliott Brown, the assistant deputy minister of water stewardship division; and my special assistant, Erik Selch, who also is joining us today.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

At this time—acknowledge the hard work of, and the professionalism, of all of our department staff. I take my role as minister of the department most seriously. Our vision is one of a healthy and resilient nature—natural environment where current and future generations will prosper.

This reflects my government's commitment to balance the needs of Manitobans while protecting the environment, and also sustainably growing our economy, now and in the future. Protecting the environment has been a clear importance this past year as we work on a number of key priorities. Since becoming Minister of the Department of Environment, Climate and Parks, I have been—I'm pleased to meet a variety of stakeholders, industry representatives and Manitobans, including Indigenous communities.

I and our department are committed to listening to Manitobans and to stakeholders' groups to improve services our department offers. Despite the challenges of the past couple of years, due to COVID-19, meeting with individuals and groups from across this great province, often over by phone or video meetings, but also in person recently, which is a welcome sight, has been key importance for me, and I will continue to do so.

I want to highlight several priorities, priority areas of work in our department as a way to frame the opening of our discussions in committee today. Our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan sets out a bold vision for Manitoba to become Canada's cleanest, greenest and most climate-resilient province. It includes a variety of tools to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to changing climate, build a prosperous green economy that focuses on adding green jobs in Manitoba, protect our valuable waters and conserve our natural environment for both current and future generations to enjoy.

We have begun implementing our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan and have already achieved great success. The introduction of our government's Conservation and Climate Fund had an exceptional year of activity, with a number of proposals being approved for funding. Continued increases to the fund showcased our government's commitment to climate action.

Low-carbon government office has been established that works across the organization to support government of Manitoba departments and the summary government's many agencies, so that we can become leaders in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building climate resiliency.

Manitoba has been able to work with federal government and other provinces and territories to ensure access to dollars to deliver innovative and green programs and initiatives. For example, the government of Canada through the Low Carbon Economy Fund, and the government of Manitoba through Efficiency Manitoba, are each contributing to support natural gas reduction programs offered by Efficiency Manitoba. This is a tangible benefit that will improve Manitoba's energy efficiency and the health of our natural environment.

In addition, the Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office has been instrumental in leading the efficiency trucking program, which has been—which has seen the government of Manitoba contribute to an initiative that reduces greenhouse gas emissions in

transportation sector by providing rebates for fuel-saving technology and retrofits for heavy-duty vehicles.

The department continues to develop a multi-pronged approach to modernization of our provincial parks. The Park Endowment Fund is a big piece of this and illustrates the commitment of our government to our wonderful provincial parks.

Strategic capital infrastructure improvements continue to ensure that amenities and facilities that are available to enhance the experience of Manitobans who are increasing their visits to our parks and campgrounds. Capital spending is targeted to address a variety of priority projects for the benefit of Manitobans—Manitobans and our visitors.

We launched a study in partnership with Travel Manitoba to better understand the opportunities we may wish to consider to improve parks in Manitoba. I am looking forward to reviewing and creating—the creative and innovative ideas that may come from this study.

Our parks are not for sale. Instead, the study will ensure that public investment in parks is secure. Furthermore, our department, in partnership with our departments and stakeholder groups is focused on development of our trail strategy that will enhance trails for all Manitobans.

Trails are critical infrastructure that allow a variety of Manitobans to enjoy the great outdoors and we are committed to delivering a thoughtful and strategic plan. Our provincial parks and campgrounds are enjoyed by Manitobans, as well as many, many visitors to our province. Our government is committed to making provincial parks accessible for all.

In closing, there are many ongoing activities and critical priorities for the department. We are committed to building partnerships and continuing our ongoing discussions and consultations.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

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

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): The annual report for the Manitoba Environment, Climate and Parks for 2021-2022 shows that this Province is going in the wrong direction with underspending and cuts from the year before.

It is, in fact, this minister's job, more than any other in this government, to protect the environment, to protect parks and to get his government to take climate change seriously. Real action is needed to avoid the worst effects of climate change, and the bottom line is, there is not enough being done by this government.

We can see by the budget that this government's gone in the opposite direction. We know that you've dropped transit funding, dragged their feet on North End pollution plant, and, as I talked about earlier today, fought the carbon tax.

This government's done virtually nothing to increase protected spaces in Manitoba. And this government is in support of increasing the use of pesticides in this province that we heard from many folks talking in committee that they don't support this, that it increases dangers for health, it increases costs to the health-care system and it's worse for the environment and biodiversity, and it's unfortunate that that's the only bill that has even been brought forward by the minister of this department.

So, looking at the budget and the record, I just want to urge this department to do more.

Thank you.

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

Under the 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 12.1.(a), contained in resolution 12.1.

* (16:20)

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

Mr. Wharton: I have introduced the staff in my opening comments, so I think we're good.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Naylor: Thank you for introducing the senior staff that are present here today, Minister.

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

Mr. Wharton: Certainly pleased to provide technical officers to the member, and looking forward to also having a more broader discussion on the member from Wolseley's comments about the department not moving on climate. I think we're looking forward to challenging that comment today, and certainly we will be doing that in the coming minutes and days, as long we sit.

I'm happy to report that Erik Selch, Jack Zinger [*phonetic*] and Jonathan Scarth are technical officers within the department.

Would you like the titles? Special assistant, Erik Selch; executive assistant to the minister, Jack Zinger [*phonetic*] and chairperson of Clean Environment Commission, Jonathan Scarth.

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

Mr. Wharton: I know the member has a copy of the Budget 2022 supplement Estimates and expenditures for Manitoba Environment, Climate and Parks. I'll direct the member to page 13, which has a clear chart—an organizational chart that you're referencing.

That would be, again, page 13.

Ms. Naylor: Can the minister give a list of all current vacancies in the department?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly appreciate the question from the member from Wolseley.

Currently, as of August 31st, 2022, there are a total of vacant FTEs of 77.6, and 25 per cent of that number are actually administrative levels, where the—when the NRND was formed, some of them amalgamated over to our department, so I want to make sure I'm giving the member a clear understanding of what the 77.6 vacancy rate is. And again, to the total complement, it's about 16 per cent of our total complement of staff, full-time staff right now, FTEs.

Ms. Naylor: Can the minister—you don't—not to explain every one of those vacancies in detail, but can the minister give me an overview of what departments and positions where these vacancies, in general, are?

* (16:30)

Mr. Wharton: I know the member knows I—and I will give the member a little bit of a preamble; I know she's familiar with it.

Right across every sector, it doesn't matter where you are, or what—who you employ or how you try to employ, whether it be the food sector or service sector or retail sector or professional sector, finding employees, FTEs, right now, is one of the most difficult challenges that businesses have, governments have. We're certainly not immune to those issues, and I wanted to make sure that the member understood that and that that is the reality.

We find that a lot of the breakdown—again, 25 per cent was administrative, but the rest are spread out throughout departments—but the bottom line is that some in rural, for instance, were recruiting regularly but, again, trying to find folks that want to work and come to work has been a challenge, not only for government but for Manitobans—Manitoba employers at large.

Ms. Naylor: I can certainly appreciate the issues with hiring at this time. So I just want to confirm that there's not a high concentration of vacancies in any one position or any one part of the province.

Mr. Wharton: Right.

Ms. Naylor: Can the minister explain, looking at page 33 of the report, why the amount spent in 2021-22, \$157,430,000, is less than half of the last year's budget?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks.

Mr. Wharton: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, appreciate that.

And thank you for the question. We have a very good breakdown for you. Are you ready? Okay.

So, \$323 million. You're wondering why there was a difference, a discrepancy from '20-21 fiscal to '21-22. I have the answer.

We had a one-time write-up for orphaned and abandoned mines to the tune of \$160 million. As you know, our government is very proactive in ensuring that we get this—these issues cleared up, and we've taken action, and that's exactly what we're doing. That one-time write-up has given us the opportunity to go ahead and do that.

We also have a \$20-million write-up, as well, for a parks endowment fund. You're probably aware of that too. As you know, we had an announcement back

in late August on the endowment fund where we funded over 64 projects, and these are making differences within our provincial parks. I can tell you I had the opportunity to walk out on one of the mobimats in Birds Hill at the Birds Hill Lake. And, wow, what an opportunity for Manitobans, especially Manitobans with disabilities, to enjoy our beautiful parks, our lakes and really get out there and enjoy sometimes short summers, but the summers that we all enjoy.

So, I hope that answers the question for the member. It certainly puts us back to where we were in fiscal '21-22.

Ms. Naylor: I'm not sure I entirely understood, but that's okay. What I'd like to know is, you're talking about additional projects for parks and making parks more accessible, but spending specifically on parks and trails in '21-22 was 18-and-a-half million less than the prior fiscal year.

So why has the—why and how is the government cutting spending on parks and trails?

* (16:40)

Mr. Wharton: Again, earlier I talked about the endowment fund that our government started to—as we had to look at ways to ensure that our parks could be sustainable and could—we could recognize continued growth and investment within our parks. We—our government started the endowment fund, the parks endowment fund.

So just to give a little more context to the member: again, it was launched in 2021 with an initial investment of \$20 million. The Provincial Parks Endowment Fund is expected to generate approximately \$1 million per year to help enhance visitors' experiences in Manitoba provincial parks. Priorities for the fund are determined through a process involving engagement with citizens and stakeholders.

So, again, it's engaging Manitobans, and Manitobans wanted more investment in their parks. This gives them a sustainable, generational investment going forward through the endowment fund of \$20 million. So it was booked in March 31st, 2021, and now continues to generate revenue for infinitum. So there you go.

Ms. Naylor: I'm going to ask a little bit more about that, and I appreciate you taking the time to explain it to me. I'm not that familiar with the endowment fund and how that works. So I'm glad to hear that that's in place.

But I'm still trying to understand; regardless of the endowment fund, it's very clear that the budget was underspent by over \$18 million this year compared to what was spent the previous year. While looking at the Parks and Trails budget, the actual amount spent in '20-21 was over \$51 million and in '21-22 was \$37 million.

So I'm trying to understand if the endowment fund is something separate and in addition to what—to the budget, and if so, why is the money coming from an endowment fund but being underspent in the department? And maybe I'm just—yes; I could use an explanation.

Mr. Wharton: I'll see if I can help a little bit on two fronts. An endowment fund is like a savings account. So at 5 per cent at \$20 million, you should recognize \$1 million a year. So that endowment fund was booked in fiscal 2021, March 31st. That is a book entry of \$20 million.

That doesn't mean you're going to show \$20 million on your books every year. What you're going to show is a revenue generated on that \$20 million. So that happens to be, this year, about \$1.1 million. So, as interest rates and returns go up, that \$20 million will generate more revenue. Again, as we go forward, hopefully we're up to 10 per cent, where we're, you know, we're looking at returns that are double the—what they are now.

So, in essence, that's how it works and I hope that explains it to you.

Ms. Naylor: Thank you for that explanation. I know we have a second day we get to do this, so I will do my best to understand it more fully if—in case I have follow-up questions before then.

So, I'm going to just ask now about the underspending for Environmental Stewardship, that there's a significant decrease in spending between—from the 2021-22 budget from 2020 to 2021. And that is a decrease; it's about 25 per cent, right, has been—it's less than 25 per cent was spent in the most recent fiscal year. So, can the minister explain that?

Mr. Wharton: Just some clarity, if I may. On page 39, section 12.3, I believe you're asking—and I just wanted clarity so I can get you the response—Other Expenditures: thirty-four-six-eighty-two; 195,600. Is that the line that you're looking at? It would be under D, just below D, Salaries and Other Expenditures.

Ms. Naylor: I'm actually looking at page 33, Environmental Stewardship, with the actuals for 2021-22 and 2020-2021.

Mr. Wharton: Again, thank you for the question and the clarity. Again, this question refers to the orphaned and abandoned mine book entry. So, essentially, then, what we did was we booked \$160 million to tackle the issue that was left unchecked for many years, under the former government.

And we now have on our books a liability to ensure, though, that we can spend up to that \$160 million as we go forward. So, the next fiscal, on a go-forward, gets us back to where we were in previous years, with an account of about 45 thousand-million, sorry, \$45 million.

And also, Mr. Chair, if I may. And also, too, member from Wolseley, glad to invite you to our office to sit down, go through it in more detail with our team any time after we get through Estimates so we can have a full understanding for you, and present, if you wish. We can take that offline later.

Thank you.

Ms. Naylor: Thank you. I thank the minister for that explanation and invitation.

On the same line of questioning, I wanted to ask why Water Stewardship was nearly \$4 million less was spent in this most recent fiscal year than in the previous one?

* (16:50)

Mr. Wharton: Under Water Stewardship there are two areas that I'd like to share with the member. One was a \$2.5-million watershed district capacity fund. It's basically a trust, again, a one-time investment in the fiscal 2021. And also \$1-million water strategy fund, essentially working—as we know, we're working towards a water strategy that hasn't been done for 20 years. As a matter of fact, it was done in 2003, so we're pleased to be moving forward with that, and that would represent \$1 million for the water strategy fund.

So, you'll notice then, much like the orphan and abandoned scenario and the other \$20 million that we talked about earlier for the parks endowment fund you'll see that we've gone back now to where we were in prior years. We're spending 'mon'—parks.

Ms. Naylor: Is the minister in the process of developing an energy policy for the Manitoba government?

Mr. Wharton: I thank the member from Wolseley for the question. And certainly, yes, we are working on an energy strategy, right here in Manitoba.

We've engaged Dunsky Energy + Climate Advisors, or Dunsky, to develop our long-term energy strategy. They have done engagement—broader engagement than any other jurisdiction in Canada to date, and we're looking forward to continuing to get information from them.

At that point, once we have the report, certainly I'll have the opportunity in the department to get the advice from Dunsky that they've gathered in this very large engagement with stakeholders.

And then, at that point, we're going to put it out to Manitobans, as we do. And we're going to engage Manitoba to get feedback from Manitobans.

And then certainly, once we get that and put it all together, then that certainly will be a report that'll drive us towards net zero by 2050.

Ms. Naylor: I thought that was a yes or no question, but I appreciate the full detail that you provided. I'm still going to ask some questions to ask you to expand on it, and I understand that we're going to run out of time before you can answer.

But my next question is if you can say more about the scope of the energy policy and if it will include Crown corporations like Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Wharton: As I mentioned in my preamble—my long preamble and explanation, Dunsky has engaged with—well, again, the largest engagement, which would include all sectors—public, private, right throughout Manitoba. So, I can assure the member that we—we're well on our way.

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

ROOM 255

FAMILIES

* (14:50)

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

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I'm very pleased to be here in Committee of Supply for

the Department of Families. It is a real honour to lead this department.

And before I get into some of the highlights of the department's initiatives, I do just want to say thank you so much to the staff, many of whom you'll meet as we go throughout the process and many of whom are here today.

But to really emphasize and stress the gratitude that I feel for their initiatives each and every day, it is arguably one of the tougher departments in government. We're dealing with very vulnerable individuals and families and working under extreme pressure at times, and yet each and every time, department staff have always risen to the task at hand.

Whether it is trying to find housing for people who are out of their community because of a forest fire or a flood, or are fleeing their war-ravaged country. Whether it is finding supports for women and children who are fleeing domestic violence. Whether it is trying to support people who are able-bodied in very unique and special ways. Whether it is trying to find housing for people under complex circumstances, or supporting children in care and trying to help them reunify with their families.

These are—none of these are easy challenges, and the Department of Families rises every time to continue to serve the people of Manitoba, and I am eternally grateful for their service and their support.

I do want to highlight a few of the things that our department has undertaken in the last year. I won't be able to get to it all in the time that is allotted to me, but I do want to highlight and go right to some of the supports that we've done for persons with disabilities this year, as I know that that is an area that opposition has indicated they would like to hear from today.

And so, I just want to put on the record that Budget '22 provides an additional \$26.4 million for the Community Living disABILITY Services program that our government was very pleased to announce earlier this year. And at that time, we had many advocates in the disability community express their appreciation, and one of them said that it was the largest infusion of cash into the disability sector in over 20 years.

So these funds will ensure that adults with an intellectual disability will continue to be supported to pursue the goals they have identified through individualized planning, including skills development to foster greater independence, employment and job

training and engaging in social activities in the community.

Budget '22 also provides 26—or, \$16.4 million to new participants to access the Community Living disABILITY Services, as we understand the importance of supporting our service providers to recruit and retain highly skilled front-line workers in the adult disabilities services sector.

To ensure that safe and reliable service continues to be provided, we took steps to stabilize this important workforce, with the \$10-million initiative to increase wages paid to front-line staff employed by our service-provider partners across the province. These new investments build upon the projects that our government committed to supporting in 2021.

In December, the Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Task Force completed a very comprehensive review of services for adults with intellectual disabilities. The task force's final report is called the—pathways to dignity: the rights, safeguards, planning and decision making, and it explored issues related to services to adults with intellectual disabilities and made recommendations in 16 key areas. Our government is committed to implementing these recommendations and release a two-year implementation plan to support this important work.

I do want to thank everybody who was on that task force, including the chair of that task force who was none other than Dale Kendall, who was very instrumental 25 years ago in bringing about the legislation to support vulnerable persons, and so it was very sentimental to have him full-circle come around and lead the 25 year—lead a 25-year review.

* (15:00)

As a first step towards implementing some of the recommendations, our government provided \$775,000 for two important pilot projects to support and develop independence for adults with an intellectual disability. For that first project, we provided \$100,000 to Inclusion Winnipeg to deliver person-centred training in the disability support sector across Manitoba, including direct service workers and agencies and community service workers in the department.

The second project, we provided \$675,000 to the 120 Maryland Group, a collaboration of five prominent disability services and advocacy organizations in Manitoba to develop peer support networks for families over two years to promote the use of community-based assisted decision making.

Our government had also launched a two-year pilot project that will provide long-term, out-of-home respite care for families who require more comprehensive support but do not wish to place their children into the care of Child and Family Services. I remember saying at the time that nothing could be more heartbreaking than a family needing to assign care of their child over to CFS so that they could receive the supports that they needed, which is what the historical system had left families feeling the need to do.

And so, this bridge program is a way to allow families to stay together and provide some of those longer term respite initiatives with an \$8-million investment in keeping families together and providing support for those children and youth with complex disabilities.

We also announced a \$4.8-million out-of-home respite project to continue supporting the needs of families caring for children with complex needs.

As the Minister responsible for Accessibility, I am pleased to also provide an update on the implementation of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, which calls on organizations to identify, remove and prevent barriers that affect nearly one in four Manitobans with disabilities.

As you're likely aware, we've enacted three accessibility standards for customer service, employment and information and communications, which were developed with the assistance from stakeholders representing businesses, municipalities and the disability community. The accessible customer service standard has been in place since 2015, and we just completed the five-year review on that.

The third standard for accessible information and communication just came into force on May the 1st of 2022, and it's—it primarily removes barriers to content and interactions that are accessed electronically, particularly through websites. As with our other standards, the department will provide policy handbooks, templates and webinar presentations for free at accessibilitymb.ca to encourage and—compliance from all impacted businesses and stakeholders. Standards respecting accessible transportation and the design of public spaces are being developed, and we anticipate their enactment in 2023.

Stakeholders wishing to comply with accessibility standards often need financial assistance, and in response to that our government had created the Manitoba Accessibility Fund to provide annual sustainable grants for initiatives to promote the principles

of accessibility. We thank The Winnipeg Foundation for hosting the \$20-million endowment with an annual working capital that will initially average \$775,000 a year.

I was very pleased earlier this year to host the very first award ceremony where 30 successful organizations received grants from that Manitoba Accessibility Fund that was very much needed and supported for non-profit organizations and municipalities to receive funding to upgrade their businesses, their—and their service offerings so that there would be no barriers, that all Manitobans could access them.

And so, those are just a few of the highlights in regards to disability services that we are providing. And I'll just conclude my opening statement with work that is ongoing right now, and that is the creation of the new disability income support program where we are in the process of moving all of our EIA clients who have severe and prolonged disabilities into this new Disability Income Support Program so that they will no longer need to continuously go back to their service worker and confirm that they have a disability in order to receive that benefit.

And we think that it is very positive that The Disability Support Act and—received royal assent and that these initiatives are under way, and we certainly look forward to having this transition of clients on this new income support program.

So, with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know I only covered one small area of my department, and—but I'm certain we will touch on the other very important initiatives in housing, EIA transformation and child welfare transformation in further questions.

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

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

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): So, thank you to the minister for that. I appreciate, you know, the work that you do because I know that a lot of the work that you do are—you know, is something that you're very passionate about; you've been through and certainly have experience with, and I know you know your file.

So I just want to put a few words on the record just in regard to, you know, some of the things that we're seeing right now in our city, in our province in terms of, like, housing.

We see a lot of social housing boarded up, including the social housing that I used to live in, which is 4-711 Dufferin. There's, like, four units out of 10 that are boarded up. And we have a homelessness issue here in our province which, you know, is putting women at risk. And we've certainly seen in the last week, you know, a homeless woman be burned to death and, you know, we don't want to see those types of things happening. And we're hoping that, you know, we're going to ask some questions about that and what is the Province doing to make sure that those units are getting fixed so that families can be in them.

And—as well as—we're hearing, on the doorsteps, people are moving out of social housing because they're riddled with bedbugs, they're riddled with cockroaches, they're being overrun by people that are not on—not occupants of the apartment buildings, which has made it unsafe for, whether it's seniors or young families, or the everyday Manitoban. And rents are really expensive in Manitoba, and people have no alternative but to live in social and affordable housing.

We haven't seen any new units built, so that's another question we'll be asking about and talking about a strategy, whether, you know, this government is planning to ensure that we're building housing to meet the needs of Manitobans. We know that there is another shelter opened at—on Sutherland—or, not on Sutherland—on Higgin—Disraeli, sorry: 190 Disraeli, and that has met some of the need, but it's certainly not a sustainable need. We need to be building more social housing and not building more shelters.

And certainly, we've heard from women that are in these shelters that they feel unsafe, that there's no space for them. And we see people all over this province, you know, carting around their belongings in a shopping cart, which is, you know, not humane for them—doesn't give them any dignity, and we've all seen it. We're coming to winter, and I know as we walk out of this building, the Manitoba Legislature, there is always people in both of these bus shelters. And as the cold weather's coming, we need to really have a plan. So I'm looking to, you know, this government, to ensure that we don't have people that are sleeping in these bus shelters, that they have an alternative, and especially our women, so that they're not being exploited.

And we know that there's families, as well, that are now becoming homeless because they can't afford the rents. They can't afford the increase in food. They can't afford the increase in hydro. And it's forcing people to couch surf. People aren't on leases, so

they're getting warnings about, you know, vacating, and they have nowhere to go. There's no shelters for families unless someone has been a victim of domestic violence, and that needs to change. So, certainly, we need to be looking at what are we doing around housing.

Another issue that I've heard from a lot of agencies is the block funding, or the basket funding that they receive that—it's—they're being underfunded, and they're not able to serve the needs of all the families that need to be served.

We've certainly heard from families who have opened their doors and taken in their family members, many of whom, you know, are working two jobs just to support their own family and are expected to, you know, care for one, two, five children without getting any support from the government. So, we think this is the wrong approach that we should be supporting.

* (15:10)

We know that they're given health care for the first six months. And often, these families, you know, may be working in precarious jobs where they don't have health care, which leaves children not able to access dentistry, not able to get, you know, access to optometrists, like things like that.

So—and it's putting children at risk. There is so many children that are in need of health—mental health supports, that's another area that agencies have been talking to us about that they don't have the funding to be able to provide these supports, whether it's a psychologist or a clinician; that the dollars aren't there to support these kids.

The other thing is, I know Bill C-92 is coming in and, you know, we're starting to see communities take on that work, like Peguis. But we need to ensure that the supports are there and we're working collaboratively to ensure that that hand-off is not just a here you go. But how do we make sure that all of those children's are—needs are met and that the things are in place that need to be in place for those children?

Daycare—we've certainly heard from—and I know the minister has probably heard from daycare providers that they were given the subsidy and expected to disburse them. They didn't have the staffing to be able to do that. Every single person who applied for subsidy—or didn't, whether they were in need of it, were given it, which is an unfair practice because if I make \$100,000, I have one child and I apply for the subsidy because I'm told to apply for the subsidy, I

automatically receive that subsidy, which takes away from families who actually need the subsidy.

So, you know, I know that subsidy's come to an end now. There was three months of it, but then—now families are left with how do I pay, you know, for my daycare fees when everything else has gone up? And, you know, three months was great but there needs to be a longer-term solution to that and ensuring that the people who need the subsidies get the subsidies.

Disabilities—we've heard from a number of folks and certainly The Disability Support Act has put folks in precarious positions where if they're diabetic and they have a special diet, they've been cut off from that diet. We've written letters to the minister in regards to some of these cases, doctors have written support letters to say that these folks need long-term access to disability and that it's a life-long struggle for them and that they require special diets, but yet these folks have still not been able to access. So, we will be asking a lot of questions around that.

OFE is another area and, you know, we recognize that people need to gain skills to get into the workforce. This is a band-aid solution. We need longer-term access to training programs for folks. I know a number of my family have gone through the OFE program and it's basically they come in, they are put on a computer and they're looking for a job, whether they have skills or not. And that's—that creates a revolving door for a lot of folks because they get into a position where they're not qualified and they end up not being able to continue that job because they don't have the ability to. And there's no option for them but to go back on EIA, which means they have to apply and it takes about six weeks for people to get on EIA. You have to call, make an appointment, someone calls you back, and that's another area—if you don't even have a phone or you don't even have a home, you're going to sit at the shelter and waiting for a phone call because that's the only place that—the number you can give.

So, it's certainly put a lot of strain on folks that are seeking shelter benefits to get out of these shelters, but also to get the skills that they need to get out of what we call the welfare wall. So, longer term programs that actually support people to get into the workforce and making sure that they have the skills to do the job.

The other thing is when they do get a job or they are called for an interview, they aren't given any extra funds. And I know when I was on EIA and I was getting into the workforce, there was a fund that you could apply to for work clothes. And that's super

important for people, especially if you're going into the construction industry, you have to have work boots. They're not going to allow you to come and work unless you have steel-toe boots. I certainly wouldn't want to go to an interview in clothes that perhaps, you know, I'm living in a shelter and I don't have access to, you know, laundry every day and I've been wearing these clothes for a few days.

So, certainly, setting an example and making sure that people are able to get into these jobs with the skills that they need.

And lastly, you know, I just want to note that this, you know, this portfolio was held by Danielle Adams, and as December comes, you know, that we remember, you know, our colleague that, unfortunately, passed away on Highway 6 and that was—she was very passionate about housing, daycare—

Mr. Chairperson: The member's time has expired. Is there leave for—

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Mr. Chairperson: Leave is granted.

Mrs. Smith: Yes, just that, you know, we want to make sure that we're honouring her and bring—continuing to do the work that she was so passionate about. And we look forward to working with the minister, and I know that the minister is very knowledgeable about questions we'll be asking.

So, miigwech.

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

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

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

Ms. Squires: First of all, I'm very pleased that I have deputy minister Michelle Dubik in the Department of Families. She is not here today, she is—she'll be joining us, probably, on subsequent meetings at Committee of Supply.

I do have, to my left, Catherine Gates, who is the acting deputy minister, and she is also the assistant deputy minister responsible for Community Services Delivery division. I also have Heidi Wurmman, who is

the assistant deputy minister responsible for Corporate Services division, and Brenda Feng, who is my assistant deputy minister responsible for the Administration and Finance division. And against the wall we have Christina Moody, who is the assistant deputy minister responsible for the Child and Youth Services Division.

And we have Elizabeth Debicka, who is the assistant deputy minister of Child and Youth Services—*[interjection]*—Indigenous Governing Bodies. My apologies, Elizabeth recently had a title change, but we have this newly created assistant deputy minister position. I'm very pleased to have Elizabeth in that role.

Joining us later will be Dwayne Rawniak, who is the acting chief executive officer responsible for Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Minister, for those introductions, and welcome, everybody.

According to our rule 77(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put separately on all resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Smith: The minister, as I understand it, has taken the existing disability program and dividing it into three things: (1) a new disability support program for those with a permanent disability lasting longer than a year; (2) a newly named medical barriers to full employment program; (3) those who might have a disability lasting less than a year.

* (15:20)

Can the minister take us through these three and give us a better understanding of how each of them will work?

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the question from the members opposite on the disability income support program. And our government was really pleased to pass this legislation last year and begin the work on creating this new program for people with disabilities.

And the first categories—the severe and prolonged disability category—these are for individuals who are anticipating having a disability that will last well into the future, that they are likely going to not have any changes in their physical well-being year over year.

And so, by moving them over to the severe and prolonged category, we're not only increasing their benefits—and those are spelled out in the regulations that we're consulting on right now.

I believe we just undertook a 45-day consultation period that concluded just recently on what that income-support program would look like in terms of the monetary amounts included in there. And I look forward to concluding that process and finalizing that category. And so these are people that will no longer need to go to a doctor and get that sort of medical note and then meet with their service provider and explain that they are still requiring the disability income support.

We thought that it wasn't very dignified for people that have severe and prolonged disabilities to have to go to a doctor year over year and then confirm their disability with their worker year over year over year. So we received a lot of feedback from community when we were consulting on this legislation and on this initiative and, generally, it was very well-perceived.

The second category is medical barriers to full employment. And these are people that are experiencing episodic disabilities and will not be able to engage in a work program and anticipate their impairment lasting up to a year or longer. And they will be in that category.

And then the other category are people who do not have a full disability that is expected to last a year or more. And they will be eligible to continue receiving the regular EIA assistance, but yet they will have their work expectation deferred if it is required, and they will receive general supports through that program.

I would like to just highlight that this year alone—or, just recently, our government had increased the EIA basic rate for people in the general assistance category. This is a rate that hadn't been increased since 2004, and even at that, it had been—it had increased nominally since previous years.

And I often think back to my own experiences when I was on EIA in 1989 and 1990, and the rate as it was set in 1990 and the rate that it was set up until we basically had received this—received—or provided this increase, had only grown incrementally by a few dollars.

And I think about what it would be like to have no increase in your annual household income since 1990 and what that has done to families. And we

certainly do recognize that it has created significant challenges and struggles for people who are—that have barriers to employment, who are not able to achieve independence and who rely on the social safety net for their monthly income.

And so the increase that we had provided that came into effect on October 1st was the first of its kind since October 1st. And we know that we still have many, many more steps to go to lifting people out of poverty, but placing it into context, I think all of us in this room can agree that if we hadn't received any income—or any increases to our household income since 1990, we'd all be in a far worse position.

And with those thoughts, I certainly look forward to future questions from the critic.

Mrs. Smith: I'm wondering if the minister can elaborate on the permanent disability: some examples of what a permanent disability would be, episodic disability would be, and then, the third, like, lasting less than a year.

* (15:30)

Ms. Squires: Under the severe and prolonged disability category, for example, all of our CLDS clients will automatically be enrolled in the severe and prolonged disability category, as well as people with permanent intellectual disabilities, people who, for example, are receiving the CPP disability benefit, someone under the age of 65 that's living in a personal-care home. They would be automatically enrolled in the program.

Someone with a long-term disability that we know that a full recovery is, you know, been determined by a medical expert to likely not happen within the year or longer, such as a diagnosis of schizophrenia or another long-lasting impairment; they would be subject to the medical—the severe and prolonged disability category. And again, a lot of it will be subject to a doctor's assessment.

The medical barriers to full employment would be, for example, undergoing—a client who is undergoing medical treatment that is expected to last a year or longer. A long-term cancer treatment plan, that sort of thing would allow them to be in that category. And then in the short term, in the other category where work expectations are being deferred, but otherwise they're in the regular EIA assistance category, those would be individuals that have a short-term recovery time as they're recovering from a surgery—or, rather, a short-term ailment and they're anticipated to be recovered in a, you know, short-term period. And again,

all that is subject to that—in that particular category that would be subject to a doctor's assessment.

Mrs. Smith: I'm wondering if the minister can tell us if addictions and mental health would fall under any of those categories, because we see psychosis—you know, we see all spectrums of folks when they're—you know, whether it's mental health breakdown and they can't work or, you know, they've—they're—they have an addiction and they might be in shelter and we're trying to get them, you know, on EIA, and there's so many barriers to that.

If they would be considered as, I guess, a newly named medical barrier to full employment program or if say somebody that was—that has diabetes, whether that would fall under category 1 or category 2 or where they would fall because we know diabetes is not something that, you know, folks recover from, and they do have a special diet and—and again, many folks are at different spectrums on—with diabetes.

I had a constituent who had to have the ambulance called on them because their diet was cut and they went to the bank to take money out and they collapsed at the bank machine. And someone came in, found them, called the ambulance, they were taken. Their sugar levels were low because they weren't, you know, having—they didn't have the extra funds to have a proper diet.

So we see a number of cases like that, so I'm wondering if, again, mental health, addictions and, as well as diabetes, where they would fall under that—those categories.

Ms. Squires: Thanks—I thank the critic for the question.

And for starters, I want to confirm that all the health benefits extended to people on EIA who are now moving into the disability income support program will remain the same, in terms of funds for the special diet, access to prescription drugs, the dental benefits.

That will carry over for whatever category of disability benefit that person qualifies for. In regards to assessing somebody who has a particular disability, such as diabetes that the member had referenced, or people experiencing addictions and are in a long-term recovery program or experiencing mental illness.

So we are in the process of developing an assessment tool with the expert guidance of medical professionals as well as the community, to create an assessment tool that will not only be allowing us to continue

with a person-centred approach and really taking that to a new level, where we are being able to uniquely establish an individual's needs, and assess their needs and put them in the program that best suits their needs.

And that is what I mean when I say a person-centred approach, but we also need to establish some baseline or a continuity, so that people would also have an expectation that they would, if somebody else had received a benefit based on criteria that—and they met that similar criteria, they too would receive that same level of service, or that benefit category.

And so this assessment tool, which as I said is in the process of being developed, will really help provide that person-centred approach, but also a consistent methodology as we are making assessments and eligibility—establishing eligibility for entrance into the programs.

Mrs. Smith: Just a point of clarification.

So, I understand that it's a person-centred approach, but if a person has diabetes and they require a special diet, and they've been removed out of any of these categories, they're no longer receiving the funds for a special diet. Should we not have another category so that those folks, that perhaps might be able to work, or are working part-time supplementing their income, so that they can have the extra funds to be able to get their special diet, take care of their health, and not worry about, you know, their sugars going low? And maybe they can work but not full-time, but they still need assistance.

* (15:40)

And then the other clarification I wanted to know. The minister said that they—if the person was in long-term recovery programs. Many folks can't get there because they're not even on EIA and there's barriers.

So, if a person was—had an addiction, they weren't in a recovery program, are they still able to access any of these three categories?

Ms. Squires: So, in regards to the special diet, which is a benefit of—a range between \$27 and \$171 a month benefit, any individual, any client on EIA or the disability incomes support program, if they qualify for any category of support, they are eligible to also receive the top-up benefit for their special diet of between \$27 and \$171 a month for particular medical needs.

And if they're having a barrier to accessing that benefit, if there's a specific constituent that the member is thinking of in posing this question, I'd be

certainly more than happy to look into doing a case review or having the department do a case review to see what could be done to ensure that the person receives the benefit that they are eligible for that would prevent traumatic incidents like not receiving the food that they need to maintain appropriate blood-sugar levels. So, I'd be more than happy to look into that specific case for the member.

But all EIA clients are eligible if they have the special requirements because of a disability like diabetes, then they would be eligible for the special diet supplement. In regards to someone who is in long-term recovery, there wouldn't be any barrier to accessing EIA in any of the categories if they were eligible to receive those benefits.

Mrs. Smith: So, if I understand the minister correctly, they—someone with diabetes could apply for the special diet or \$27 to \$171.

Just going back to the long-term recovery: so, someone could be in a shelter, have addictions, still access the services and still qualify for one of these so that they could—I just think about people needing—like, one of the basic needs is housing, right? And when you're in a shelter, you're just trying to survive. And often, you know, addictions is a survival tool, right?

And to get them into a house, to get them into one of these extra support programs could be all the difference. So—but they're not in recovery yet. Would they still fall in—under any of these three, even if they didn't have a psychosis? Because addiction is, you know, a medical condition and people do require extra supports.

And yes, to me, like, someone with an addiction wouldn't be able to access full employment, especially if they're living in a shelter. They might, you know, be on meth—like, who knows, something that's brain altering, where they need at least six months or more of treatment, but they're not able to access that because they have no supports. Would they fall under any of those three?

And I hope that's clear, kind of—my question.

Ms. Squires: And I believe I—I'll attempt to answer the question as fully as possible and, if there needs further clarification, I will seek to provide that.

But when it comes to an individual living in shelter, if that shelter is providing the meals, that client may not get the special supplement for food if their meals are being provided. But, if their meals are not being provided, then they should be able to get the

supplement, no problem. And it is assessed on an individual basis, so that is where the individual always needs to be in contact with the director to ensure that their needs are being met and that they're receiving the benefits that they're entitled to.

In regards to somebody who's in a long-term recovery program, we are still in the process of developing that assessment tool. But there, again, it would be—if a person who is on EIA to meet their basic needs and they're also in a long-term recovery program and they have spoken with their—they've received professional advice and guidance about the long-term disability of—or, impairment to seeking employment, they certainly, at the director's and their professional advice from their medical professional, should be able to qualify for one of the categories in the disability income support program.

I say that knowing that we are in the process of still developing that assessment tool. And that assessment tool is going to be incredibly important because I do recognize that there are a lot of individuals who have very unique needs and who will be coming forward with unique circumstances. And it's going to be a challenge, but a challenge that our department is committed to rising to to ensure that we meet their needs, that we take into account the disability that they're experiencing, whether it be short-term, episodic or long-term, and getting them the appropriate benefits.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Smith: Okay, I thank the minister for that answer.

I do want to hear, though, whether—even if somebody wasn't in a shelter and they were—they did have an addiction, that they would be able to access these three categories, but I'll move on.

Can the member—or, minister give us a better understanding what the medical barriers to full employment program is and what would be different—or what is different about it from the existing disability program?

So, for example, can the minister explain when work expectations might be applied to those in the new medical barriers to full employment program? What change is there for the medical barriers to full employment program compared to the existing disability program?

Ms. Squires: So, under the medical barriers to full employment category, the person—a person enrolled in

that program would receive everything that they're currently getting if they are in the EIA persons with disability category, which includes the \$1,109-a-month benefit, as well as overlooking certain assets and if they have a disability income—pension.

They can—we don't take into account other sources of income into their annual—into the—when we're calculating their annual income, such as gifts from families and friends.

And then we are also adding an extra \$50 a month, which would allow—there's \$25, which is just an increase that we've provided October 1st, as well as a \$25 benefit for working with them in terms of planning, preparing their case plan. It's a benefit that we use to incentivize people to come in and work with the department on individualized case plans. So that is that medical barrier benefit.

The full and severe and prolonged benefit: those individuals would receive everything that's in the medical barriers category plus \$100-a-month shelter benefit and a \$45 benefit for laundry and telephone services. So, it's another 15 per cent increase for individuals who are in the full, severe and prolonged category.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that answer.

So, the changes from the existing to the medical barriers, it's just a change in monetary, so they're getting an extra 100—they're getting their regular benefits, plus an extra \$50 and a \$25 incentive a month. And then the second is if they are in the full barrier they're receiving an extra \$100 on top of that.

Is there any other changes to any of those from the existing disability program besides monetary?

Ms. Squires: So, people in the medical barriers to work category would have no work expectations for the duration of the time that they're in that—they're receiving that benefit.

People in the severe and prolonged disability category would not only not have that work expectation, there wouldn't be the requirement for an annual assessment as well as an earnings exemption of \$12,000 per year.

Mrs. Smith: So, just to clarify, so those folks that are in the medical barriers to full employment program, when would they be expected to return to work, or would they be expected at all?

* (16:00)

Ms. Squires: During our consultation, we had heard loud and clear from the community that, while people are experiencing a disability, even those who have a disability, even if it's not expected to be a permanent disability, but they're dealing with it, there should not be a work expectation.

So, as long as an individual is in that medical barriers to full employment, they are not required to have—they don't have a work expectation.

If they do express an interest in returning to work, and they feel that they're ready to re-engage with the labour market, we do have community navigators in place who will help them on that journey towards independence, will help them achieve training or reach out and find opportunities that would—that they would be suited for. But there is no work expectation.

Mrs. Smith: Okay, I thank the minister for that question.

I was just talking to the member from Thompson, and he was sharing a story about someone who was a double amputee that has trouble accessing services because they've been told, well, while they've lost their limbs—their legs—that they can still type and, you know, cognitively they're there.

But, mentally, because of the disability, it's really set them back, and they've been told that they need to go back to work and they've been pushing them to go back to work. So, I just want clarification whether that would be an expectation.

And I know the minister talked earlier about somebody maybe having cancer, going through chemotherapy. We know that, like, there's a five year, kind of—you know, if you're—if you've been in remission for five years, you're—you know, you have a clean bill, you can—so, if those types of things would play into that and whether they would be forced to go back to work.

And, I hear what the minister is saying, that they wouldn't be forced back to work. But I just want to make sure and clarify that when these folks are in those types of situations that there isn't an EI worker saying, well, you know, you're capable, you're now in remission or you've had your last chemo, and they might still be, you know, dealing mentally with what's gone—what they've gone through, that they won't be forced back to work and that there'll be a period of time where they get some support to maybe transition slowly, if they're capable.

Ms. Squires: I do want to express my appreciation to the member for Thompson (Mr. Redhead) for raising that situation of a constituent that has undergone that experience, and if he'd like me to look into that, I certainly would.

I do want to just say that this new program, this—it is in the process of being developed and the—and implemented to better help meet people where they're at, and in taking that person-centered approach to that assessment, which would allow them to receive the benefits that they need. And that assessment, of course, would include mental and physical well-being.

And we are certainly undergoing transformation in our EIA department and moving forward to better meet people where they're at in delivering the service.

I do want to highlight three new initiatives that are also helping people who are in the transition phase between maybe coming off of disability or coming off of EIA and moving into the workforce, but just need some training and some supports and some connections. And one of those programs—we just made investments in Career Connections in Brandon, and then in Thompson: FireSpirit and YWCA. FireSpirit is specifically about helping Indigenous people with their—on the road to wellness, which of course leads to the road to independence. And we also recently established a \$20-million endowment fund with the Winnipeg Foundation to provide an annual fund called the Journey to Independence Fund.

So we have intake right now, or maybe it just recently closed, and it's the first of its kind, first time that we've done it, where we've asked non-profit organizations who are offering training and services to clients in—on EIA who maybe they need to take a life-skills training program or a modern-day version of life skills.

* (16:10)

I reference life skills because that was the program that I took in 1989, and I know that there's definitely more modern programs out there, but we know that these programs are certainly life changing for many clients. And we're wanting to see more of them being offered to everybody, that would allow the client to receive training and opportunities that would be available to them.

So, we are looking forward to rolling out these grants to successful applicants in the near future. I haven't received an update because we did just open up the intake a few weeks back. I don't know how

many applicants we've received, but I'm certainly hopeful that there were several of them. And I hope that we have many organizations willing to offer training and really just meeting people where they're at and providing them with upgrades to their skills.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'll just be sitting in briefly while my colleague takes a short break.

Wanted to ask, according to the minister's regulatory consultation website, there are also 2,000 people with shorter term disability lasting less than a year will be, quote, will be recategorized once their current eligibility period expires. That will also mean that going forward that those whose disability is not categorized as lasting longer than a year will no longer be eligible.

Can the minister provide an explanation for that change?

Ms. Squires: So, I can confirm for the member that that number—that 2,000 number is accurate.

Everybody is entitled to a full assessment, and we look forward to providing those services to all individuals that will be moved into the medical barriers to employment or the severe and prolonged disability category or into the regular EIA program with perhaps some of the benefits that are available to them based on their needs. If they have special diet, they certainly qualify for the 27 to 171 top-up benefit for their dietary needs, or any other benefit.

We really are moving forward to a person-centred approach and will be assessing each individual and hopefully making these assessments and putting people into the proper category based on the new criteria.

Mr. Sala: Can the minister tell us when she expects that—the 2,000 people will be recategorized?

Ms. Squires: So, again, I'd like to reiterate that we don't know how many clients won't be eligible for this—the medical barriers to employment category, and—but what I can confirm for the member is that, in January, we are anticipating moving approximately 8,000 clients from the EIA category into the severe and prolonged disability category.

That is based on some data that's easier to attain, such as they're already existing CLDS clients, or have the requirements as I'd spelled out in an earlier answer about the entry into the severe and prolonged category. So we're hoping to migrate those 8,000 clients in January; and then in March and April of this year,

we're hoping to take all clients who are eligible into the new medical barriers category.

But, again, everybody who is currently in that category is eligible for and entitled to an assessment to determine eligibility.

Mrs. Smith: Miigwech. I thank the minister for that answer, and it's nice to see that 8,000 people will be supported.

I just want to go back to the amount of people, and I know you're not looking at that right now, if you would take that under advisement to let us know when—or, how many people are expected to be taken off of any disability supports in the future, and if there's going to be a transition, what's that going to look like, because I told you about diabetes, right? And people being taken off that, even though they have letters.

So, that's one thing. And then I just wanted to go back to the question that I asked earlier. The minister referenced a training program, Journey to Independence. The non-profits were taking up that work and that they were to apply for grants.

I'm just wondering if the folks that are going to be in that training, whether it'll be paid training, or they're just going to be receiving the regular benefits while they're going through that?

* (16:20)

Ms. Squires: So, next year, at the very latest in the annual report will be the numbers of all the participants in the severe and prolonged disability category, the medical barriers to employment category and the regular EIA categories. So those numbers will be reported in our annual report, at—the—at—so at the very latest, it will be available next year at this time.

In regards to the benefits available to people, I should clarify that the Journey to Independence program—we haven't assessed the applicants yet so we don't know what we're going to receive in terms of proposals from community organizations. But quite often, these proposals do come with a wage subsidy, and I look forward to learning about the initiatives and then awarding some of these initiatives to the community for eligible applicants.

But every EIA client who is undergoing training, they receive access to child care, a top-up benefit for their transportation—bus pass or other transportation costs—as well as just a \$25 miscellaneous benefit for the costs associated with attending a training session all day. Sometimes they might need to spend a little

bit more on food, because they're obviously not going to be at home; they're going to be at a place of work or a training centre for the day, and those costs might be additional to what they would normally experience, so the \$25 miscellaneous benefit is automatically awarded to anybody participating in a training program.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that answer.

I hope that they would take under advisement that these are people who are going into work and that we should be paying people to go into trained, paid labour. I realize that, you know, they're going to gain skills. These non-profits are going to be getting grants to support them. I do recognize that as well.

So I'm not sure if they're just going and sitting in a classroom all day, and that's the purpose or whether they're—it's on-the-job training. But if it's on-the-job training, I think that we should—providing incentive closer to a wage so that people can actually see what it's like to make money above EIA. It certainly gives people incentive to be like, you know, making a thousand dollars a month versus twenty—maybe \$2,000 or, you know, over \$2,000 a month—is certainly incentive and having people experience that.

But I'll move on. On September 10th, 2021, accessible—Accessibility Advisory Council released its five-year review of accessibility standard for customer service. They provided 22 recommendations.

Can the minister tell us whether she accepts in full all of these recommendations?

Ms. Squires: So, I can confirm that we receive—that we're—we received 22 recommendations. Twenty-one of those recommendations have been accepted and are being implemented. The one recommendation is still being further researched, and that was the recommendation to go to—down to 25—workplaces with 25 employees or greater must publish their accessibility plan on a public-facing platform.

Right now, the standard requires businesses with 50 or more employees to publish their accessibility plan on a public platform and the recommendation is to go to 25.

So, we're doing a little bit of research right now as to whether or not that would improve compliance or not, and right now, with having workplaces of 50 employees or greater needing to publish their accessibility plans on the public platform is very consistent with other jurisdictions, including Ontario.

* (16:30)

I do want to also reiterate that regardless of whether or not you have your accessibility plan published on your website or available to the public for perusal, it is still the law, and you still must be compliant with the accessibility standards. So even if you just have one employee, you still have to comply with The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, and you just don't have to have it in a public domain.

Mrs. Smith: So, just to clarify, 21 of the recommendations—the full recommendations were accepted. Just want to clarify that.

And then, just to move on, can the minister tell us what the time frame is to implement the 21 recommendations that they are fully implementing?

Ms. Squires: So, we'd received these recommendations last October, and we committed to implementing within two years. So, we have an expectation that within a year from now we will implement all 21 recommendations that have been accepted.

And I can confirm that we are just about to publish our annual report on the implementation of those recommendations. That report will be available this month, and as soon as it is, I will endeavour to provide the members opposite a copy of it. But, yes, we are committed to fulfilling those—implementing those recommendations within the next 12 months.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that answer.

I'd like to read from the review. So, one of the overarching themes council heard throughout the consultation process was the lack of perceived leadership and accountability shown by the provincial government in implementing the accessibility standards for customer service participants. They expressed that as the Manitoba government provides services to all Manitobans, it must do a better job of leading by example.

As stated at the time of the four-year independent review of the AMA, the government did not assign additional staff nor fiscal resources to implement the legislation. The direction given to the Disabilities Issues Office, now the Manitoba Accessibility Office, was to implement the law in a cost-neutral manner. Within the last eight years, the MAO's budget has only received a modest increase.

Can the minister explain and respond to this concern?

Ms. Squires: I can advise the member that we have established an accessibility steering committee that will help guide the work of government to ensure that

we do play a leadership role in the implementation of our accessibility standards and on all matters pertaining to accessibility. So, that is new since the publishing of the report that the member had referenced.

Also new is the hiring—the creation of four new FTEs. We have—and the creation of a new compliance secretariat that has been moved out of the Manitoba Accessibility Office and is a stand-alone secretariat. There's two new FTEs in that secretariat, and work is under way to increase the capacity of the secretariat as new standards are being implemented and passed. And then, the other two new FTEs are in the Manitoba Accessibility office. And that is mainly to provide support and also to administer the new Manitoba Accessibility Fund.

A year and a half ago, we established the \$20-million Manitoba Accessibility Fund endowment, and every year we have just a little bit shy of \$1 million in funds to provide to the community for compliance with the accessibility standards. This is in response to a lot of concern that we'd heard from, whether it be AMM, municipalities, organizations and businesses, who were saying that they were needing to have funds to increase their capacity and to comply, ultimately, with the standards.

And so, this Manitoba Accessibility Fund was created to provide that source of revenue for all these businesses, organizations and municipalities that need to comply and, you know, ensuring that those dollars are being put towards good projects and that applicants are being assessed as applications come in. We hired two new FTEs in the Manitoba Accessibility Office. That's all new work that has taken place since the report was published that the member's citing.

Mrs. Smith: [*inaudible*] the minister for that answer.

The member from Maples had raised a concern when we were talking about accessibility. The member had shared with us that cab drivers have to take accessibility training but ride-sharing groups don't have to.

Can the minister speak to that and whether that is something that's going to be an expectation in the near future, as they are doing the same kind of work?

* (16:40)

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the member raising this.

And they're correct in that ride-sharing services were not conceived of when the AMA was first passed

into law, and so we are having the compliance secretary look into ways in which we can ensure that ride-sharing organizations can be taking appropriate accessibility training and meeting their obligations under the AMA.

Mrs. Smith: Can the—well, first of all, we're going to go onto something else, just some generic questions.

So, we're not going to get to CFS because it was a lot to delve into and the member from Thompson had to leave, and we didn't think that we would get through all these disability and accessibility questions. So I don't know if those folks want to—I'm sorry about keeping you.

So, can the minister tell us who her political staff are?

Ms. Squires: I'm very pleased to have Melanie Maher work in my office as a special assistant, and she is somebody who's got tremendous experience and knowledge and is a—just an overwhelming asset to the Minister of Families and the entire office.

And new to my office and joining us here today, as well, is my new executive assistant, Cosette Beaudin, who has been on the job for 10 days, I believe, and is a tremendous asset and is very—her contributions to the office are greatly appreciated and I'm very pleased to be working with both of these brilliant assistants.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister tell me the vacancy rate for the department as a whole?

Ms. Squires: There are 2,015 FTEs in the Department of Families, excluding the FTEs assigned to the Manitoba Developmental Centre.

There are 328 vacancies, which translate to a 16.1 per cent.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister provide me the vacancy rate by division of her department?

Ms. Squires: Sure.

I would like to ask the opportunity to bring that information back. We need a little bit of time—a few days—to put that information together.

Mrs. Smith: Miigwech, I appreciate the minister taking that under advisement, and we look forward to getting that information as soon as possible.

In its 2021 annual report, the Social Services Appeal Board identified concerns for EIA recipients in getting access to outpatient physiotherapy after surgery.

What steps, if any, is the minister taking to address these concerns?

Ms. Squires: My department is currently consulting with the Department of Health to look at future opportunities and options.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister tell us how long that that review's going to take before people start to be able to have access to physiotherapy after surgery?

It's really important for people, especially in their recovery, to be able to have access to that. So, I'm hoping it'll be done in a timely manner because we have quite a few people that are having surgery these days and, you know, need access to that.

So, how long is that going to take?

* (16:50)

Ms. Squires: So, we are in the very early stages of researching ways in which we can expand the programs for people to access physiotherapy programs.

I can say that we are looking at the success of a chiropractic model that we've implemented where we do have—where people on EIA may receive additional chiropractic benefits as well as having a special chiropractic clinic that we've established and funded at the Mount Carmel Clinic, which is ultimately removing barriers to access for individuals in the community to receive.

And so, we're looking at the success of this program and looking at ways in which we can expand service delivery.

Mrs. Smith: Okay, I appreciate folks being able to access chiropractic, you know, at Mount Carmel Clinic.

But the question was about outpatient physiotherapy after surgery and how long it's going to take for that consultation, because people are, you know, waiting in pain, or this is, perhaps, limiting, you know, their accessibility to get out or their recovery. So, it's specific to physiotherapy outpatient after surgery.

Ms. Squires: We are in the early stages, and I don't have a timeline.

Mrs. Smith: Okay. I'm hoping that it's not going to take too long, because again, like it's—helps with people's recovery.

Our team has heard from someone on EIA who has been denied coverage for hormones, so progesterone and injection estrogen.

Is the minister aware of a policy or other changes in this area that would result in a loss of benefits?

Ms. Squires: So, I can confirm that we follow the formulary established under the Pharmacare program under the Health Department, and doctors can also apply for exceptional drug status if someone is—if someone needs access to a drug that is not on the formulary and yet an assessment is confirmed that that drug is needed.

I can't speak specifically or list off what drugs are on the formulary, but if the member has a constituent with a specific case that they would like me to review, I'd certainly be willing to undertake that.

Mrs. Smith: Okay, I appreciate that minister's offer, and, again, it's specific to progesterone and injection estrogen, which I'm assuming probably isn't on the 'formulaire'—'formulairely'—'formulaire.'

And—so, if a doctor were to write a letter to an EIA recipient requesting that, what is the likelihood of someone getting that treatment approved?

Ms. Squires: The Department of Families does not employ the expertise required to make a medical assessment or determination of that sort.

Doctors are certainly familiar with the exceptional drug program, and that the EIA client would be subject to a medical assessment. And if the doctor had applied for exceptional drug status, there would be no barriers for receiving those treatments.

Mrs. Smith: Miigwech, I thank the minister for that answer and I do hope that that would take—be taken under advisement as more and more folks are trying to access these drugs, you know, when they're transitioning. And certainly, it's something that is—that they need to be able to do that.

The Manitoba development centre is slated to close in 2024. Can the minister provide an update on the plan to close that facility and the transition plans for staff at that facility?

Ms. Squires: So, currently, MDC has 102 residents remaining and work is under way with an individualized care plan for each of those 102 residents. There are seven agencies that are actively engaged in establishing new community residence for some of these clients to transition into. And we're looking at building capacity amongst other agencies that are already established in community.

In regards to the workforce, we do have a workforce adjustment team that has been created to

strategize recruitment retention options and to really ensure that the employee impacts are reduced. We're working diligently with Shared Health, in particular, in the region, finding options for each of the employees at MDC.

Mrs. Smith: There are currently 359 positions remaining at MDC. How many of these positions does the minister anticipate—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

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

CHAMBER

INDIGENOUS RECONCILIATION AND NORTHERN RELATIONS

* (15:00)

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

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

As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Just to kind of continue on where we left off yesterday: the minister had spoken about—and this was in regards to the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation unmarked graves, cemetery issue that I'd—we'd spoken about yesterday. The minister had mentioned that they were—they played an intermediary role and was also led to believe that that was, in fact, a neutral position to perhaps just kind of be the go-between. But the minister also made reference to the fact that they were forced into the intermediary role when the landlord and the landowner informed the department that he would not grant access as promised. And as such, the minister just kind of forwarded information along.

I'm just wondering, can the minister say, then, in an intermediary role, was that a neutral position? Or was there advocacy to the landlord on behalf of Sioux Valley?

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): The honourable—oh.

The honourable Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): As we were saying yesterday, this was a very sensitive situation, and the department has worked closely with both the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation and the landlord as well as departments across government to support protection of the children's graves.

However, the landlord, though agreeing to allow access on September 23rd, notified the department staff that he had changed his mind, and staff attempted to re-engage and negotiate, but the 'landloder' was unwilling to entertain access and unwilling to notify Sioux Valley of his decision.

The government continues to support the community in the identification, investigation, the protection and commemoration of Indian residential schools and burial sites.

* (15:10)

Mr. Bushie: Yesterday, the minister referred to the fact that his department had, and I quote here, brokered an agreement between Sioux Valley and the landowner. And I'm just wondering—I'm hearing, then, that that, in fact, agreement was broken by the landlord. And I'm just wondering if the province and the minister's department has a consequence for the landlord for breaking that agreement.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Given the sensitivity of this situation, at this time it would be inappropriate for us to comment further on any actions that can be taken or may be taken by the provincial government. Manitoba does continue to co-develop multijurisdictional approaches to find, memorialize and protect missing children through distinction-based engagements with regional Indigenous organizations and the council.

Mr. Bushie: So, then, I'm led to understand that the minister is, in fact, just straight out not going to tell us what they're going to do. So I also assume, then, that also means no advocacy on behalf of Sioux Valley because that was basically the premise of the question, is what kind of advocacy and what kind of consequence would there have to a deal that the province brokered, that the department brokered, to allow Sioux Valley Dakota Nation to be able to actually search the site for unmarked graves—that has been identified, by the way.

So, I'm hearing, then, from the minister that they're not going to share that information with anything that's going to be done, if at all anything is, in fact, going to be done.

There was also correspondence put forward to Sioux Valley from the government where the province is going to advocate that Canada take a stronger role in resolving this issue and that they find a path to acquire the land to support the search.

I'm just wondering, does the minister also have a role to play there or feel he has a role to play there to help acquire this land and support this search for Sioux Valley Dakota Nation?

Mr. Lagimodiere: And, once again, I want to stress, for the record, that this is a very complex and sensitive situation and we don't want to jeopardize the ongoing discussions.

We acknowledged yesterday that we have taken to discussions with all levels of government, including the City of Brandon, and we continue to explore all avenues available. As you will know the TRC Calls to Action 75 calls upon the federal government to work with provincial, territorial and municipal governments to develop and implement strategies and procedures related to burial sites.

As such, we will take an approach that is consistent with the 'truse' and reconciliation Call to Action 75. And the searches are a complex process, and we recognize that a multifaceted Indigenous-led approach is required, involving the collaboration of various levels of government.

Mr. Bushie: So, again, I'm hearing that the minister and his department are basically taking a wait-and-see-what-everybody-else-does approach first and kind of be the last ones to the table to be able to bring forth these issues. And, again, not work collaboratively but rather, expect everybody else to come to the table and the Province be the last ones to the table, including some of the correspondence that's going back and forth where the government has invited chief and council to, quote, use their voice and call Canada to take responsibility.

* (15:20)

But also, I guess, the question that a lot of communities have, and in this case the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation has, is that the provincial government should also be using their voice to advocate on their behalf. And it seems like it's actually the opposite, and the advocacy is not taking place for the community to

help with the situation. And understanding, and I mean the minister has mentioned many times, it is a sensitive issue, a sensitive topic. But at the same time it's a topic that needs to be discussed.

And you can't simply hide behind the fact that it's a sensitive issue and then try and avoid responsibility, because there is a responsibility by the federal government and provincial government to deal with this issue of unmarked graves, and in this case, the Brandon residential school cemetery site. It's an issue that's been raised many, many times by Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, and it's not something that should be taken lightly. And it seems like it is; it's being passed back and forth between federal, provincial responsibility, and that's again kind of the way governments have also looked—had always looked at First Nations' issues, especially here in Manitoba. They bounce them back and forth between federal and provincial responsibility.

So it's unfortunate that this government and this minister is taking the wait-and-see approach, wait and see what somebody else does first, and then maybe we'll participate at that point in time, rather than taking the lead. So, that being said, I just wanted those words on the record in regards to the issue with Sioux Valley Dakota Nation and Brandon Indian Residential School cemetery site.

I do have a question now, to kind of switch gears on that, is about northern affairs. The review of the northern affairs program cost \$500,000. I'm just wondering if the minister identified any issues in this report, and when are you going to act on any recommendations, if any.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Once again the member opposite has chosen to misrepresent the actions of this government on the record. And this is disrespectful to all those who are working so hard to work towards resolving this issue.

And I would like to state for the record that Sioux Valley did tell me, when the NDP were in government, they reached out to that government at that time and asked them for support to search the burial grounds in Brandon and were flat-out turned away. So, you know, the NDP have no plan, they've never had a plan, and they never will have a plan to work with First Nations with respect to these burial grounds.

[inaudible] of a solution. We have commuted that—communicated that collectively to Sioux Valley Dakota Nation—

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): Sorry to interrupt, honourable minister. Your audio cut out there for about 20 seconds. So if we could back up a little bit as to what you were saying there so we could hear you again.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Okay, sorry for that. You hearing me okay now?

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): We can hear you now. It was about 20 seconds ago.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Okay, so, what was stated in fact, was that our department staff have taken a leadership role in co-ordinating a collaborative identification of a solution, and we have commuted that—communicated that collectively to Sioux Valley Dakota Nation along with Canada.

Mr. Bushie: Okay, thanks for sharing your talking points about the whole man-with-the-plan kind of knowledge there. But I also ended off that previous question with their review of the northern affairs program that cost \$500,000, and I'm just wondering if the minister could identify any issues in this report and if you're going to act on any recommendations and when.

Mr. Lagimodiere: The issues or recommendations of the report cannot be released due to Cabinet confidence.

Mr. Bushie: What is the current vacancy rate in the northern affairs program?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Would the member clarify for me, is he just talking—is he talking about the entire department or just the northern affairs?

Mr. Bushie: Well, I guess we'll say the entire department.

Mr. Lagimodiere: As of today, there are a total of 15 vacancies, and we continue to do what we can to actively recruit to fill these positions.

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): Are there any further questions?

Seeing not, we will go ahead with the resolutions. The last item to—

Resolution 19.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$29,114,000 for Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, Indigenous and Northern Relations, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

* (15:30)

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 19.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 19.1. If necessary, at this point, we request all—we request that all ministerial and opposition staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions. If a motion comes—

Mr. Bushie: I move,

THAT line item 19.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations' salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Motion presented.

An Honourable Member: Seconders.

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): Secunder is the member from Transcona. Motion is in order and the debate can now proceed.

Mr. Bushie: Mr. Chair, again, this is about affordability and being able to take home a paycheque when others may not be able to take home anything. So I think in—it's the right thing to do, so this minister and this government cannot take home a salary that's unfair to the rest of Manitobans. And I think they need to truly lead by example, and leading by example would mean, in fact, to actually take your own pay cut and take your own reduction in pay.

You can't lead a department and expect others to follow, expect Manitobans to kind of do their part to help us all and, at the same time, take home a larger piece of the pie for yourselves. And including this goes back to when Brian Pallister kind of circumvented the rules here a little bit and got himself a pay raise by that way.

I'd also like to thank the minister for the engagement, here, over the last little while during Estimates. And I realize I'm not able to share certain things, but I would like to point out that the minister talked about engagement just with us, meaning the opposition, and why we didn't come up to his office and have dialogue on a number of different issues. And I know I really can't say whether a member is present or not present here in the Chamber, but there is an opportunity to actually—and we do have that opportunity to sit face-to-face here in the Chamber on a daily basis, or we can do that via Zoom.

And I feel that attending in person is really something that's beneficial to us all. It's something that

we've—we did our sacrifices during the pandemic so that we could actually get back to face-to-face and have that real communication go back and forth. And others choose to do that on Zoom because they choose to not be accountable and to not really take into consideration the back and forth, and really get the feel of the room, and the feel of the issues.

And there's been a number of occasions where it may or may not have been health-related to choose to participate in Zoom—or choose to participate in person, but I truly believe that in person is the best way to have this communication, including during Estimates process. And I'm sure Indigenous people here in Manitoba, when they participate and they go through this Estimates process and QP and go, they'll know exactly what I'm talking about.

Miigwech.

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): Any other members wishing to speak in debate of the motion? Seeing none, shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): All those in favour, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): All those opposed, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Recognize the member from—oh, sorry. Honourable member from Keewatinook.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): On division.

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): The motion is defeated on division.

* * *

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): We shall now go to the last resolution.

Resolution 19.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,979,000 for Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

The next step—the next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration.

Shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and critic the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next department? *[Agreed]*

The committee recessed at 3:35 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:47 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

ADVANCED EDUCATION, SKILLS AND IMMIGRATION

* (15:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): 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 Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

An Honourable Member: I do not.

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

Does the official opposition critic have an opening statement? No?

We thank the critic for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line 44.1(a) contained in resolution 44.1.

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber, and I would invite the minister and critic to please introduce their staff in attendance. You guys are welcome to invite your staff in, if you have anyone—you're welcome to, if you'd like to.

And minister, do you have staff with you you'd wish introduce?

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Yes, I do. Along with myself, I have my deputy minister, Eric Charron; my

assistant deputy minister of Finance and Corporate Services, Melissa Ballantyne; and my assistant deputy minister for Immigration, Karmel Chartrand.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, minister.

Would the critic like to introduce any staff? *[interjection]* No? Okay, they'll be here shortly. No problem.

In accordance with subrule 77, subsection 16, during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner with questions put on the resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Is the government working on new tuition fee policies currently?

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, if you could give me a wave. The reason being that the tech people at our end mute your mic. So just give me a wave before you start talking and I'll recognize you, and then we'll unmute you at the technical end here. So, get my attention somehow and then you can go ahead. Did you want to speak now, Minister?

Mr. Reyes: Mr. Chair, I will respond once I've raised my hand.

Mr. Chairperson: Please go ahead, honourable Minister. You've muted your mic, Minister. Okay.

Mr. Reyes: Mr. Chair, I know that the critic had asked me a question with respect to—can he repeat the question? I just got—sorry, we were just talking to someone.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for St. James—St. Vital.

Mr. Moses: Is the government working on new tuition fee policy currently?

Mr. Reyes: Yes, we are working on that. We've done some—we've completed some consultations and we are working on doing those efforts.

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, I—I'm sorry to interrupt you. We can't really make out what you're saying, or I can't. Do you have a headset or something that you can plug in, or are you able to come down here? *[interjection]* Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Reyes: Yes, the response to the critic was, yes, we are—there has been consultation that has been completed that we're working on—

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, I'm sorry to interrupt you. I cannot hear you clearly. You need to either plug in a microphone or just come down to the Chamber, and we've got everything set up here that works great.

Mr. Reyes: I'll put on my headset.

Can you hear me better, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Chairperson: I believe so. Let's try that again. Why don't you go ahead and answer the question about tuition.

Mr. Reyes: Yes, it is being worked on. Consultations have been completed and we are continuing to engage.

Mr. Moses: I thank the minister for the question—for the response.

He said the consultations are completed, I would like to know when the new tuition policy would be announced or published, and will that be done before the start of the next school year in September 2023?

Mr. Reyes: I'd like to thank all post-secondary partners and Manitobans for participating in the consultation process regarding the future tuition fees and student fees policy in Manitoba.

Throughout our consultations, we heard from our post-secondary partners, faculty and student associations, students and other Manitobans. Their feedback and input has been very—has been invaluable toward informing the development of a policy.

The future policy will consider the balance between student affordability, tuitional sustainability and fiscal responsibility. We look forward to continue working with our partners to develop a flexible and responsive policy that will ensure that quality post-secondary education remains accessible and affordable for Manitoba students.

Mr. Moses: Thank you for the response. I'd like to get more clarity on when the new policy would be announced.

So, would that be in time before the next 2023 school year, so that's September 2023? Would it be earlier to give, perhaps, students more time to plan on what the tuition changes would be and how it would impact them?

When is the minister going to provide this information, since he's already said that the consultations are complete?

Mr. Reyes: Department is in the process of developing the policy based on the consultation feedback and a jurisdictional scan of tuition fees, student fees and

policies across Canada. The department intends to submit the draft policy for governmental approval in December of this year, which is pretty soon, and for implementation, early 2023.

Mr. Moses: So, just to clarify, you said it would be December, and what would be in December? And then it would be announced in early 2023, meaning first quarter—January, February, March of 2023? Just wanted to clarify that. Or perhaps before the end of February—if he could be more specific.

Mr. Reyes: Just to let my critic know that the letters go out to the post-secondary institutions in the—around the end of January, beginning of February, and implementation start—begins in the start of the school year in the fall of 2023.

Mr. Moses: Does the minister and the government still support the creation of performance-based funding models for universities and colleges?

* (16:00)

Mr. Reyes: [*inaudible*] have told us they want to demonstrate how they are helping students succeed and will continue to work with us as we move forward to improve outcomes over time.

Based on the Auditor General report of 2020, it states, you know, better accountability of PSIs on behalf of Manitoba taxpayers. Through consultations, our PSIs are in agreement, and I understand that they have a role to play to satisfy the report of the Auditor General, and that's why consultations are ongoing.

Mr. Moses: Okay, so the consultations are still ongoing, as the minister just said, for performance-based funding. That's correct, so it means he's supporting the idea of performance-based funding. If I can understand that's correctly what the minister's saying, that he supports the idea of performance-based funding model for universities and colleges, and the consultation for that—the implementation of that plan is still ongoing, is that correct?

Mr. Reyes: No, that's not what I stated. I've stated that the introduction of a framework is consistent with calls from the office of the Auditor General's 2020 report.

On oversight of post-secondary institutions for publicly funded universities and colleges, the recommendations include developing a modern framework with defined performance benchmarks and stronger reporting requirements, which the post-secondary

institutions are in agreement with, and we are consulting with them, and they understand that they have a role to play with regards to the report.

Mr. Moses: So is the system that the minister's describing one in which performance measures would be set out for universities and colleges, and based on whether those universities and colleges meet those performance measures, funding for that institution would be tied to how those measurements are met? Is that the process that the minister's just described?

Mr. Reyes: No funding decisions have been made. This is an accountability framework exercise, and we're looking to develop accountability framework metrics that will satisfy everyone involved and, most importantly, for the Manitoba taxpayer.

Mr. Moses: So the accountability framework that you're describing, does that include any performance metrics for colleges and universities?

Mr. Reyes: Mr. Chair, can you have the—my critic repeat the question, please?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for St. Vital to repeat the question.

Mr. Moses: The accountability framework that you just mentioned, Minister, does that include any performance metrics that is tied to funding for colleges or universities?

Mr. Reyes: Our framework will be incorporating best practices from models developed by other jurisdictions and feedback from post-secondary stakeholders in Manitoba. No decisions have been made as of yet consulting. We're determining with what the framework will be. We're consulting to explore models with all PSI stakeholders, and we'll propose a model on a new accountability framework when these are completed.

Mr. Moses: In the minister's last response, not the most recent, but the second-last response, he mentioned that one of the primary goals was to ensure that it was satisfactory for taxpayers.

I also want to just throw to the minister that perhaps he should be keenly aware that students in Manitoba should be of main focus when it comes to funding framework. The health and success of our institutions should be also a key part of that, a primary objective and satisfying, as well as the faculty who work at all these institutions. And I think that if the minister is creating a framework with the key objective of satisfying taxpayers only, it misses out quite

a bit of very, very critical stakeholders like students, faculty and the administration themselves.

So I'll put that to the minister that he should perhaps keep that in mind if he's creating new accountability framework without having some of the key stakeholders as top priorities.

So this accountability framework, which I think it's clearly geared towards a model that includes some performance-based measure for universities and colleges, will that—this accountability framework, as the minister puts it—will that be ready by September 2023?

Mr. Reyes: I think that my critic, you know, I've mentioned many times in the House, and he knows this well or he should know. But you know what, it's not surprising they probably don't have a plan and they'll never have a plan, but we have consulted with students. Their feedback is very especially insightful. We consulted also with faculty associations. We had excellent feedback.

So for him to say that we didn't consult with other stakeholders, you know, it's very, very, you know, I guess, you know, the critic can think of the way he wants, but, you know, our government is working hard for the taxpayer, to include all stakeholders including students. Again, their feedback was very insightful and the faculty associations as well. So they provide excellent feedback.

And again, no decision has been made yet, but I can tell you that we're consulting to explore models with all PSI stakeholders, including the feedback that we got from students and faculty associations on a new accountability framework with—when these are all completed.

* (16:10)

Mr. Moses: I never said the minister hadn't consulted with those groups. I just wanted to make sure the minister listens to those groups and really hears their feedback.

I did want to just get further clarity on the time frame of this framework. Will it be implemented for the 2023 school year—that's the start of September 2023 school year?

Mr. Reyes: You know, we are improving our accountability system for post-secondary institutions as part of the action plan in the Manitoba Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy. It's a very important document. I don't know if the critic has read that document.

Again, the introduction of the framework is consistent with the calls from the Office of the Auditor General 2020 report on oversight of post-secondary institutions for publicly funded universities and colleges. Recommendations include developing and monitoring a framework with defined performance benchmarks and stronger reporting requirements. This will ensure that our investment in post-secondary institutions is achieving the intended results and that post-secondary education is aligned with government priorities.

University and colleges have a role to play in shaping the new framework, and that's why we've been in constant engagement with them. They have provided constructive feedback on critical aspects for a new accountability system. We'll continue to engage with our post-secondary stakeholders to work toward our vision for a high-quality education system that prepares Manitobans for long time—lifelong success, including students and faculty associations and other stakeholders that are pertinent. Our framework will incorporate best practices for models developed, again, by other jurisdictions and feedback from post-secondary stakeholders in Manitoba.

Mr. Moses: Since the minister has undertaken so much work with this project, I think, you know, Manitobans—specifically students—would like to get a sense of what the time frame looks like on when these changes would arrive. You know, I would think that if the minister is so positive on the plan that he'd be, you know, pretty resident—reticent to want to share at least a ballpark of when Manitobans can expect the new plan to roll out. So, will this be announced and be ready for the start of the September 2023 school year?

Mr. Reyes: You know, it's very important, you know, that we get this done right, and that's the reason why we've been consulting with all stakeholders. We know that advanced education in this province is very crucial after a post-pandemic period. The metrics that we collect and that they'll be done—will be done in a fashion where it will be done properly to ensure that the framework will respect the autonomy, size and diversity of our colleges and universities.

That's why no decisions have been made with respect to, you know, the metrics. But that's the reason why we're engaging with post-secondary institutions and stakeholders that are pertinent to this framework.

Mr. Moses: I recently met with faculty members from the University of Manitoba. They organized an event to—discuss topics like performance-based funding, tuition fees, differential tuition fees.

And one of the common—I would say, almost universal—thoughts on this were that they're, quite frankly, not necessary. That they would—if implemented, would make the post-secondary system in Manitoba worse off.

So my question is—and the minister said that he has consulted with faculty. Well, what did they tell him about this plan? What was their feedback about these initiatives that the minister is proposing?

Mr. Reyes: I want to thank faculty associations for their recent participation and contributions during our formal consultations on a new tuition and student fees policy on a post-secondary accountability framework.

You know, our department appreciates all faculty associations' level of engagement. I'm encouraged its members remain active on matters of importance to Manitoba's post-secondary education system.

You know, the—my department, we look forward to working with faculty associations and its members again in the future.

Mr. Moses: So, faculty members told me loud and clear that this type of initiative would include performance metrics for funding, that would include differential tuition fees—would be a resounding negative effect—impact on our universities.

And I want to know whether the minister got this message as well, if this was what came out of his consultation meetings, and what the minister says about that response to the framework that he's currently working on.

Mr. Reyes: I just want to let the—my critic know that consultations are ongoing. We need to get, you know, very important stakeholders involved, including Indigenous groups. You know, we have to listen to all views.

But, again, I want to thank, you know, the participation of faculty associations and students for their contributions during our formal consultations on this new tuition fees and student fees policy, which will bring on a new post 'coundly' frame—framework. The department appreciates their participation, and we'll continue to listen to all views.

* (16:20)

Mr. Moses: So I just want to know if the minister can provide a little more clarity or detail there because all the meetings that I've had on this topic, from—including students and from administration as well as faculty members have been a resounding no to these

proposals. And it's odd to me that the minister seems to be moving forward with this when there's a resounding and a large amount of pushback on this idea.

And so I would really love some clarity into, you know—give the minister an opportunity to prove why this change is necessary and why he's continuing to move forward with this plan when there seems to be a large amount of opposition to it.

And I—because I'd really love to just get as to why we are making this change. I don't think that's been clearly explained to many faculty or students or, quite frankly, you know, even members in this Chamber, people in Manitoba, why these changes are needed.

So I'd really like to get a sense of why this is, you know—minister claims that accountability is needed. Accountability can be achieved in many ways without going to differential tuition. Accountability can be achieved without going towards performance-based funding. So if the minister wants to achieve accountability, he can do so without bringing in these initiatives.

My question is why does the minister feel the need to bring in performance metrics, differential tuitions, when it is clearly, according to the experts and the people most impacted in our post-secondary system, would be a resounding negative into our post-secondary education system? Why does the minister push forward with this?

Mr. Reyes: Clearly—I say again, clearly, the critic has not read the Office of the Auditor General report with respect to post-secondary accountability framework.

At these meetings that he has supposedly heard, clearly—and I say again, clearly—they've all said accountability is important to all those stakeholders.

So I recommend that the—I strongly suggest that the critic read the off—the report of the Office of the Auditor General so that he can familiarize himself on why accountability is important from the people that he heard at these meetings, and that my department has heard.

Mr. Moses: Can the minister just give me a—answer a factual question for me? How much has tuition increased for students at universities since 2016?

Mr. Reyes: What I can tell the critic—my critic, that the average tuition in Manitoba is just around—a bit over \$5,000, with a provincial contribution of 39.2 per cent to PSI revenue.

If we compare our numbers with British Columbia, which is governed by the NDP, the NDP government of BC contributes 32.4 per cent to post-secondary institutions' revenue—6.6 per cent less than Manitoba—while the average tuition is almost 20 per cent higher in BC as compared to Manitoba.

So, our government is committed to investing more in post-secondary while keeping tuition one of the lowest in Canada, and he's heard that time and time again because it is factual.

Mr. Moses: I asked the minister how much university has increased for students since 2016. As he is not able to provide the number for me now, can he endeavour to find—get the specific numbers from tuition in 2016 versus tuition in 2022?

Mr. Reyes: I just want to state some stats from Stats Canada with regards to undergraduate students, the average tuition.

As I stated, while Manitoba is just averaging just over \$5,000, in Nova Scotia, it's actually \$9,000. Our neighbour next door, Saskatchewan, it is \$8,500. Even PEI, which is a smaller province than Manitoba, is just over \$7,000. Alberta is \$6,500. British Columbia, \$6,100. Ontario, \$8,000. The Canadian average is \$6,700. But ours in Manitoba is \$5,000 for the average tuition for a undergraduate student here in Manitoba.

Mr. Moses: I mean, I'm sure that the minister would have the figures on the average tuition for students, since his government's been in office since 2016 'til now. I'm sure they have that information.

I'm wondering if they can share it with us. I don't see what the—his hesitation is, why he can't endeavour, agree to endeavour to take that on to provide both the tuition increases from 2016 to now for universities as well as for colleges. If the minister is so confident that his tuition rates are low, then I don't think he would be—any hesitation to sharing the figures over several years, if he's very confident in its affordability offer.

So I ask the minister, just one more time, if he can provide the average tuition for university and colleges in Manitoba since 2016 up until 2022.

Mr. Reyes: So, when it comes to affordability, I don't know if these critic heard me. The average tuition for an undergraduate student in Manitoba is just over \$5,000; Nova Scotia, \$9,000.

* (16:30)

Our government is committed to ensuring Manitobans have access to higher education. We're

finding a balance between affordability, institutional sustainability and quality education. That's why these consultations are very important, not only with our post-secondary institutions, but our faculty associations and our students. Their feedback has been very insightful which has been really good engagement with everyone to ensure that we meet the objectives of the report of the Office of the Auditor General, which the critic has not read.

Mr. Moses: I don't understand why the minister is accusing me of not reading a document I never said I didn't read. I don't know where that's coming from, Minister—I'll put to the minister.

I also want to say that I think it's very telling he doesn't want to share his tuition data over the last record of this government. It doesn't matter what the current—in many respects, it's irregardless of what the current tuition is, because I'm asking about whether it's increased over time.

Manitoba students who started their programs four years ago are paying significantly amount—significantly more now. That increase is a huge different in the lives of Manitoban students. It makes them question whether they want to have a career here, an educational career here in Manitoba, whether they want to stay here or whether they want to go to another province.

That increase in tuition is what I was asking the minister about. Maybe he did not understand me. That's why I had to ask it three, four and now—two, three and now I'm on the fourth time of asking this question: whether the minister can provide me what the increase in tuition is? Does he have a problem understanding what I'm asking? I asked him about the increase in tuition, not the current tuition. And, yes, I have read the document. The minister does not need to put false information on the record.

Now, I want to move on to a different question. I would love to move on to a different question, but I'd love the minister, even more, to answer my question about whether—about how much tuition for colleges and universities has increased since 2016.

Mr. Reyes: You know, during the dark days of the NDP, with regards to advanced education and post-secondary, they took an ideological approach. Neglect.

We, since 2016, have been cleaning up their mess—cleaning up their mess. And that's why the report came out. A report came out that the Auditor General has recommended that we have metrics to

ensure accountability that all our stakeholders have agreed upon. A report that the critic allegedly has read or not read, so I don't know why he's so offensive when it comes to that. But the thing is, we're cleaning up the mess and we're ensuring that we meet the information that was put onto that report by the Office of the Auditor General.

Mr. Moses: Is the minister interested—is the minister considering reinstating public-provided health care for international students?

Mr. Reyes: You know, all summer I've been meeting with many folks, and I'm sure the critic has, too, as well. I've met with many international students from many countries—Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, China.

And you know, one thing—you know, I'm always eager and excited to meet them because these are highly likely future Manitobans because they like to come here because of—first of all, No. 1 is they actually have connections here. They say the reason why I came here is because, you know, I have friends here that go to these post-secondary institutions like the University of Manitoba, Assiniboine Community College, Brandon University.

Number 2, the great programs.

Number 3, affordability. The low tuition costs. That's what they tell me as the minister, that tuition costs are lower than other jurisdictions. I can't afford to go to British Columbia or Ontario. I decided to come to Manitoba because they have a pathway. They have a pathway with regards to, you know, coming here as an international student and then, you know, streamlining into our Provincial Nominee Program that a PC government created in 1998, may I remind him.

So, these are individuals that are very important to Manitoba because they are studying here. We offer low tuition rates, the reasons why they're coming here.

And with regards to him asking me about the question on international student health care, I would ask him to ask that question to the Department of Health.

Mr. Moses: Thank you for the response, Minister.

I think, you know, many international students are watching this. They're paying attention. This is their health, their livelihood on the line, and so I know that the minister, as he explained, cares deeply for international students.

And I urge him to—you know, if this is something that he supports, if he supports the idea that international students should be back on the provincial health-care plan, then I encourage him to say so today and to encourage his Health Minister to reinstate them if it is in her department's responsibility.

And be clear about it. International students are watching this. Tell them that you support the idea of having them back on their health—on the provincial health-care plan, and tell them that you're going to support advocating for them to the Health Minister to get them reinstated on the—onto the provincial health-care plan.

I'd like to hear that from the minister, and if he can't do that, please explain to international students why he is not able to do that.

Mr. Reyes: I know this week there has been a lot of religious festivals and holidays, including Navratri, and I want to wish, you know, international students from India, those of the Hindu faith, a happy Navratri.

I met with Nidhi [*phonetic*], the other day—two days ago, and, you know, again what I just said there she told me—like I asked her, from India to Manitoba? Why? Why are you studying in Manitoba? Because I'm always curious, and I always ask these questions. And, again, she told me because she had a friend here, she had a friend connection here, she had a family connection here, and the low tuition costs and the programs that we offer at our fine post-secondary institutions here in Manitoba.

And she's aware—and I don't know if the critic's aware, because I've said this many times—that when international students, as part of their tuition enrolments, they have health-care coverage and they will receive the same benefits as domestic students once they enrol in their health-care benefits.

* (16:40)

But, again, I want to tell Nidhi [*phonetic*], and all the students from India, because it is Navratri this week—those of the Hindu faith—one of our largest source countries for immigration; I believe they are No. 1 at this time—a happy Navratri, and thank you for choosing Manitoba because of the low tuition cost here in our great province of friendly Manitoba.

Mr. Moses: International students in Manitoba pay the highest for their private health insurance out of any international students in the country. That's a fact. And the minister's inability to see this as a problem, or at least his inability to work to solve this problem, is

frustrating because, irregardless of tuition, the levels of tuition in Manitoba, international students have to pay for that health care; they have to pay the highest amount for private health care for international students in the country here in Manitoba because the minister's government refused to allow them to be on the health-care plan, a change that happened under this government's watch in 2018.

Minister's made no commitments to reinstating them today when given the opportunity, and I'd like to give the minister an opportunity to change course again to benefit the thousands of international students here who are calling to be reinstated on the provincial health-care plan. Because, quite frankly, in addition to having to pay out of pocket for the private health-care plan, the services, if they need health-care services, they—the international students have to pay up front for those services before getting reinstated by their insurance plan. In addition, health-care service providers are often unsure about whether they qualify for health-care services, so many students are leery and unsure about going to get services in the first place. And that leads to worse health-care outcomes. It leads to worse health-care outcomes. And why would we ever want to put our students in that sort of a position?

So I'll ask the minister, what is he actually going to do to take this issue seriously? Is the minister going to consider pushing for international students to be reinstated on the provincial health-care plan?

Mr. Reyes: I don't know. I guess the member did not hear me the first time, but I'll explain again more—maybe more in detail.

Since January 2022, I've had many discussions with hundreds of international students from countries like Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, China, Nigeria and all across the globe that choose Manitoba as their top destination to study. And the common theme in their discussions is that our low tuition and our affordable living costs in Manitoba are the fundamental reasons for students to choose Manitoba.

The average—in comparison to tuition costs, you know, the average tuition in Manitoba for an international student is just under \$18,000 versus Nova Scotia is \$20,000; neighbouring Saskatchewan, \$22,000; NDP-governed British Columbia is \$30,000; Ontario is \$42,000. The Canadian average is \$33,000. Again, our average international tuition for undergraduates is just under \$18,000.

Mr. Moses: Has the minister done any analysis on the impact of cutting support—health-care support for

international students? And the analysis I'm asking about is would that be for, you know, perhaps, health-care outcomes, or in—or, rather, economic impact as a result of the cut of health-care services for international students?

Mr. Reyes: Again, I want to ensure that all 'internash' students, that they have health-care coverage in Manitoba as part of their tuition enrolment, and that, you know—health, again, doesn't fall under my purview, and he can ask the question to the Department of Health with regards to that.

But let me tell international students again that they have health-care coverage in Manitoba as part of their tuition enrolment.

And again, on behalf of the Province of Manitoba, thank you for choosing friendly Manitoba to study because of our low tuition rates that I've heard since I became minister for this portfolio in January 2022.

Mr. Moses: I know in the—in previous—what was known as bill 33, The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act, there was a section around determining fees for university students.

And I'm not talking about for student unions, I'm talking about non-student-union-related fees. There was the ability for the department, the minister, to create regulation on student fees for university students.

Is the minister planning on making a change to that regulation or—and would that be for this year or next year? Is he doing any work on that part for student fees, and specifically ones that are not related to student unions?

Mr. Reyes: I want to thank the member, my critic, for that question.

I want to thank all post-secondary partners and Manitobans for having participated in our consultation process regarding the future tuition fees and student fees policy in Manitoba.

Throughout our consultations, we heard from our post-secondary partners, faculty and student association students and other Manitobans. Their feedback was very valuable. Their input was very valid toward informing the development of a policy—in this case, the future tuition fees and student fees policy. This future policy will consider the balance between student affordability, institutional sustainability and fiscal responsibility.

I look forward—my department looks forward to continue working with our partners to develop a flexible and responsive policy that will ensure that a quality post-secondary education remains accessible and affordable for Manitoba students.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Moses: Can the minister provide the most recent wait times for students trying to access Manitoba Student Aid?

* (16:50)

Mr. Reyes: As I said earlier today, we are continually 'entancing' our processes and products that include Manitoba Student Aid. I know that my staff are working hard each and every day to ensure that the applications and enquiries from clients are addressed in a timely manner.

We know that the previous NDP government didn't know how to run a Manitoba Student Aid system and wasted \$15 million—\$15 million of taxpayers' money—on an outdated student aid software resulting in delay in students' applications and disbursements of funds. The lack of action on their part has created a mess for our government. We have a plan to improve that.

So again, I want to thank all the hard-working staff at Student Aid for enhancing the processes and products to ensure that we meet the students' needs.

Mr. Moses: Many students complain about not being able to get through the phone lines of the Student Aid as well as no response to emails and having a hard time getting any information from the Student Aid offices.

What is the minister doing to address these? Is he increasing staffing or is he making any changes to address these to improve Student Aid for Manitobans?

Mr. Reyes: What I can tell my critic is that 16,000 applications have been processed. That's approximately 60 per cent of funds being dispersed for a total of \$74 million, right? I know my staff has been working hard on cleaning the mess that the previous NDP government, who didn't know how to run the Manitoba aid system, because they left us with this mess, and again, wasted \$15 million on outdated student aid software, resulting in delays; and we're cleaning up that mess.

But you know what—the Manitoba Student Aid division is working very hard to get those funds out, but I can tell you that 60 per cent of these funds have

been dispersed. During this time, it's been a very peak time to get these out there, but again, the department is working hard to enhance the processes of Student Aid.

Mr. Moses: Some students bring up the fact that, you know, this is a provincially run student aid program and they're going—attending a provincially funded post-secondary institution, for example, the University of Manitoba, and saying how it's confusing that they, you know, might be facing penalties and inability to attend a publicly funded university and also, you know, issues with this publicly funded student aid.

And so, wondering if there's a connection that could be made there to help university, a publicly funded university, understand that there's issues that are beyond the students' control with Manitoba Student Aid that would—and allow them to continue their education at that publicly funded institution while the issues with Manitoba Student Aid get sorted out so that the student doesn't get caught in the middle; their education doesn't get suffered. Understanding that there is a lot of public funding going in, obviously with Manitoba Student Aid as well as the institution that they're attending.

So has the minister considered any plans or proposals to allow students to continue their education so that they don't suffer in any way while they might be living through delays with Manitoba Student Aid?

Mr. Reyes: We always work in close partnership with our post-secondary institutions, and we are working with our post-secondary institutions to defer tuition. We've had regular communication with them. We know that it's very important that students who have not received their aid, you know, get their student aid in a timely manner.

But the thing is, though, we have communicated with PSIs to defer tuition, and we've had some really good conversations about that. They've been very understanding. And regular communication is ongoing until we have the situation solved.

Mr. Moses: I thank the minister for that response. So to be clear, if a student is having specific problems accessing education due to a delay in their student aid, what process should they follow? Should they be contacting your office to have that looked at in terms of the specific—their specific case? Because many times, when they reach out to Student Aid, they're not getting a response, there's extreme wait on a phone line and the folks there aren't able to be as helpful.

Should they be reaching out to your office, Minister?

Mr. Reyes: As I've said before, you know what? We're committed to students. We're committed to ensuring Manitobans have access to higher education, and in this case, to Manitoba Student Aid. We want to find a balance between affordability, institutional sustainability and quality education.

With regards to the question that my critic asked, I just want to let him know that I know that Manitoba Student Aid is working extremely hard to ensure that we get these funds out for these students. But to answer your question directly, there—to the member of St. Vital, is the first step is to contact that respective post-secondary institution first, and then if there is any issue at all, please contact my department, and we'll assure that we get back to the student who is affected.

Mr. Moses: In the annual report for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, page 30, it's clear that the grant or grant assistance was decreased from last year as well as the grant assistance for apprenticeships.

I'm asking the minister, you know, how he expects to continue to provide—ensure that our post-secondary institutions are thriving and successful when we see year after year reductions in funding for post-secondary institutions that we see again evidenced on page 30 of the annual report.

Mr. Reyes: The one thing that I can tell the critic is that, you know, the department has started public consultations with regard to skills at apprenticeship to modernize the apprenticeship model to address the labour market shortages as part of our five-year—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday morning.

Happy Thanksgiving, everybody.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 6, 2022

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<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>