

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

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

Vol. LXXVII No. 36B - 1:30 p.m., Tuesday, April 4, 2023

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 4, 2023

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I am just tabling for the information of the House the revised Estimates order.

Madam Speaker: And the honourable Minister of Justice.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Also tabling for the House the Manitoba Court of Appeal Annual Report for the year ending 2020-2021.

Madam Speaker: And I am pleased to table the Annual Report of the Legislative Assembly Management Commission for the year ending March 31st, 2023. Copies of the report have been placed on members' desks.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes' notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 27(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

Sikh Heritage Month

Hon. Obby Khan (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize and celebrate Sikh history month in Manitoba, which is observed annually in the month of April.

Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh.
[*The Khalsa belongs to God, Victory belongs to God.*]

Throughout our province's rich history, the Sikh community has continually demonstrated leadership across every sector, whether it be in science, business, trade or the arts. Their efforts have, in return, enriched Manitoba's diversity, innovation and growth, shaping our provincial identity along the way.

The deep roots of the Sikh community in our province date back over a century. Among some of the intrepid Sikh pioneers from Manitoba were John Baboo and John Singh. During world war when— one, they were two of 10 Sikh men that were permitted to join the Canadian Army. They did so, despite the fact that Sikhs were denied the possibility of Canadian citizenship and the right to vote until 1947.

Their commitment to the Sikh principles of justice and equality for all people inspired them to enlist, and Manitobans are grateful for their contributions every single day.

For these—from these humble roots, generations of Sikhs have lived in Manitoba and contributed to our communities in many ways. With over 35,000 Manitoba residents that identify as Sikh, the community continues to grow and enrich Manitoba every day.

Stewardship and guidance are the core principles of Sikhism. Through long-standing organizations such as the Sikh Society of Manitoba, home to our province's first gurdwara and newer organizations such as the Sikh Heritage Manitoba, the community has worked hard to provide a welcoming place for Sikh newcomers while sharing Sikh culture with all Manitoba residents.

A great example of this was the Ardaas prayer that is held in the Legislature at the start of April for the last five years, an incentive brought forward by Sikh Heritage Manitoba, which occurred this past Saturday.

Whether you are in a small town or a big city, the impact of Manitoba's Sikh community is evident through their social, economic and civic achievements. These contributions reflect the core values of selflessness—service, known as seva. This dedication to community building aligns with the core value that unites all Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, as we celebrate Sikh history month, Manitobans will have the opportunity to learn about Sikh community and honour their important place in our provincial identity. I extend my warmest regards to the Sikh community here today and throughout Manitoba, and encourage all Manitobans to take part in the many activities planned for this month, Sikh Heritage Month.

Madam Speaker, I ask that we all now stand and recognize the great showing of support for the Sikh community here today.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh. [*The Khalsa belongs to God, Victory belongs to God.*] I welcome my Sikh community members in the gallery today.

Sikh Heritage Month is a time when Sikhs celebrate values such as humanity, tolerance and equity. Manitoba is home to over 35,000 Sikh people and has the fourth largest Sikh population in Canada.

The celebration of Sikh Heritage Month not only recognizes the vital role Manitoba's Sikh population plays in our communities across the province but also highlights Sikh reputation of bravery and service. Sikhism has Punjabi roots and Punjab constitutes just 2.3 per cent of the population in India. However, Punjab has the highest number of deceased veterans in India, which goes to show just how devoted Sikhs are to living a life of sacrifice and patriotism.

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Sikh Heritage Manitoba in creating dynamic and accessible spaces for community engagement, championing awareness for the multifaceted experiences of Sikhs in Manitoba and celebrating the legacy of Sikhs across the province.

The Sikh community in Manitoba is passionate about providing selfless service to their communities and they continue to show it year after year through different programs.

For Sikh Heritage Month this year, Sikh Heritage Manitoba is working towards helping people in need through their second Fill the Truck Challenge to gather donations for Harvest Manitoba. This challenge aims to fill up a five-ton truck with non-perishable items to stock up our food banks.

The need for such donations amidst the current hike in food prices cannot be overestimated. I encourage everyone in the House today and those connected online to visit sikhheritagemanitoba.ca to find out how they can donate towards the Fill the Truck Challenge.

While we celebrate the Sikh Heritage Month in Canada, Manitobans of Punjabi origin are concerned about the situation in Punjab, where people are fighting for their human rights and freedom of speech. I share these concerns and ask all Punjabis worldwide to stay united and observe peace.

Happy Sikh Heritage Month to all Sikhs in our province. Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh [*The Khalsa belongs to God, Victory belongs to God.*].

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I ask for leave to respond to the minister's statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the ministerial statement? [*Agreed*]

Ms. Lamoureux: April is Sikh Heritage Month, not only here in Manitoba, but from coast to coast to coast all over Canada.

In every single aspect of our society, the Indo-Canadian community is there. They steer our economic development, our international students and Manitoba would not be where we are today without the community.

Madam Speaker, I was actually in India—mainly in the Punjab—just five weeks ago, where I was able to have a couple of new first-time experiences that I want to share with the House.

So, I flew into Delhi, then hopped onto a plane to Amritsar, and our first stop was the Golden Temple. Now, I've been here before, but what made this time different was the fact that we went at 1 a.m. in the morning, and the temple, the water, the stillness, the peaceful atmosphere, it just—it glistens, and it just—it resonates with you.

I also had the opportunity to visit Anandpur Sahib. And, Madam Speaker, this is the place where the 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, founded the Khalsa in front of thousands of people in 1699.

And whether it's the Golden Temple and its beauty, the incredible hours of volunteerism and giving back to the community and making everyone feel equal and welcome through langar, or the birthplace of the Khalsa—these are all-consuming experiences. And I am so grateful because my father, over the years, has taught me that you do not have to be of Sikh faith to appreciate the spiritual presence of these places.

It is truly an honour to be able to rise in these Chambers in recognition of Sikh heritage, and I'd like to thank all of those who have joined us here today in the galleries, as well as the minister for bringing forward the statement.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Further ministerial statements?

The honourable minister of community wellness and mental health—and I would indicate that the required

90 minutes' notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 27(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Caregiver Recognition Day

Hon. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): Today, the first Tuesday in April, marks Caregiver Recognition Day.

I'm proud to share that Manitoba was the first jurisdiction to pass a recognition act for caregivers in 2011. The Caregiver Recognition Act acknowledges the vital role of caregivers and sets out general principles for government and agencies to promote caring in Manitoba.

* (13:40)

We all know someone who has needed or provided essential personal care, support or assistance to a loved one. I personally want to thank the caregivers, support workers and front-line workers who do this very important work every day, supporting our loved ones, communities and our province.

I ask everyone to take the time to recognize and celebrate the selfless contributions caregivers are making today and every day. This work is vital to keeping our communities safe, healthy and connected.

Thank you.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I am pleased to have the opportunity to express gratitude to all of Manitoba's dedicated caregivers today for National Caregiver Day.

This year, Carers Canada and associated organizations are recognizing the many caregivers who are providing care for someone with a life-limiting illness.

Caregivers sometimes seemingly face impossible tasks, only to take on any challenge thrown at them and meet it with resilience and commitment. Through the years of the challenging pandemic health care and long term—or ongoing health-care and long-term-care crisis, the constant emotional struggles that come with them, caregivers have shown up on every occasion, providing the best care possible to those across Manitoba.

Caregivers have rarely received the recognition and thanks they deserve for their contributions to our health-care system. This is certainly the case in

Manitoba, as unfortunately we have seen mistreatment, underfunding and high turnover rates throughout the province, leaving many caregivers chronically burnt out and under-supported.

The work that our caregivers do is essential, and it should be treated accordingly. Caregiving does not need to be a thankless task, and we will continue to fight for caregivers to be provided proper support and resources.

Today, we thank all caregivers across Manitoba. We will continue to advocate for you.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I seek leave to speak to the ministerial statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Lamont: Today, I'd like to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the caregivers who work so tirelessly in the province of Manitoba. Whether you are a paid professional or an unpaid family member, your unwavering dedication to families, to patients, seniors and people with disabilities has been an inspiration to us all.

As we navigate through these challenging times, caregivers have truly been the backbone of our community. You've been on the front lines, providing essential care and support to those who need it most. You've worked long hours, sacrificed time with your own families and put the needs of others before your own.

I want to acknowledge this kind of work can often lead to burnout and emotional exhaustion. It takes a special kind of person to do what you do, and we all recognize the tremendous sacrifice that you make every day. That's why we want to remind you that it's essential to take care of yourselves as well. Don't hesitate to ask for help when you need it, because you are not alone.

As we move forward and begin to recover from the pandemic, it's important to acknowledge the need for healing. We need to provide you with the support you need to heal—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

An Honourable Member: Leave.

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

Mr. Lamont: So, today, I want to say thank you for your tireless dedication and your unwavering commitment for all you do and know that your hard work and sacrifice do not go unnoticed. We celebrate you today and every day.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RCMP Retroactive Salary Cost to Municipalities

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Last week, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities released a statement expressing their disappointment in the federal government's recent budget for its failure to include a commitment to absorb the retroactive salary costs from the RCMP collective bargaining agreement. This decision will put the burden of costs onto municipalities instead of on the federal government.

Municipalities in Manitoba are already dealing with the crises of inflation and affordability in their communities. And they were left for years without help from the provincial PC government when it froze municipal funding for seven years, including during the pandemic.

And now that they are being forced to pay retroactive salary costs to the RCMP, municipalities are faced with the prospect of having to increase property taxes, delay infrastructure projects and find other ways to cut costs. This will harm local communities when they are already in a fragile state.

To make matters worse, the federal Liberal government failed to meaningfully consult with municipalities during negotiations on this issue, even though municipalities are paying contract partners.

This is the wrong approach. Healthy municipalities are the backbone of a healthy province and country, and it is the responsibility of the federal and provincial governments to consult with municipalities and give them the support they need.

Unfortunately, municipalities have been struggling for a long time, and the current provincial and federal governments are only making it worse.

We have seen them freeze funding, pass costs down, and now they fail to meaningfully consult with municipalities when making decisions about issues that affect them.

As the NDP critic for Municipal Relations, I join the AMM and municipalities across Canada in calling

on the federal government to commit to absorbing the RCMP retroactive salary costs immediately.

Thank you.

Lakeside Community Initiatives

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): It gives me great pleasure to stand before you today and speak about some great local initiatives in Lakeside.

As part of our government's plan to strengthen communities, we're investing nearly \$50 million through the arts, culture and sport community fund. This funding will support the delivery of quality programs and facilities in communities throughout Manitoba, with Lakeside receiving \$2.1 million of this community funding.

The local organizations receiving support in Lakeside are Ducks Unlimited wetland discovery centre; Stonewall Quarry Park kiln restoration; Green Acres Art Centre; Settlers, Rails & Trails; St. Eustache Minor Hockey Association; Warren Curling Club and Woodlands museum.

The kiln restoration initiative will restore a key element in the town's history and restore tourism. As the kilns were built over a century ago, they are much need of repair, have they degraded drastically. These kilns have now become the DNA of Stonewall and will continue to serve as the park's centrepiece and a reminder of the once booming sector.

With people making new connections between wetlands and—being conservation and the importance of natural areas have once again come into focus. The re-envisioning of the wetland discovery centre provides a unique destination welcoming wildlife and people year-round. A renewed experience will take visitors through a journey that connects, transforms and inspires action. Visitors will gain strong understanding of wetlands, why they are relevant and what they can do to protect them.

All these 'invative' projects contribute to a thriving, sustainable community while improving the quality and accessibility and availability of facilities for Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, I'm so thrilled to see these funds go to these local initiatives. These projects will create a greater quality of life in Lakeside and communities now and for generations to come.

Penner International

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): In 1923, Peter K. Penner, with his lone Model T Ford truck, began hauling freight

between Steinbach and Winnipeg. His business was known as Penners Transfer.

Over the first few decades of the company, many goods were transported, from milk cans to pulpwood. And briefly, when tires and gasoline were rationed during wartime, a passenger service was included for local residents who did not have gasoline for their vehicles.

During the 1940s, additional drivers were hired, and in the 1950s a major change happened as Penners Transfer became a contract carrier of parts for the Ford Motor Company from Windsor, Ontario, making Penners a long-distance trucking company.

As the Ford Motor Company grew, so did Penners Transfer, now shipping parts from Ontario to British Columbia. During this time, Peter's son Milton became involved with the company, eventually becoming an owner.

In the 1970s, Penners began to focus on transporting goods to the United States. During this time, my father worked for the company and I enjoyed joining with him on a few trips, although I think it might have been illegal under the insurance rates at the time, but we won't dwell on that issue.

The 1980s saw Penners open terminals in the United States, becoming Penner International, and by the 1990s, it employed about 500 people.

During this decade, Allan Penner, Milton's son, became president and CEO and soon after would become the sole owner.

All three generations of Penners are well known for their generosity to Manitoba and Manitoba charities.

This year, Penners, which is now owned by the C.A.T. group, is celebrating 100 years in business. Long recognized as a leader in the trucking industry in Manitoba, it's won many awards and employed thousands—including my father, step-father and many other relatives—and contributed millions to the Manitoba economy.

Congratulations to Penner International on 100 years of success, and thank you for all your contributions to Manitoba, Canada and North America.

* (13:50)

P3 Schools

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): This PC government recently announced they will use a P3 model for school construction, and like so many things this

government does, P3 schools are bad news for Manitobans.

Let's look at the experience of other provinces.

Nova Scotia built P3 schools. In 2016, they had to spend millions of dollars buying them back when the leases expired.

New Brunswick built P3 schools, claiming it would cost less than the traditional method. But now we know that the traditional method, Madam Speaker, would have saved the province millions.

Alberta built P3 schools and, just a few years after committing to the P3 model, they're walking back that decision.

Saskatchewan did the same thing. The result? Teachers not being able to open their windows for a whole year and strict limits on what could be placed on their walls.

There are many examples of how P3 schools don't allow educators flexibility in their space because of the control the private company has over the building. In some P3 schools in Edmonton, school staff can't even control their thermostats.

On top of this, Madam Speaker, we've known for years that P3s don't save money. A report from the Ontario Auditor General from 10 years ago found that P3 projects had cost the province billions more than if they were entirely public sector. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: And, Madam Speaker, the minister responsible yesterday got up and compared school construction to road construction, a comparison that is entirely meaningless given how different the building of roads is to the construction of schools.

Manitobans, Madam Speaker, need complete details and a full accounting of how this government plans to build these schools. Question is, will they get one?

Garden Grove School

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I am excited to rise this afternoon and share some thoughts and some questions that the grade 4s and 5s from Garden Grove School, who are up in the gallery here, have worked on and they want to share with this government.

So, first and foremost, Madam Speaker, there are some things this government needs to know.

There are not enough sewers in our neighborhood. The streets flood too much, especially when there is heavy rain and the snow is melting. And on this note, the roads need to be cleared better, more frequently and more salt should be used. There also needs to be more bicycle paths so people don't get hit by vehicles.

A couple of positive thoughts that the students have for this government include how Manitoba has great parks and, in their words, we like Manitoba because there are a lot of supports for immigrants and refugees.

Now, Madam Speaker, the students also have a few questions that I am going to read: Why doesn't Winnipeg have enough schools near big residential communities? Why do our streets have so many potholes? Why does construction last so long? And why don't we have more trash cans everywhere?

I'm tabling these questions because the students who have joined us today here are not able to stay for question period. However, I am hopeful the government will briefly address each question when I ask about it in QP so that the students can still receive their answers.

Madam Speaker, a lot goes on behind the scenes when schools visit, so I want to thank our education and outreach services, our planning and program co-ordinator 'Ana-lyst,' and the Speaker's office for their work in helping co-ordinate opportunities such as these.

I also want to wish Mehtab a very happy 10th birthday—if you want to give a wave—and ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the grade 4s and 5s and their teachers for their great questions.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: I would indicate in the public gallery, just to let you know how many students we have here, we have from Garden Grove School 40 grade 7 students under the direction of Kelly Livingstone, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux).

And we do all welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature.

Also in the public gallery, we have Chuck Lawrenson, who is the guest of the honourable member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen), with children Phoebe, Takis, Sonnet and Bronte.

And also, we have municipal guests in the gallery—and we have a number of them—from the town of Neepawa: Murray Parrott, deputy mayor; Yvonne Sisley, councillor; Lisa Pottinger, councillor; Colleen Synchshyn, CAO; Jodi Baker, assistant CAO.

From the municipality of Norfolk Treherne: Gilles Guertin, reeve; Jacee Frizzley, councillor; Aaron Knibbs, councillor; Shawn Jackson, councillor.

From the municipality of Glenella-Lansdowne: Damian Dempsy, councillor; Kevin Paramor, reeve; and wife Pat Paramor.

And from the municipality of North Norfolk, we have: Chris Leckie, councillor; Sadie Tait, councillor; Ed Sattler, councillor.

And these are all guests of the MLA from l'Agassiz.

We welcome all of you to the Manitoba Legislature.

Some Honourable Members: Agassiz.

Madam Speaker: Understanding I was saying the MLA for Agassiz.

* * *

Madam Speaker: And now on to oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Death of Linda Mary Beardy Condolences to Family

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I wanted to begin on a somber note and offer some words of commemoration in the memory of Linda Mary Beardy.

Just shortly before the session began this afternoon, the Winnipeg Police Service shared some very troubling details about this woman, who was originally from Lake St. Martin First Nation and also called Winnipeg home.

I'm sure Manitobans, Canadians, are going to be very concerned about the details of this incident, but I just wanted to take this time to acknowledge a dearly departed mother from our province and from our country, to support the work of our colleagues from St. Johns, Point Douglas, The Pas-Kameesak, as well as standing with everybody here in the Chamber to say, no more stolen sisters.

I do have a question on health care, but wanted to put those words on the record first.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition. Of course, this is an

absolute tragedy that has happened to this individual, and our deepest condolences go out to the family and friends of Linda Mary Beardy.

We understand she was 33 years old and from Lake St. Martin. I know that all of those individuals in Lake makes—Lake St. Martin community will be mourning her loss today, as are all of us. We know and understand that this continues to be under police investigation; we will let that process take place, Madam Speaker.

But again, our thoughts and condolences go out to the family, the friends and the community of Linda Mary Beardy.

Madam Speaker: And with a Speaker's latitude, I am going to say we'll start oral questions now, after those comments are made.

Allied Health Professionals Timeline for Contract Settlement

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you kindly for your consideration, Madam Speaker.

There are 6,500 health-care workers in Manitoba who are being forced to consider taking a strike at this time. We're talking about the paramedics who serve in rural Manitoba. We're talking about the lab techs, the X-ray techs, the respiratory therapists who help care for Manitobans when they're sick or when they need an urgent diagnosis.

These are the front-line health-care professionals, and they've been without a contract for five years now under Brian Pallister and under this Premier.

Will the Premier tell the House why her government has refused to bargain with these thousands of health-care workers for the last five years?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): It just gives me an opportunity to thank all of the paramedics out there, and all of our front-line health-care workers: doctors, nurses, all of our other health-care professionals who do incredible work to help with the health care of individuals in the province of Manitoba.

Specifically when it comes to paramedics, I know that we're in the process of negotiations when it comes to that, Madam Speaker, and we'll allow those—that process to take its course.

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

* (14:00)

Mr. Kinew: Five years, Madam Speaker. Five years in which the PC government should have worked to ensure that we're going to keep paramedics in the province, that we're going to keep the lab techs and X-ray techs working in our local hospitals right across Manitoba.

For five years, people in rural Manitoba have been talking about wait times for EMS. For five years, people across Manitoba have been asking when we're going to get more diagnostic services delivered to them. And now the answer, apparently, is to just wait longer.

Well, that's not good enough, Madam Speaker. We need action today. The PC government must immediately enter into a contract with these workers so that we can keep them working on the front lines.

Will the Premier explain why she has failed to get this done for the people of Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, each and every day, our government is committed to recruiting, retaining and attracting more health-care professionals to Manitoba. That's why we have invested more than \$200 million to recruit more than 2,000 health-care professionals to the province of Manitoba. I know the paramedics are a very important part of that.

Of course, we're in the middle of a—collective bargaining negotiations right now, Madam Speaker. It would be inappropriate to interject into the process there. I'm—surely the Leader of the Opposition is not suggesting that we would do that, because that would be inappropriate. We need to let that process unfold.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, what I'm suggesting is that this Premier should have gotten a deal done five years ago so that we could keep these health professionals working at the bedside here in Manitoba.

Again, Madam Speaker, we're not even at a position where this government can be taken seriously on the topic of health-care recruitment because we're not even taking care of the job of health-care retention. These are paramedics, these are lab techs, these are respiratory therapists who, in some cases, are leaving the province because what they're being offered is no longer competitive when we look at Saskatchewan or when we look at Ontario.

We know that the allied health-care professionals in Steinbach are voting with their feet. They're leaving

the province because of the failures of this government to respect those who care for us on the front lines of our health-care system.

Will the Premier simply explain why she's failed for five years to deliver a contract for allied health-care professionals?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition seems to be saying that we should be interfering in the collective bargaining process when it comes to paramedics in the province of Manitoba.

We disagree with that. We don't believe that that's appropriate. We need to ensure that that process takes place and unfolds as it will. And we thank all of those who are involved right now in those negotiations, and we look forward to coming to a solution, but we will not interfere in the process, Madam Speaker—we have too much respect for our paramedics out there, for the incredible work that they do. *[interjection]*

Well, I guess members opposite think that's funny because they don't know what the word respect means, Madam Speaker. They have no respect for Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, I will tell you that we have respect for paramedics and for all Manitobans, unlike members opposite.

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

Manitoba Public Insurance Rate Increase Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): If they respected paramedics and other allied health-care professionals, they wouldn't have frozen their wages for the last five years.

We know that there's a growing mess happening at Manitoba Public Insurance under this government's watch. Tech modernization projects are now hundreds of millions of dollars over budget, but no one is being held to account. What that—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —means is that rates are going up for you, the average person out there in Manitoba.

This mismanagement is costing Manitobans money, and it's happened under the PC watch.

How did the Premier fail to take any action to address the mismanagement at MPI?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, there is a theme, certainly, that came out of

a debate that the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party and I were at, at AMM this morning.

And I want to thank all the reeves and welcome—and mayors who are here and councillors who are here with us today, because what they saw earlier is what we were presenting was the facts and that the NDP presented fiction.

And this continues along that theme, Madam Speaker. Nothing that the Leader of the Opposition said has any bearing on the facts whatsoever when it comes to MPI, when it comes to paramedics. All of the issues that the NDP brought up and that the Leader of the Opposition brought up—it's nothing but factually incorrect.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, Madam Speaker, here's a fact: MPI rates were supposed to decline by 10 per cent this year, but instead, we saw a rate hike this April 1st because—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —of the mismanagement of this government. That is a fact.

Here is another fact: We raised the issue of cost—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —overruns with MPI's Project Nova, this tech modernization project, some six months ago. We brought this issue to the attention of the Premier and she refused to take action. Now it's costing you money—costing you money at a cost-of-living crisis moment in our province's history, I would add.

Insurance rates are going up for regular people in Carberry, in Steinbach, even right here in the city of Winnipeg, and the Premier has taken no steps to address this issue.

Will the Premier tell the House why her government ignored warnings on MPI and has overseen a rate hike on Manitoba Public Insurance customers instead? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: I don't even know where to begin with the litany of false accusations that the Leader of the Opposition just put on the floor of this Chamber, Mister—or, Madam Deputy Speaker—or Madam Speaker—sorry.

So, just—let's get back to the facts, though. The fact of the matter is, when it came to Project Nova, the Leader of the Opposition and the NDP, the reason that that work had to take place in the first place is many, many decades of neglect by the previous NDP government, Madam Speaker. That's why we had to move forward on that front.

But I will say, also, Madam Speaker, that rates are not set by us or them. They are set by the Public Utilities Board. It's an independent body that sets the rates in the province of Manitoba and that there have been no raise rates for MPI.

Once again, fiction put on the floor of the Manitoba Legislature by the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, it's remarkable that the Premier doesn't know that Autopac rates went up this April 1st. That happened this past week, Madam Speaker.

It's also remarkable that this government has overseen the transfer of funds from MPI to fund operations.

It's also glaringly obvious that this government is responsible for its failure to address cost overruns related to Project Nova, the tech modernization plan at MPI.

And now it looks like they're trying to hide more rate increases until after the next election. That's due to an edict that the Attorney General put out yesterday. We just had one rate increase and now it looks like they're trying to kick another one down the road 'til after Manitobans vote this year.

The Premier needs to be clear with Manitobans: Will she tell the House if her government will see increases to MPI if they're elected again later this year?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition knows that it's the Public Utilities Board that sets the rates when it comes to Manitoba Public Insurance.

But if the Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about what rate increases went up on April 1st, well, let's talk about those rate increases that went on April 1st. It's called the carbon tax, Madam Speaker—the carbon tax. That was set out by the NDP-Liberal coalition federally, something that members opposite,

each and every one of them, support. That doesn't put more money in the pockets of Manitobans.

* (14:10)

We're against it; they're for it. Those are the facts, Madam Speaker.

Organizational Review of MPI Request for Crown Corporations Committee

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, we've been sounding the alarm for months now regarding this PC government's failures in overseeing the ongoing massive cost overruns for Project 'noba'—Nova at MPI.

Yet—now yesterday, there's a 'conspicuous' urgency from the minister for—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —an external review, by way of yet another external contract.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Continue.

Mr. Wiebe: This urgency, now, from this minister is with regards to an external review that won't be complete until, of course, after the next election.

Will the minister commit to calling an immediate meeting of the committee on Crown corporations so that Manitobans can start getting answers about the boondoggle over at MPI?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation): I don't know what 'conspicuous' is, Madam Speaker. I do know the fact of the issue is that for 13 years, the member opposite—well, 16 years—the member opposite sat in a government that refused to actually upgrade the MPI computer system. For 16 years, they just let it deteriorate. They didn't want to do anything. They kicked the can down the road in terms of upgrading that system.

So yes, MPI needed to upgrade the system so not everything would crash, not everything would be paper-based, not everything wouldn't be able to be transmitted around the province. Now, the member opposite now is upset that there is a new system going in place.

If he wants to have a committee to talk about a new system that's going in place, he should've called

it when he sat on the government benches and did nothing, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Clearly, the minister has more information about this boondoggle at MPI that he's not sharing with Manitobans. What we're hearing is that the hundreds of millions of dollars that has already been overspent with Project Nova is really just the tip of the iceberg.

We also know that the government is the one that appoints the board at MPI whose role it is to provide management oversight, which has been clearly missing. And yet, last year they reappointed members of the board, including the chair, Michael Sullivan, as well as Jim Robson, Carolyn Halbert and Grant Stefanson.

How can we trust this minister when he has been the one who's been forced to call this external review because of his own hand-picked board hasn't been doing their job at MPI?

Mr. Goertzen: Think when the member opposite next visits McNally Robinson, he might be interested to discover there's more than just a fiction section at that bookstore. There's all sorts of other things, like facts.

One of the facts is that when that member sat on the government benches—he sat just over that direction—on the government bench, he sat there for 16 years. I heard him clapping at a—various different things. What I never heard him do was raise the issue of the need to upgrade the computer system at MPI. We found out after we came into government along with the other, sort of, technologies were left to languish—the municipalities would know about this, when it came to the emergency system that they had, and that had to be upgraded as well.

Nothing was done for 16 years. That is the issue that had to be addressed; that is the issue that is being addressed, and we're going to continue to ensure that MPI is there as a publicly owned Crown corporation serving Manitobans with good service at a quality price.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Let's be clear, Madam Speaker: Hundreds of millions of dollars of Manitobans' money that's been wasted under this government's watch, and now there's more questions about the leadership at MPI and the role of the board. This minister expects us not to worry; says to Manitobans, don't worry.

But now he's showing that maybe even he doesn't trust his own board that he just reappointed.

The board's lack of oversight turned into—what should have been a rebate this year into another PC tax hike. And there needs to be accountability for that, Madam Speaker.

Will the minister, who can't trust his own board, call a Crown corporations meeting and have some accountability from this MPI board and with MPI in general?

Mr. Goertzen: What Manitobans may want to worry about is what would ever happen if those individuals over there ever resume government.

Because they'd only have to look back at something called FleetNet, when we heard from different emergency responders, when we heard from municipalities around the province who said we can't use our communication systems when it comes to emergencies because the former NDP government never upgraded them. They had to get parts off of eBay. They had to go to garage sales to try to keep these things running.

Well, the same fate was heading towards MPI because the former government, where that member sat and said nothing on this issue, didn't upgrade the computer system, wasn't able to ensure that there was modern technology for a modern corporation.

That's what Manitobans should worry about if they ever get back in the government, and we're going to stop that from happening, Madam Speaker.

Resignation of Nurses from SANE Program Request for Minister of Health's Resignation

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): The Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) Health Minister is putting the status of the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program at risk.

Survivors, including children, have been turned away from the SANE program due to a lack of available nursing staff. These folks have been told to come back hours later, not to wipe themselves, not to shower in the meantime.

That is absolutely devastating and outrageous, Madam Speaker. That's a failure of this PC government and more specifically of the Health Minister.

Will the Health Minister admit that she's failed sexual assault survivors, and do the right thing today and simply just resign?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Acting Minister of Health):

After consulting with community, our government was very pleased to make an announcement—a \$1.3-million announcement on Sunday at Klinik Community Health Centre to establish a complementary sexual assault nurse examination program that will be available in the community that will be overseen by a group of knowledge keepers and survivors. We think that survivors really need to have a say in the implementation of these services.

And so, this program will be complementary because we know that the demand for these services, unfortunately, is incredibly high in the province of Manitoba.

And so, we are working to address the demand by having two parallel programs offered either through Shared Health or in the community to meet the needs of all survivors.

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

MLA Fontaine: The Health Minister has completely mismanaged the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program. She's failed to ensure survivors get the supports they needed when they needed and immediately.

She's failed to support SANE nurses; seven have resigned in response to her terrible leadership. It's going to be hard to repair the damage that she's done to the SANE program, and clearly she's not capable of doing it, Madam Speaker.

Will the Health Minister commit to supporting the SANE program by resigning today?

Ms. Squires: While that member wants to go down the avenue of issuing personal attacks against another person, I'd like to take this opportunity to say thank you.

I want to say thank you to Klinik—[interjection]—to Ayn Wilcox—and if the members opposite could control themselves while I'm offering these thanks to many people in community who do this very important work.

Klinik has been at the front lines of sexual assault, of responding to the needs of survivors for many, many years. They have been offering third-party reporting for four years, since this government brought third-party reporting into the province of Manitoba because we know not all survivors want to present at a law-enforcement agency.

Now they're handling the sexual assault nurse examination program because once again, we know survivors want a community method.

So I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to everybody at Klinik for the work they do.

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

MLA Fontaine: I think it's important to note that holding a minister accountable who has utterly failed Manitobans and some of the most at-risk, vulnerable Manitobans isn't personal attacks, Madam Speaker.

* (14:20)

It's literally my job to hold members opposite accountable for their failures, and there is nothing more quintessential in a failure of this government is turning victims of sexual assault, including children, away, telling them to go home, not to wipe themselves, not to take a shower.

That is an utter failure on this government's part, and the Health Minister should do the right thing, say she's sorry and resign today.

Ms. Squires: Well, I would like to also point out that none of these services were available when that member was an adviser to the NDP government.

What our administration's done since we took office is we've brought in community supports, we have offered funding to Toba Centre that will be available to have an integrated approach for child abuse and children who are sexual assault survivors.

We know that these heinous acts of crime happen to children and we want to make sure that there is an trauma-informed, person-centred approach to helping children get on the road to recovery. And that is why our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and our government has been a proud and steadfast supporter of Toba Centre in helping get this integrated initiative up and running.

And we are going to continue working with survivors—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Expansion of Broadband Services Rural and Northern Communities

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): We know that access to high-speed, broadband services is not a luxury, it's a necessity. The PCs pretend to agree. In November of 2021, they promised to connect 125,000 Manitobans across the province to broadband services.

But, a year and a half later, and to no one's surprise, they've broken their promise. The PCs' failure means that 350 different rural and northern communities are suffering as a result.

Can the minister explain why the PC government has broken their promise to 125,000 Manitobans?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): It appears that the theme for today is continuing from this morning all the way through question period of facts versus fiction.

And the fiction that the member is offering is just simply completely unfounded on what is actually happening with Internet in our province.

Now, I'm very pleased to be part of a government that did make a commitment because I can tell you when the NDP were in power, they did very little to nothing to ensuring that high-speed Internet access would be offered to rural communities.

Under our government, tens of thousands—tens of thousands—of households have been connected in hundreds of communities.

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

Mr. Sala: We notice that the minister and what he just shared was completely absent of fact or details. That side, fiction; this side, we like to talk about facts. *[interjection]* Thank you.

In 2021, the PC government handed over Manitoba Hydro Telecom's fibre optic cables to Xplornet. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: They claimed that this private company would do a better job than Manitoba Hydro Telecom and would connect 125,000 Manitobans to broadband.

Yet, a year and a half later, we've seen little to no progress in connecting Manitobans to broadband services. This failure means that thousands of Manitobans will be waiting for access to broadband on an ongoing basis.

Will the minister admit his government has broken their promise and apologize to the Manitobans they've let down?

Mr. Teitsma: Perhaps another contrast would be in order: We move things forwards; they want to take things backwards.

The member opposite pretends to be some great defender of Manitoba Hydro when—and maybe that's still his critic—or critic role, I don't know. I thought he was the Finance critic, but today he seems to be willing to talk about Internet.

I love talking about Internet. I'm an IT professional with 30 years' experience. I know how important it is for high-speed Internet to be available and to get to these rural communities.

What happens when high-speed Internet gets into these rural communities is that people are able to do jobs in—at a time when we have more and more remote workers. The opportunities for rural Manitoba are endless.

I'm proud to be part of a government that is getting that done and is working hard to get tens of thousands of families connected—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Sala: The pandemic showed us that access to high-speed broadband services across the province is a necessity. That's why Manitobans are so disappointed that the PCs broke their 2021 promise to connect 125,000 Manitobans to high-speed broadband.

The PCs have had a year and a half to deliver, yet we've seen little to no progress. Hundreds of communities are desperately waiting for those broadband services.

Can the minister explain why his government has broken their promise to Manitobans?

Mr. Teitsma: For 17 years, the NDP government left Manitoba's—Manitoba Hydro's dark fibre dark. We are committed to lighting it up.

Now, I know that the AMM is in town and there's many, many municipal leaders in town. And when I've spoken to them, they tell me that they're happy to see that there is improved high-speed Internet service coming to communities across Manitoba. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Teitsma: That's the facts. What the member opposite brings is fiction.

Construction Industry Apprentices Wage Reduction Concerns

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, on this side of the House, we respect people who have to work hard every day. We believe that

hard work and both the physical and mental demands of work in the trades should be paid properly.

The cost of groceries keeps going up, but the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) couldn't care less about lowering the pay of workers and apprentices who build our province.

Will the Premier tell the House why her PC government is looking to cut wages for apprentices?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Our government is proud to support all people who choose the trades as their career.

In fact, just yesterday, I was honoured to tour MITT and visit with students who have chosen the trades as their career and encouraged them to continue on in their learnings.

Madam Speaker, the members opposite failed to consult or meet with any stakeholders in 17 years. They don't care about the workers. We do, so we ask for their feedback. Members opposite are scared of feedback because they want to make decisions in isolation. Our government works with partners and stakeholders to find solutions together.

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

MLA Marcelino: Madam Speaker, those young people looking to work in the trades and those taking retraining courses are investing in themselves and their families so that they can help grow and build our province.

But, under this PC government, apprenticeship funding was cut by 43 per cent since 2016, and they weakened safety protections by cutting apprenticeship ratios.

While the minimum wage is going up, now the PCs are looking to cut the wages of apprentices this year. This will just make retaining skilled workers harder and hurt efforts to tackle our serious labour shortage.

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

Mrs. Guillemard: I appreciate the opportunity to put some facts on the record. Our government has not cut any funding towards apprenticeship whatsoever. And on a personal note, I am super proud of my own son, who is in his third-year apprenticeship program. And I

take offence by the member putting untrue issues or untrue words on the record.

Madam Speaker, we have never reduced any funding for Apprenticeship Manitoba. We don't plan to reduce any money. I wonder if that's what the hidden agenda of the members opposite is.

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

MLA Marcelino: Madam Speaker, Manitoba workers know that this PC government doesn't have their backs.

* (14:30)

While everyday Manitobans struggle with increasing bills, they are trying to cut the scheduled wage increases of apprentices who are trying to enter the trades. It's just like this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) to be so out of touch with working people and with what regular families have to go through in order to get by and to get ahead.

We need a clear commitment. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Marcelino: Will this PC government back off on their cuts to cut apprenticeship wages? Yes or no?

Mrs. Guillemard: Madam Speaker, it's very disappointing to hear that the members opposite continue to fear monger. That is unfair to Manitobans and, truthfully, that's not going to get them very far in the next election.

Madam Speaker, our government is proud to support every apprenticeship seat, and we cover 90 per cent of all costs. We are great partners with industry and post-secondary institutes to really encourage the trades. There is no cap on that number of seats.

The member opposite is trying to fear monger, and I think that that member should apologize to all Manitobans.

Manitoba Hydro CEO Meeting with MKO Leadership

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Manitoba Hydro's dams in northern Manitoba generate an enormous amount of revenue for our province, but they were often built at tremendous cost to Indigenous communities who've never been fully compensated for the damage caused. Communities were uprooted, the environment was disrupted and resulted in the collapse of viable fisheries and other economies that people relied on to feed themselves and earn a good living.

Now, many of these dams are on MKO territory, and we asked the minister a written question about whether the CEO of Hydro has ever met with MKO leadership. We didn't get a clear answer.

But given the tremendous importance of dams in this territory, can the Premier explain why the CEO of Manitoba has never met with leadership of MKO?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): I appreciate the question coming from the member opposite.

Certainly, Manitoba Hydro is our Crown jewel, and we want to make sure that we're doing everything to make sure that Manitoba stays—Manitoba Hydro stays as our Crown jewel.

Clearly, we value the partnerships we have with Manitobans and with Manitoba communities, especially those communities in northern Manitoba.

And certainly that—those discussions, those consultations, they happen on an ongoing basis and we look forward to making sure that Manitoba Hydro—management at Manitoba Hydro continue to have those important dialogues with our northern communities.

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

Hydro's Debt Management Borrowing and Interest Rates

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Now, that's not the only problem with Hydro.

I tabled pages from Manitoba's debt management strategy, dated December 9th, 2022. It says that Hydro's sinking fund, which is used to pay off Hydro's astronomical debt—nearly \$25 billion—was completely depleted in 2016. I quote, interest rate risk is a top risk for the corporation. With, on average, \$1.1 billion in debt maturities annually potentially requiring refinancing over the next decade, the maturing debt is currently projected to be refinanced at higher interest rates. End quote.

Can the Premier explain why, under this government, the plan for Hydro is to borrow billions at a higher interest rate to pay down lower interest debt?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): I think the member should recognize—take a little history lesson here and recognize where Manitoba Hydro is.

We recognize \$24 billion of debt that Manitoba Hydro carries. We should also recognize why we got

to that position. And it's members that were sitting across the way here got us into that. They circumvented the Public Utilities Board in the biggest capital investment in our province's history. That's why we've got a \$24-billion debt at Manitoba Hydro.

We recognize that as a challenge. That's why this government has cut the water rental rates and the debt guarantee rates by 50 per cent to provide cost savings to Manitoba ratepayers of \$180 million this year alone.

This will get Manitoba Hydro back on its feet—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Garden Grove School Students Questions for Government

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Earlier today, I tabled four questions on behalf of some determined grade 4s and 5s from Garden Grove School.

They were: why doesn't Winnipeg have enough schools near big residential communities, why do our streets have so many potholes, why does construction last so long and why don't we have more trash cans everywhere?

Can the government please try their best to address each question?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I want to thank the member for—*[interjection]*—Tyndall Park, sorry, for the questions and for the students in the gallery today. I always appreciate when you bring these questions forward.

When it comes to schools near residential communities, it's important to note for these children that we have announced more than 20 schools; 14 are on their way. The rest are on their way, as well, and so there'll be more schools in these residential communities.

Why are there so many potholes? I think it has to do with our extreme weather conditions, actually, but we are investing significantly more in potholes. We gave \$15 million earlier this year, Madam Speaker, and another \$7.5 million.

Why does construction take so long? I think we need to ask the construction companies that, but it comes with the contracts and those things are negotiated.

And the last question is, why are there not more trash cans everywhere? I think it's a great question. I'll bring that up with the Mayor Gillingham next time I see him.

Northern Manitoba Economy Transportation Infrastructure Investments

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): After 17 dark years of the NDP's neglect, we are listening to Manitobans, north, south, east and west by giving equal opportunities, unlike the political favours the NDP had demonstrated. Further to this, in the last six years of the NDP government, they underspent their infrastructure budget by over \$1 billion.

The NDP government did not do it, but we are. Our government is committed to making record infrastructure investments at every corner of the province. And the Minister of Transportation did last week in Thompson.

Can the minister please share more details about the over \$420-million investment that we are making to help northern communities and create more opportunities for generations to come?

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I just want to thank the honourable member for Swan River for the great question.

I was pleased to be up at Thompson last week with my two colleagues, the Deputy Premier (Mr. Cullen) and the Minister for Natural Resources, who made a \$400-million announcement in Thompson.

And it includes the improving of seven First Nation airports of \$75 million and building two new airport terminals, Madam Speaker; \$15 million to the Thompson Regional Airport Authority; \$18 million for runway rehabs across the North; \$250 million for five existing roadways to improve safety and year-round connectivity between northern communities; and one of my favourites—\$8.5 million to upgrade PR 620 to connect Nelson House.

And Chief Angela Levasseur said that that was the first time—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Northern First Nation Communities State of Emergency Declaration

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Thompson.

An Honourable Member: Stand up for the North.

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): Actually, I will.

Access to health care in the North is suffering under this government. Less than two weeks ago, Keewatin Tribal Council declared a regional state of emergency to sound the alarms over death involving

suicide, drugs, violence, inadequate health care in its 11 Manitoba communities.

Can this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) tell this House of any supports or assistance that her government has offered to these communities?

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): I'm pleased to respond to the 'mender' opposite. In discussions with chiefs in the North over the last several weeks, several incidents, tragically, have happened in many different communities. The minister from mental health and wellness and I spent some conversations and we responded to that. Just this week, we sent one million-plus to MKO as well as to FC-SCO for their crisis response units.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

* (14:40)

PETITIONS

Health-Care Coverage

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

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

(1) Health care is a basic human right and a fundamental part of responsible public health.
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: Many people in Manitoba are not covered by provincial health care: migrant workers with work permits of less than one year, international students and those undocumented residents who have lost their status for a variety of reasons.

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

(3) Racialized people in communities are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, mainly due to the social and economic conditions which leave

them vulnerable while performing essential work in a variety of industries in Manitoba.

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

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

(6) Jurisdictions across Canada and the world have adopted access-without-fear policies to prevent sharing personal health information or immigration status with immigration authorities and to give uninsured residents the confidence to access health care.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker, this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

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

Right to Repair

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Further petitions?

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): Madam 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) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, NRHA, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and the region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications or inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, could you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

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

* (14:50)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

ROOM 254

SENIORS AND LONG-TERM CARE

* (15:00)

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 Seniors and Long-Term Care.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement.

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I would invite members of my staff—

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Do you have an opening statement first?

Mr. Johnston: Yes, I do.

Mr. Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Okay, Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Johnston: On behalf of the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care, I am very pleased to present the financial Estimates for the 2023-24 fiscal year.

The Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care was established in January 2022 to provide stewardship over the implementation of the Stevenson review recommendations, as well as implementation of a renewed seniors strategy so that aging Manitobans are able to stay safe in their own homes and communities for as long as they choose to do so.

We are committed to continued implementation of the 17 recommendations identified in the external government-commissioned review led by Dr. Lynn Stevenson in 2021.

We are proud to say that 10 out of the 17 recommendations have already been implemented. The recommendations include, but are not limited to, ensuring that staffing levels and services provided are appropriate to the complexity of the current and future residents of personal-care homes, and reviewing and

streamlining the licensing standards for personal-care homes to ensure currency and applicability to the changing needs of residents.

We are also committed to the implementation of our new seniors strategy, which was released in February 2023, Manitoba, A Great Place to Age: Provincial Seniors Strategy.

This strategy is a guide for the Manitoba government to address the challenges faced by some older adults, their families and their caregivers. It will support all Manitobans in their aging journeys and will value the significant contributions older adults have made to continue to make our province great.

The proposed 2023-24 core budget for Seniors and Long-Term Care reflects an expenditure of \$93.3 million and a 15-point staff years FTE. This represents a \$38.9-million increase from the 'restrated' 2022-2023 budget or a 71.7 per cent increase. The summary budget is set, as I indicated, at \$93.3 million.

This year's budget includes investments in the following: \$23 million for the continued implementation of the recommendations of the Stevenson review in the following key areas—enhancement of infection prevention and control, including increased house-keeping, staffing, to be better prepared for any disease outbreaks within the long-term care sector; increased allied health staffing within personal-care homes, including additional occupational therapists, physiotherapists, rehab aides, dietitians, social workers and recreational therapists; increased direct-care staffing within personal-care homes, including health-care aides, registered nurses and licensed practical nurses; enhanced information and communication capabilities to better manage human resource staffing issues before they become critical; enhanced Internet access for personal-care homes in rural and northern locations and increased emergency management staffing.

* (15:10)

This investment results in a total budget of \$55.1 million for the initiative stemming from the Stevenson review initiatives, \$15.9-million increase to support the implementation of the seniors strategy, resulting in a total budget of \$35.8 million for new and expanded care options for seniors in their communities, empowering them to remain in their homes and communities longer—excuse me.

This includes support for the following programs across the province: health-care aides to support seniors in Manitoba with household incomes of under \$80,000, Rainbow Resource Centre's Over the Rainbow

programs for seniors who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, self- and family-managed care, palliative-care services, support services to seniors, expanding age-friendly communities, support for elder abuse services, support to the Alzheimer Society of Manitoba's First Link program.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge my appreciation for the initiatives my colleagues in Health has taken, such as the \$200-million investment into health human resources action plan, which will help us achieve the goal of hiring 2,000 health-care staff.

I would also like to acknowledge that the seniors long-term-care department will be implementing a new position serving an advocacy function, which will serve both as an investigative function as well as an advocacy function reporting directly to the minister.

I thank you very much for the opportunity to say a few words on this year's Estimates, Mr. Chairman. I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues in Health for their partnership and support in this important work, as well as the many civil servants involved in this policy, planning and related decision making for the proposed budget.

I would now be happy to answer any questions that you may have and look forward to calling my staff and introducing them.

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): We thank the minister for those comments.

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

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I'd like to congratulate the new minister, and I know he's got a very tough job in front of him because he—his job is to try to change the channel when the past history of the government for the last few years has been disastrous, totally disastrous.

So I can appreciate what they are trying to do here, but I'm just saying to you that it's going to take quite a long time to do that. For example, back in 2016, the new PC government—actually, before they became the government—promised to build 1,200 new personal-care homes in Manitoba. And today, evidently, we have 200 fewer beds than when they took office and so their record is actually negative. It's a negative record from—and that was 2016.

For example, when the pandemic started, we could see the pandemic spreading from, you know, the cruise ships in the south up through the nursing homes

and the seniors homes in the United States, on the border. And it took quite a long time to actually get to Manitoba. Matter of fact, the first wave practically passed us by. We had fewer, I think, than 100 cases in Manitoba.

But other parts of the country were—New York, for example, had a huge, huge crisis there. And, you know, I kept thinking, watching TV like everybody else, that somebody was in charge of something here, that there at least had to be, like, one person that would do an inventory of the homes and the staffing to make sure that we were in a good place.

And that, apparently, did not happen. How we had so many people die in Maples is just beyond comprehension, and Parkview.

So we learned—the government should learn a lot of lessons out of this whole experience, and I think the lessons are that we shouldn't be building any more high-rise centres; that they should be like—that we do in—they're doing in Holland and other parts of the world—building low-profile structures.

And that's why I'm very interested during these Estimates to find out just where the minister plans to build his next building, because he's alluded to building new buildings, but I haven't heard one announcement as to where the first one's going to be. I'm interested in that first one. I'm not really too concerned about how many there are. I just want to see what your next one is going to be; that you're not following the—this failed road of what happened here, and we haven't had a pandemic for, you know, 100 years. And 100 years ago people were living on farms and, you know, they—you didn't have a situation here—like we have here since the 1960s, where we built all these seniors homes and basically served up these seniors to the virus, you know, buffet style.

We can't do that for the future, and we don't know when the next pandemic is actually going to present itself. So the minister may not have—government may not have as much time as they might think in this—on this issue.

So I'm interested in knowing what their path forward is in terms of actual construction, actual buildings, and what they're going to look like. If you're just going to build them like the old ones that have been here since the '60s, we found that that doesn't— isn't really very smart, and I know of one building in my area where the elevator stopped to work and they had to get parts from Germany, and the seniors were all on the top floor and the families were

all on the bottom floors. And the elevators broke down for a few weeks.

So, you know, looking forward, we wouldn't be looking at it the same way that we were in 1960. We were just happy to have some buildings in 1960, boarding four people in a room, right? But it's different times now, and so the different times call for a better approach to it, and I think it's lower profile buildings and I think it's single—you know, single rooms and stuff, and I haven't really heard the minister talk about this part of it.

The only thing I've heard so far is we're going to get control of this situation here—yes, an election coming in a few weeks; is it basically just to get past the election or does the minister think he's going to actually be building something, you know? And I hope he, you know, would try to find that out, whether we're actually going to be constructing anything in the near future.

So I have some—I don't know how much time I have left on the introduction—

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Four and a half minutes.

Mr. Maloway: Four and a half? Okay. Well, you know, recently we had a situation where a resident of Elmwood, Eric De Schepper and his partner Katherine Ellis, were very frustrated by the broken system that they went to the media. And she had level 4 pancreatic cancer and she came home in—for palliative care, and the care didn't arrive until three days after she had died.

And I can tell you that's not the first time this has happened. It's happened before, okay. The first time I've read about it in the newspaper. But, you know, there's a lot of work that has to be done here, and I don't know whether the minister has enough time to do it.

Anyway, I'm ready to move on to the questions.

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): And we thank the member for his—that opening statement.

So, under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for the department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 34.1.(a), contained in resolution 34.1.

Mr. Maloway: Mr. Chair, I would prefer to—global approach to the—

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Yes, that's part of it. That's what we're doing. Yes, it's automatic.

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

* (15:20)

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Chairman, I would introduce Bernadette Preun, my Deputy Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care; Sandra Henault, who is the assistant deputy minister and executive financial officer for Manitoba; Larissa Gobert, who is the senior project 'manister'—manager for policy and planning secretariat; and Mr. Doug Nanton, who is my special assistant in seniors long-term care.

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Thank you for that, and we welcome you to the table.

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

Therefore, the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Maloway: Can the minister undertake to give—provide us a list of all the technical appointments to the department, including the names and titles?

Mr. Johnston: I have two technical staff: my special assistant, Doug Nanton and my executive assistant, Andreas Kontanaeous [*phonetic*].

Mr. Maloway: Can the minister undertake to give an organizational chart that lists all employees in the program areas?

Mr. Johnston: I'll take that question as notice; I don't have that particular chart with us, but we obviously do have one, and I will forward it to the member.

Mr. Maloway: Can the minister give a list of all current vacancies in the department by program area?

Mr. Johnston: We are proceeding to find that information for the member. Once we have got it, then I will certainly relay it, but I won't take up too much time while the search is going on right now. So if that's acceptable to the member, then we can proceed further.

Mr. Maloway: It would be acceptable, but I'd like an idea as to whether it's going to be coming here in the next day, by tomorrow or a month or two from now.

Mr. Johnston: That's the efficiency of my staff.

Mr. Maloway: Also, I'd like to ask some questions within the home-care field. We've asked him to explain why his department is failing when it comes to the demands being placed on the Home Care program, and he would know that we had documents from a response to a FIPPA request that shows monthly home-care staff vacancies continue to be a problem. The last data they provided shows that one in five positions, or 20 per cent, are vacant.

So the question is, what specifically is the minister's plan to fill these positions and reduce the vacancies so the home-care clients are getting the supports they need?

Mr. Johnston: I would disagree with the member that this department is failing its responsibilities to address the needs of seniors in Manitoba. Quite the contrary, we have taken a number of initiatives, and certainly our budget reflects the initiatives that we are taking to support the people of Manitoba. I will—would indicate to the member that there—he is correct that there has been some challenges in regards to home-care satisfaction. However, we are striving to address those staffing issues and will continue to do that.

Mr. Maloway: That's not really a very good answer because I just previously outlined the situation with Eric De Schepper and his partner, Katherine Ellis, who are constituents of mine.

And she had level 4 pancreatic cancer and she was promised home care. This was—like, this was over a number of months. This didn't happen just—she was stage 4 in November and passed away just recently, I guess February 22nd. But after—passed away three days before any home care arrived.

Like, how does the minister explain that? How you could go from November and all those—all that time, 'til February 22nd, and then show up with the home care and the supplies three days after the person's passed away. How does that happen?

Mr. Johnston: I am certainly familiar with the Mr.—Mrs. De Schepper's tragedy, and that's what it was. And certainly our government doesn't condone a situation and circumstances that took place.

There—when learning of this particular issue, my department, working with the Department of Health, did do an investigation into the circumstances that did exist with this initiative and—or with this problem. And we are certainly addressing that issue.

As I mentioned, that situation was unacceptable and we understand that action needs to be taken to ensure that these situations don't occur.

That's why there was an investigation that took place with the WRHA and there's—in my view, that situation was addressed. I know that the WRHA officials had addressed the situation with Mr. De Schepper after his concerns were raised.

And, as a matter of fact, I have correspondence from Mr. De Schepper that was—that had indicated to the staff how satisfied he was with the study and diligence that was done to try to address his concerns.

Mr. Maloway: This is way after the fact. Like, how does it happen that a person gets diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic—that's the worst—pancreatic cancer in November and three months later, the person passes away and then the home care shows up? Clearly, something went wrong here.

Has anybody been disciplined for this? Or do we just, like, pretend that it's, you know, what's passed and we go on and hope it doesn't happen again. Is that what we're relying on here? Or did the minister actually—was anybody disciplined over this?

* (15:30)

Mr. Johnston: Well, you know, under these circumstances you have to rely on your management to deal with these tragic circumstances.

And when this situation did occur, the WRHA management did certainly do its diligence to investigate and address the issues. I, as minister, don't have direct management over the individuals who potentially needed to be addressed. I rely on the management that we put in place to be able to address those issues.

In this particular case, this fell under the authority of the WRHA and the Ministry of Health, and it's my perspective that it was dealt with through that management structure.

Mr. Maloway: This is not the first time that this has actually happened. I've got names and times and what-not where the exact same situation happened before, where the person had cancer and the hospital bed got delivered literally the day after the person died. You know, so, I don't know what happened at that time, like, whether anybody was disciplined; it's hard to talk to somebody, they're very emotional when this happens, you know?

And—but, I'm just—I don't know what sort of a system you can put in place. I know today we have the

electronic medical records, is way more than, you know, it's in place in many more areas than it was before.

You know, I just wonder, is there a way to have a system where you can—you, when the doctors prescribe the home care that it's locked into a system and it's not forgotten, and the home care gets sent out?

Mr. Johnston: When you're getting into the specifics of someone's medical circumstances, that really is not—ministers and politicians aren't privy to that type of information, nor should they be.

You're asking whether or not the system is able to address those particular issues, and I'd indicated to the member that the WRHA—the authorities; all the health authorities—have mechanisms in place to be able to address these issues. And it's the minister's responsibility to ensure that these situations, when they come up—unfortunately, they do come up periodically—are addressed, to try to prevent further problems. And that's exactly what we do.

Mr. Maloway: The point here is that we don't precisely know what went wrong in each of these two cases, do we? I mean, somebody has to find out at—where did the actual mistake happen? You know, when there's a railway—a train crash, they do an inquiry to find out and reconstruct exactly what happened, to find out just what happened, with the idea that you're going to improve the safety. That you're going to maybe have a mechanical problem, or a problem with a person. I mean, that's what you have to find out.

And those recommendations are made public at a certain point, and changes are made. And the railway is made safer, and the problem doesn't repeat itself. But you—here, you have two examples—actually, both of them are my constituents—where the same sort of situation is here. And nobody's been able to point out what the actual problem was in either one of these cases right now. Like, what could have made this—and it went on three months.

So, is everyone running for cover here? Is that what, sort of, happened, and they covered things up?

Mr. Johnston: I would challenge the member to—who's indicating that our health-care professionals are running for cover. We have a very, very capable health-care system with very, very dedicated and compassionate and passionate individuals. So to suggest that those particular individuals are not prepared to do their job and do due diligence to this type of thing, frankly, is not really acceptable.

So, again, I come back to the same position that the health authorities investigate these situations and, based on their investigations, they take the appropriate actions and try to ensure within their processes that these type of situations don't re-occur.

Again, our government—nobody in this room—would condone a situation like that that exists. And to suggest that our health professionals wouldn't do their due diligence to ensure that these type of situations don't exist and just throw it under the table is totally inappropriate and not accurate.

Mr. Maloway: So, I'd like to ask the minister then, what is the current vacancy rate then in staff positions with home care today? Like, where are we at with vacancy rates at the moment?

Mr. Johnston: I would have to take that question under advisement. The particular numbers that the member is asking for, we would have to get through the Department of Health.

And in order to get the member the accurate information that he is seeking, we would have to do further due diligence with the department and reply to him once we are able to achieve those numbers.

Mr. Maloway: So, can the minister give us an idea as to when we should be getting that information?

* (15:40)

Mr. Johnston: My department works very, very closely with the Department of Health, and I'm advised that we should be able to supply—I say should be able to supply—that information by the end of the week. That is our intent. If we have to go into the next week based on circumstances, I can assure the member that we will find the information for him in reasonable time. *[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Excuse—I need to just acknowledge you first, sir.

Mr. Maloway: So, when—could you ask them, then, in addition to finding out what the vacancy rates are, say, today, can you give us a trend line as to whether we can see—where we're seeing improvements, right? So if they can say, well, the vacancy rate is such-and-such on April 1st, then, you know, which way is it going, here? Is it improving or is it getting worse? That's what I'd like to see, anyway, so, maybe if you could graph it from January, right? Maybe, right, try that?

Mr. Johnston: I would indicate to the member that our department is committed to satisfying his request,

and with the information that we're able to supply, I'm sure that he has the experience and the ability to analyze and determine what those trends may be. So, I have every confidence in the member's abilities.

Mr. Maloway: So, with that in mind, then, I'd like to know specifically what the minister's plan is to fill all these positions, these vacant positions, and reduce these vacancies, so that all of the clients who—are getting the supports that they need. So does he have any specific plans, here, to keep this—get this vacancy down to zero and keep it there? I guess that's the question.

Mr. Johnston: I would indicate to the member that this government has taken a number of initiatives to ensure that we are addressing the needs of seniors, in particular—in particular, the department has increased its overall budget to this department by 71.3 per cent, I believe, and a lot of the initiatives—or all the initiatives are going into enhancing seniors' experience in Manitoba.

Currently, there are 50,000 seniors that are being served by the Home Care program and that relates to an investment of this government by over \$300 million to home care annually. That initiative and that contribution to ensuring home care is continually supported, I think it speaks for itself. As a matter of fact, at the end of this fiscal year, our government has increased the home-care funding by 3.66 per cent, which again, speaks loudly to our commitment to home care.

We are certainly looking to take initiatives through a number of issues. I know most recently the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority was on a very aggressive recruiting program to hire 50 individuals, non-certified, initially. And the goal, again, was to have 200 more by the end of June with ultimately the goal being at the end of the year to have 500 additional recruitments.

So we are, certainly, working very diligently to address the issue of staffing and support home care in a number of different areas. And we will continue to do that.

Mr. Maloway: Well, you know, what the minister says, you know, makes sense and would make more sense if there wasn't a past history with this government. I guess that's the reason the conundrum here, that if you could forget the last six years, when Brian Pallister was elected premier the first time, it's a totally different looking government right now, at least talking government.

That's what they're trying to do here. But, you know, the public, I don't think have gotten onto this newfound approach yet. Because they remember all those years, those six years where, you know, this wasn't your priority.

So forgive me if I, you know, want to ask you a few more questions here because of that. You know, if the government had been paying attention to this issue of home care and these—and building more of the buildings and so on, had they been in tune with this issue for the last six years, we probably wouldn't be, you know, totally skeptical of what the government is doing right now.

I think a lot of people think that what you're trying to do is just get past the next few months. And this kind—this has happened before, probably with you guys, too. But it's a believability issue. And so you say you're going to do this and then people just want to know that it's real, that it's actually going to happen.

And I think, you know, what you want to be doing here, if you're going to build a seniors home or if you're going to do one of these long-term-care homes, that you actually announce a real project, you know, so we can see it. And—*[interjection]*—well, there's a new one that you want to make this. Yes, I want to see that.

But I can tell you that in, for example, the Highway 59 issue, right, of the cloverleaf up there and expansion, we didn't think the public was going to believe us if we just simply announced it again. So we made sure—some of us made sure that there was actual graders and work being done there, like, right away. Okay? And it proved out to be a good project. But did we even believe it ourselves because it had been promised so many times before, you know? And governments have a tendency to do that.

The Conservatives in Brandon announced that hospital in Brandon probably how many times over, about ten years. It became a point where people actually wouldn't believe that you're actually going to do it when you just keep re-announcing it. That's what the issue is here, right? You know, so I just want to know, like, when are we going to get—when am I going to find out when this next PCH is going to be built?

You were supposed to build one in Lac du Bonnet. That was a big issue for quite a few years here while the—he's now a minister, but he was the critic before—was complaining about the PCH home being built in Lac du Bonnet and all of a sudden, it just disappeared. It disappeared in thin air—gone. What happened to that

home and where is it now? Like, why are you not building it as we speak? Because it was a promise.

Mr. Johnston: Certainly, the member brings up a great—likes to bring up a great deal of history. I mean, the previous government that he represents was thrown out by the people of Manitoba who understood that there needed to be change in this province, and initially in 2016, gave this government one of the highest majorities in the history of the province, if not the highest.

And then in 2019, after this government had an opportunity to continue to show the people of Manitoba how it was going to proceed and progress, the people of Manitoba with their wisdom, determined in 2019 they would also give this government a very substantial—second highest and doubling, I think, what the New Democrat Party, the member's party, had.

* (15:50)

So, I think that if you're looking at the perception of what the public feels about governments, I think there is a history of, certainly, of what the people's preference was in regards to governments doing their job.

Now, the member does indicate—I think the member jumped around here a little bit; we were talking about home care, and now we're talking about PCHs.

So, I'm very happy to—if the member wants to shift gears to personal-care homes, I'm very comfortable in doing that. As I mentioned, our home-care initiatives—before I leave that particular component—this government is working very diligently not only to establish further aging-in-home initiatives such as the self- and family-managed program, which we have initiated; and we also, too, I've indicated several times in the House that there are more initiatives coming forward out of the seniors strategy.

And I can assure the member that they are coming forward, and they're—and innovative initiatives, not just the standard status-quo initiatives that are well thought out—and a lot of due diligence done to look to the—how the people of Manitoba, seniors of Manitoba, are going to be able to enjoy their aging.

Now, back to the personal-care homes that the member now brings forward, is that the member is correct. This government is very interested in fulfilling the needs of Manitobans when it comes to personal-care homes, and again, we will be announcing in the very near future our government's plans to fulfill those

needs. And I can indicate to the member, if he's taken the time to read the seniors strategy—which does, I think, very aggressively indicate that this government is very supportive of the concept of seniors' village or seniors' campus.

And I can assure the member that the initiatives that we are bringing forward do address that particular concept and that initiative. The member does bring up that there are different models in different areas, and I can assure the member that myself, with my department, with the stakeholders of Manitoba, have reviewed a number of different areas that—different models—that we feel that we can adapt going forward. And also, too, there's more than just focusing on the traditional personal-care home that can satisfy needs of Manitobans as they age.

And as we proceed with further initiatives, to be able to address the needs of those individuals who need personal-care homes, we will also be announcing other very innovative and progressive initiatives that will also address it. So I'm sure the member will be sitting on the edge of his seat, waiting for these announcements to come forward, and I certainly look forward to presenting them.

Mr. Maloway: I'll be pleasantly surprised when I see it—

An Honourable Member: Optimistic.

Mr. Maloway: —optimistic when I see it, yes. I know I want to see it done.

And so that way—when the next pandemic comes, hopefully it never comes, but it will be on some day, that we will not have—whatever government's in power at the time—that we will not have this terrible situation on our hands. It was totally—I wouldn't say it's totally impossible, it can't happen again; but we should do whatever we can to make certain that it doesn't.

Now, I have a question here about the data showing that the number of—back to home care, here—the number of home-care clients helped was down by over 1,000, and the number of hours of care is down by over a quarter million hours close to a—it's about a 10 per cent decline.

Does the minister acknowledge that the staff vacancies are the main barrier, here, to increasing hours of care for an increasing number of patients and making up for the cuts they made to the total hours of care?

Mr. Johnston: So, just for clarification with the member, we are talking about personal-care homes

right now, staffing? Or are we talking about home-care staffing?

Mr. Maloway: We're talking about home-care staffing right now. I did say that.

Mr. Johnston: In order to ensure that the member has the most accurate data on that particular question, I would, again—administration feels that they can give me some information right now, but it doesn't really include all the information that the member's asking for.

So therefore, if it's—accommodates the member, we will, with the other information that we are providing him, we will provide you with that too.

An Honourable Member: Tomorrow, or?

Mr. Johnston: We're looking—*[interjection]*

As I'd indicated previous, we will be supplying you the information. It's our intention to get it to you by the end of the week, if not the beginning of next week. So therefore, I can assure you that you'll be getting it in real time.

Mr. Maloway: Is the minister concerned that certain health support staff have still not received retroactive pay for the negotiated wages they agreed to last year some—yes, I think it's seven months ago?

So, there's an issue with retroactive pay, has that been worked out?

Mr. Johnston: You know, I'm not in a position to be able to answer the question in regards to how the contractual arrangements between our employees and the departments are carried out. So, on that particular issue, it's my expectation that all negotiations continue to be done very, very positively and both parties are able to come to a reasonable conclusion under the traditional contract negotiations.

And therefore, I'm really not in a position where I can indicate to the member one way or another on satisfaction or dissatisfaction in regards to negotiated contracts.

* (16:00)

Mr. Maloway: Now we're going to flip back to personal care homes—just follow that bouncing ball. *[interjection]*

Oh, yes. Does the minister believe that the standard of care within Manitoba's personal care homes is adequate?

Mr. Johnston: I can indicate to the member that the criteria of personal care homes is actually legislated. And it is our expectation as a government—not our expectation, our demand, as a government that that legislation is followed by those caregivers. And I would indicate that it is our intention to ensure that all of those different entities fulfill the—their obligations through the legislation.

Mr. Maloway: What percentage of the Stevenson review recommendations have been implemented so far?

Mr. Johnston: I can advise the member that the Stevenson recommendations, as we've publicly stated, out of the 17 recommendations, 10 of those recommendations have been implemented and the other seven are in the process of being implemented.

Mr. Maloway: And so, what's the timeline for the remaining seven to be implemented?

Mr. Johnston: The initiatives that are proceeding are all underway. I can indicate that to the member with a great deal of confidence.

I can indicate to the member that, when the Stevenson review was brought forward, the—our position and guarantee may be strong, but certainly our position to the public is that we would be implementing within a six-year time frame. So we're in the—based on that six year, we're into the second year now.

So, in answer to the member's question, I can indicate that we are looking to have all of the recommendations of the Stevenson report implemented within the six-year time frame that we initially put forward.

If we can get the initiatives satisfied before the end of that six-year time frame, then obviously we will do that. We're working towards achieving those goals as soon as we can.

But we indicated a six-year time frame, and that was two years ago.

Mr. Maloway: Does the minister think that there's enough PCH beds in Manitoba at the current time?

Mr. Johnston: As I think I'd indicated earlier in the—or answered the member's question earlier was that this department will be bringing forward further recommendations on personal-care-home-bed initiatives and also, too, over and above the personal-care-home-bed initiatives, other very innovative

initiatives to satisfy care beds in the province of Manitoba.

So, I—the only way that I can answer that question is to say that the government is taking an initiative to further add personal-care homes to Manitoba.

Mr. Maloway: As I said before, in '16–2016—the PC Party campaigned on a promise to build 1,200 PCH beds, so can the minister explain whether his government has followed through on this promise?

Mr. Johnston: As I'd indicated to the member, it is the government's intention to increase personal-care-home beds as well as other innovations to ensure that we will fulfill the needs of Manitobans. And I had indicated to the member, basically, stay tuned.

I'm sure that the member will be extremely supportive of the initiatives that the government is going to be bringing forward to ensure that the needs of Manitoba seniors are fulfilled.

So, I mean, I'm not sure how better to answer that question.

Mr. Maloway: Well, the fact of the matter is that the government has not followed through on this promise of 1,200 PCH beds. I don't know how he expects the public of Manitoba to believe—this year, if he makes a similar announcement, are we going to build another 1,200 PCH beds?

And six years ago, he made the same announcement. The party made the same announcement and didn't follow through on. What credibility is he going to have going forward with the public when you didn't fulfill your first promise of 1,200 PCH beds?

I'm just saying that it's probably going to be seen as an empty promise if it's—if that's what you're doing is making a promise that we're going to do another 1,200—we didn't do them in the last six years, so we're going to do them in the next six years.

So the answer to that question is no, you've not done 1,200—built 1,200 PCH beds.

Now, not only have they failed to follow through with their 2016 promise, within two terms, there's actually fewer PCH beds in Manitoba today than when they took office in '16. There were 9,698 in the province in—beds in 2016, and there's 9,549 now.

Can the minister explain why his government broke their promise to Manitobans?

Mr. Johnston: I wouldn't agree with the member indicating that this government isn't following through

on commitments to ensure that the seniors of Manitoba's needs are being met.

I think that many of the initiatives that this government has taken place in regards to supporting seniors are quite apparent. The seniors strategy that was brought forward has a number of different announcements that were brought forward to assisting the people of Manitoba.

The—one of the most recent ones, what I can tell you was very well accepted, was the hearing-aid initiative that this government brought forward to support seniors. So much so, that they were all—seniors were very interested to see what the opposition was going to do in regards to supporting this initiative so that we could get going on this and they could receive that type of support.

But—and certainly all of the other initiatives that are coming out of the seniors strategy which I have identified, which I can walk through—which I enjoy walking through in the House, actually.

* (16:10)

But let's talk about a little bit more of the member's concern in regards to personal-care homes. I can indicate—and I've indicated publicly in the House; this shouldn't come as any surprise to the member—that this government is in planning and design for a number of increased personal-care home beds, or personal-care beds, to the province of Manitoba.

So, being in planning and design is a very substantial step to continuing to fulfill the obligation of—the member continues to say 1,200. It is my expectation that after we finish bringing forward our initiatives, that we will surpass that, which is something that no other government has been able to accomplish, but our government certainly is looking towards fulfilling that goal.

And, as I mentioned, we are proceeding in planning and design on these initiatives, as well as other initiatives too, which I will identify.

So, I look forward to bringing that to the member's attention.

Mr. Maloway: The PC government cancelled PCH projects in Lac du Bonnet and Bridgwater.

Can the minister explain why, and was this the correct decision?

Mr. Johnston: I can indicate again to the member that this government is in planning and design. There are a number of different initiatives that will be brought

forward to not only reach the 1,200 beds that he continues to reference, but actually surpassing that.

So, I'm very confident and very optimistic and very enthusiastic about the support that my government has given this department to be able to proceed and fulfill its needs—its perceived—the needs that it believes will fulfill the needs of Manitoba seniors. So, look forward to it.

Mr. Maloway: Well, I distinctly remember the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), for at least a couple terms as an—as he was an MLA, talking about building the PCH project in Lac du Bonnet. And then, when the Conservatives formed the government, this was not done. Why?

Mr. Johnston: We do our due diligence when we determine how we're going to proceed to fulfill the needs of seniors in Manitoba and overall population of Manitoba. We take advice from the health authorities, the professionals who are assessing the needs of Manitobans, and we proceed accordingly.

Again, I would say to the member that we will be proceeding—we're in planning and design of a number of different facilities, as well as other initiatives, to fulfill that initiative of care beds.

And it's my hope or my expectation that the member will support this when they come forward. I've heard many times the Leader of the Opposition indicate what—his support for increased personal-care-home beds in Manitoba.

And I will—I indicated to the Leader of the Opposition, when he was speaking to it in the House once, that I would look forward to his support on these initiatives. Just like when we bring them forward, I'm looking forward to the support of the opposition to allow us to continue to proceed with these initiatives.

This is a whole-government situation. This is just not our government. This is something that affects all Manitobans, including the constituents of the opposition. And therefore, these positive needs are not—they should stand outside the political arena. They should go to fulfilling the needs of Manitobans. So, therefore, it would be my expectation that the opposition will wholeheartedly support these initiatives brought forward by the government.

Mr. Maloway: The minister's referenced a couple times now that there are a number of projects—PCH projects in the planning and design stage. How many are there and is one of them Lac du Bonnet?

Mr. Johnston: As I'd indicated to the member, we will be bringing forward the initiatives that we are planning to take in the very near future. And the member, I'm sure, will be very interested to hear our announcement.

Mr. Maloway: We know that Manitoba has an ageing population that will require more supports in the future, including PCH beds. And has the minister's department done any analysis on how many PCH beds Manitoba will need in the future?

Mr. Johnston: Certainly, I can appreciate the member indicating that we do have an ageing population and a population where the demographics are skewing towards seniors.

And this is not something that's new. This is something that his previous government, quite frankly, were seeing the same trends, were seeing the exact same situations and they did not act on it. They didn't do anything on it.

I, frankly, was—have—since I—when I took this position, I looked to see what type of reports or what type of information was gathered by the previous government in regards to looking at the long-term needs of Manitobans, and quite frankly, there was nothing. So, this government took it upon itself to address these needs.

In answer to the member's question, is that we have professionals that work within the Health Department. We have professionals that are looking at demographics and looking at different areas of need and we take that advice. And so, the member's asking what type of planning was done? Well, the planning was done with a great deal of due diligence with the department.

And I can also indicate that when the—we were developing our seniors strategy, we went out and we talked to Manitobans. We talked to stakeholders. We talked to seniors. We talked to all Manitobans and they also, too, presented their thoughts in helping us develop our strategies and also, too, contributing to the overall needs of Manitobans.

So, we took into consideration a number of different areas of expertise and—going forward.

Mr. Maloway: Well, I guess—thank you, Mr. Chair—I would guess that the minister has half a dozen of these projects that he's holding up his sleeve and waiting to announce in the election that's coming up. I can just assume that's what's going on here, otherwise I think he looks pretty excited that he'd want

to introduce them, you know, announce them right now, and let us all know, but he's been ordered not to do it.

I just don't know how the public can trust a government that promises to build 1,200 of them six years ago, actually—not only doesn't do it, but actually reduces the number of PCH beds. And now he's going to start again. They're going to start again and say, oh, we're going to deliver another 1,200.

And I just think we're looking at more broken promises, but that's just me. Maybe this time it's going to be different.

In 2016—oh, the minister would like to answer that question. Okay, sure, go right ahead. That is a question.

Mr. Johnston: Well, I enjoy the discussion with my honourable friend, I must say that. I'm—was actually hoping that with him being—and I think it's safe to say that we're both seniors, and I was always looking forward to—being my critic, to asking me some questions in the House and we could have that back and forth.

* (16:20)

And I've enjoyed those conversations too, so I consider the member—and the member indicates that these initiatives are coming forward as some type of an election strategy. You know, when the—when Premier Stefanson, you know, became the Premier of this province, one of the initiatives that the Premier took was to establish a department of seniors and long-term care. She recognized that the Health Department is so large that there needed to be some further focus in regards to some different areas. So the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care was established, as well as Mental Health and Community Wellness.

So the Premier determined, at that time, which was considerably earlier than the member is indicating right now, as far as timing of announcements, to address the needs of seniors, and that's what this department has been working towards.

So we've been working on a seniors strategy for a number of time now, and we've announced, certainly, several initiatives that has come out of that based on this—the seniors strategy, as well as the implementation of the Stevenson report.

So, I would indicate to the member that his commentary is not accurate. We've been planning to support seniors ever since Premier Stefanson has created this focus and these departments. So, this is

really not an election issue; this is a government issue that we recognized seniors' needs needed to be addressed, based on the demographics that took place. And as I mentioned, I come back to what the member had indicated previously in regards to history.

The former government, as far as I could see—I looked around for a number of different reports, et cetera, that the government did to address the increase in seniors' population, the explosion, bound to the baby boomers, were hitting the seniors age grouping, and I couldn't find anything. So, I mean, this trend is nothing new, but our government determined that, obviously, we had to address it, and we are.

So the initiatives we're taking don't have anything to do with the election. They have everything to do with fulfilling the needs of Manitobans.

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Thank you for that.

And just before I recognize you for the next question, just a quick reminder that when you're referring to other members of the House, it's by position or title, not with their name, please.

And I will now call on the member from Elmwood.

Mr. Maloway: Before we move on to another question, though, I just wanted to finish off by saying that 2016 was an election year, right?

And the PCs promised to build 1,200 PCH beds within two terms. And we never heard anything about that anymore. We didn't hear anything about PCH beds for the next number of years. So they broke that promise.

Now they've announced, just before an election, we're going to build a new PCH in Winnipeg. It's the first time they've raised the idea since 2019. And what do these two years have in common? Well, they're election years.

So, I mean, he can say all he wants, that they've been lying awake at nights or every single day in the last six years, conspiring to build things that they didn't build. They just promised in 2016 these 1,200 beds, and then what happened? Nothing happened. And then the next election came up. Once again, nothing happened.

So having said that, I want to move on to my next area here, which is patient transfer. Want to ask the minister, does he believe that seniors should have access to personal-care homes close to home? Because we have instances now where we've got patients being transferred, you know, I don't know,

100 miles or 100 kilometres from their homes; that's just not right. So I'd like to get your comments on that, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Johnston: And just before I go to the next topic of the member, before we leave personal-care homes initiatives, our government will continue to fulfill the needs of seniors and that's exactly why we're in planning and design, as well as other innovative initiatives to fulfill those needs.

And I would remind the member that on many occasions, I heard your leader indicate that he was in support of personal-care-home beds for the province of Manitoba. And it would be my perspective that the member support his leader in supporting our initiatives to further create further supports for the people of Manitoba.

Now, back to the next line of questioning that the member has brought forward in regards to transport of fulfilling seniors' needs in regards to location and in areas of more convenience—I think it's fair to say that.

Certainly, this department is very supportive of trying to satisfy the needs of any individuals who are wanting to stay closer to their communities and closer to their families. I mean, that's something that is certainly a priority when circumstances do exist under this—very difficult circumstances that all governments had to contend with during COVID; there were some very difficult decisions that had to be made.

I was—for our department, I think, in this particular instance, we're more relying on the expertise of our health professionals to recommend the most appropriate initiatives to ensure that the care of the individuals required were taken.

So, I know that our Department of Health was the authority in regards to determining these initiatives and these transfers through advice of professionals and I would defer to their expertise.

In answer to your question, do I believe that it would be best to try to keep seniors closer to home? Well, of course. I mean, I think—I don't think anybody would indicate that that wouldn't be a priority. But, ultimately, the needs of the health of seniors has to be considered first and foremost.

Mr. Ian Wishart, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Maloway: Well, I'm looking for the member's comments, I guess, on examples that we have. Like, we have a case here covered in The Roblin Review regarding a 90-year-old woman who was literally ripped from the only community she's ever known and

placed in a personal-care home in Shoal Lake where she has no family or friends.

And so, there's—and there's more examples like this. So I don't know where there's, you know, medical evidence that it's a smart idea to take somebody and move them 100 miles from their community and then make it tougher for their loved ones to come and see them. Like, does that make any sense?

I'm sure that nobody around this table would agree that that's a good idea, but these things are happening. And, of course, you're the minister, so it falls on you to find out why this is happening and what are we going to do about it.

Mr. Johnston: Well, first and foremost, I'm really not going to get into the detail or comment on a specific case that may—being dealt with—excuse me—through the health authorities. I mean, I don't believe this is the appropriate place to get into that. This is more of a discussion in regards to our Estimates and the initiatives of the government.

* (16:30)

So, you know, I understand that there may be some frustration in regards to some of the initiatives that are taken. I can't speak to why those initiatives are taken, because really, that's really a decision that are—that's made by the health professionals, and it's my understanding that all reasonable initiatives are taken to try to ensure that individuals are able to be kept within their community. And that's the—that's my position, and I believe—I know that's the position of the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon); but if circumstances dictate that an individual has to go to another area to satisfy their needs, then that's really a decision made by the health professionals.

Mr. Maloway: Can the minister explain why establishing a seniors advocate was not part of the seniors strategy?

Mr. Johnston: Frankly, I'm very enthusiastic about an initiative that this government is taking, or this department is taking, to expand its department to include a position of advocacy and investigation which will advise—further advise the minister, who actually is the seniors advocate of Manitoba.

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

And it's—the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care has now been in existence for just over a year, and with that comes an evaluation and a determination of how our department can run even more effectively.

And, therefore, it's our government's initiative to add a further position to our department, which will act to further enhance the advocacy of seniors in the province of Manitoba. And, Mr. Chair, I would indicate that there are several models of advocacy out there; there's just not one solution.

I would note that seniors advocates in the country of Canada, there are three, out of all the provinces and territories. So therefore, there are other models in place that governments are pursuing to ensure that the needs of seniors are being met. I'm very proud of the initiatives that this department has taken to ensure that seniors are being advocated and initiatives are being taken to support—and, frankly, the stakeholders that we deal with are very, very satisfied with the progress of this department.

And sometime when we we have more time, or sometimes when I'm questioned in the House, I'd be more than happy to relay all the positive and supportive comments that we have from stakeholders who also advocate on behalf of seniors. So we're working together with all of the initiatives and all the very passionate and committed people, working together to establish a—mechanisms that are going to support seniors. And we've done that.

So, in answer to your question, we do have a seniors advocacy in this province, and it's expanding.

Mr. Maloway: The recently released seniors strategy lacked important details such as when initiatives would be implemented. For example, the initiative to develop an ageism-prevention toolkit is outlined in the strategy, but there's no timeline provided to complete the toolkit.

Can the minister explain why the strategy lacks clear timelines?

Mr. Johnston: I think that the member is mistaken. I just announced a \$4.5-million seniors support initiative that addressed that particular initiative that he's referring to. So I will further ensure that I've got that information in front of me and I will relay it further.

As I mentioned last—not last week, the week before, I publicly announced a \$4.5-million investment to support stakeholders who are exactly—doing exactly what you're asking me. *[interjection]* You don't want to go there anymore.

Mr. Maloway: Many of the initiatives in the seniors strategy also lack specifics. For example, strategy on page 28, that the government will work to support older residents and those who care for and support us

to deal with the rising cost of living, yet it doesn't say how this will be accomplished.

Can the minister explain why?

Mr. Johnston: This government has taken a number of addition-of initiatives to support seniors.

The member references affordability. We are—we have proceeded with many, many initiatives in—one in particular that, again, I mentioned earlier, has resonated with the people of Manitoba, being the hearing aid initiative, where seniors who have a household income of \$80,000 and less would qualify for a \$2,000 grant, each member.

And Mr. Chair, that initiative is so positive because not only does it affect lower income Manitobans, it addresses middle-income Manitobans. And that initiative, as I mentioned, has been extremely well received. And, again, once our budget passes, the opportunity for those individuals to be able to utilize that will be, I'm sure, well received. That's just one example of what this government is doing to ensure affordability and supporting.

The other area that I would indicate is that this government has identified that one of the areas that is very, very significant challenge to our seniors is Alzheimer's and dementia. And we have been working with our stakeholders to try to identify different ways of being able to support those individuals, those caregivers who are faced with dealing with this very difficult disease.

So, you know, we had, you know, offered a First Link program, working with the Alzheimer Society of Manitoba. And in doing so, that, of course, does address and further fulfills needs of Manitobans.

So those are just examples of things that our government is proceeding to do to support not only seniors but also, too, to support those caregivers.

As I mentioned, my announcement that I made in supporting support mechanisms such as the Manitoba Association of Senior Communities, as well as other support groups. We have—we'll continue to do it, and that's something that we've committed to and we will continue to proceed.

* (16:40)

Those are some of the initiatives, and there's more to come. I keep reminding the member that the seniors strategy has a number of initiatives that we're bringing forward, and there's more to come.

Mr. Maloway: On home-care strategy, this home-care strategy says that the home-care model in Manitoba will be redesigned. Can the minister explain what the new model's going to look like, and when are we going to see this redesigned model?

Mr. Johnston: I am very excited about the new, innovative modelling that we're bringing forward for home care. We have already initiated a \$12.6-million investment into self- and family-managed care.

And, certainly, that's an area that has been well received. That's what we heard. When we went to public consultations in all parts of this great province, we heard from people that they wanted to age at home. And that was quite clear.

That was quite clear in Brandon. That was quite clear in the North. That was quite clear in the south. That was quite clear everywhere. And we had reacted on our initial investment announcement of a \$12.6-million investment in self and family care, which allows the individuals to be more in control of how they're going to proceed within their environment.

And the member asks, well, when can we expect even further? And I can tell the member that the announcement that will be coming forward to indicate more innovation to home care will be coming forward very soon, and I look forward to the member reviewing and certainly probably being as enthusiastic—'susiastic' as I am on that because as the member appreciates, I'm a senior and longer term I'm looking forward to seniors being able to utilize this type of support longer term as I'm sure the member is also.

Mr. Maloway: I promised the member for River Heights 20 minutes, and we're down to 18 now, so I think we should allow the member for River Heights to use the 18 minutes.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): When you look at the efforts for seniors and we combine long-term care and home care, it's my understanding that as the dollars—that the allocation is about two thirds for long-term care and about one third for home care? If the minister could, you know, confirm that and tell me whether that's the kind of balance that he's anticipating into the future.

Mr. Johnston: So just to clarify, I want to make sure that I have the member's question clear. So you're asking whether or not the one third-two thirds ratio that he indicates, and I haven't confirmed that, but he indicates is something that the government is adopting, is that correct?

Mr. Gerrard: Is that your vision of what that will be five or 10 years from now?

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member's question, I would indicate that that's not a government policy, one third, two thirds.

I would indicate that we're going to have to do a little bit more number crunching to ensure that in fact the accuracy—I'm not suggesting that the member's trying to mislead; I just wanted to confirm the accuracy of what he is indicating in regards to—I assume you're talking about budgetary expenditures here.

An Honourable Member: Right.

Mr. Johnston: So, we'll have to further indicate what exactly that looks like and confirm it. But I can confirm to the member that there isn't a government policy that says it's one third, two thirds. It's just—if, in fact, the member is correct, then that's just the way it shook out.

Mr. Gerrard: I understand that—from the minister's—from your remarks—that the—you're planning to and are expanding the self- and family-managed care program. Some funding was going to that before the allocation of the \$12.6 million.

But I'd like to know—you've got two primary programs, in a sense. One is the regular publicly funded home care delivered by people who hire the staff to do that, and the other is the family and—self- and family-managed care.

What's the current allocation between the two, and what's the plan for the years ahead?

Mr. Johnston: We looked at some different scenarios here in regards to answering the member's question; however, I don't feel comfortable in answering it to the accuracy that I want to.

So, therefore, I would indicate to the member that we will further determine with the Department of Health the actual dollar amounts and those break-downs and get that to the member.

* (16:50)

Mr. Gerrard: If you could get at the same time the figure and the proportions for home care versus long-term care?

An Honourable Member: I can certainly do that.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister mentioned long-term-care standards and said that these were in legislation, but I suspect that they're in regulations, rather than in

legislation. But maybe you can tell me whether it's legislation or regulations.

Mr. Johnston: I'd answer the member—I think the member's sort of right on both occasions, or both scenarios. It is regulation but it's also within the legislation. So the regulation is within the legislation, that's what I'm advised.

So when I had indicated that the—drawn the distinction between that particular service offered versus others, I'm very clear on indicating that there is a criteria that personal-care homes have to meet based on legislation, which includes regulation. I think—I hope I'm clear on that.

Mr. Gerrard: Now, one of the standards, which I understand has been in place, was that there was 3.6 hours per resident, and I believe the minister has indicated that he is or has moved to 3.8 hours per resident per day.

Is that one of the standards, and what is the current situation with 'that'?

Mr. Johnston: Yes, an answer to the member's question is that I wouldn't say that that would be a standard. That would be a goal.

And also, too, that comes from a national study or a national—the federal government hasn't adopted a standard or national standard.

So I want to be quite clear that this government is proceeding to establish a higher ratio. That's really not in question; that's where we're going. Whether or not we identify it as a standard or not, I guess, is a question.

But in answer to the member's question, when we started the—further to the Stevenson review, which the member is familiar with, one of the recommendations didn't actually indicate an actual ratio but what—did indicate that an increased ratio, hour ratio, was warranted.

So we were at a 3.6 to start and right now we are at an average of 3.7. So we've moved from 3.6 to 3.7. Our goal by the end of this year is to get to a 3.8. That is our goal. Ultimately, I've said publicly, that it's the government's goal to proceed to a 4.1 within six years. That's challenging because of, basically, staff challenges, but that is the goal that we're working towards.

Now, in saying that, as the member would know, the federal government is taking some initiatives in regards to this area, which I'm not privy to exactly

where they're going and how they're going to implement their various policies.

But if we can get this done within six years, we can get it done earlier to get to the 4.1, then that would be our government's ambition.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the things that's become increasingly important, as the minister knows, is the proportion of people in many long-term-care homes who have Alzheimer's or other forms of dementias.

Is it a standard that everybody who works in such long-term-care homes have specific training in dementia and understanding dementia and the care for people with dementia?

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member's question, the criteria of the individuals who work in the health-care system are more determined and met with the Department of Health, not the Department of Seniors.

So, therefore, the criteria that they have in regards to different areas of expertise, I would indicate that some of the individuals that are taking care of our elderly within personal-care homes would have an understanding of how to deal with dementia, but I can't indicate that all individuals would have that expertise. That's something that we would have to deal with from the Health Department's perspective.

I can tell you that I've had extremely good discussions and liaison with the Alzheimer Society of Manitoba, they're great people to work with; and Erin Crawford as well as Wendy Schettler, who've been very, very supportive and helpful to me in my understanding of this particular challenge.

So, they have indicated that as we continue to work with them through developing dementia communities and their advocacy on behalf of that, have indicated that they're certainly prepared to make further recommendations in how to properly address that, which could include those individuals who may not necessarily have the training in this particular area that the member references.

But, certainly, I'm not opposed to further understanding of dealing with it.

Mr. Gerrard: I think this is fundamentally really, really important in terms of having people who understand and know how to deal with people with dementia. You know, I've had a number of people come to me with instances where clearly that was not the case, and it was a big problem.

In Brian Goldman's book on kindness, he has a chapter which describes a woman by the name of Naomi Fiel, who has written a book called Validation Breakthrough, which talks, in an interesting and helpful way, about different levels of dementia and how individuals—

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Sorry to interrupt, but the hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

ROOM 255

EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning. Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I'd like to welcome everybody back to this process. I always enjoy this because it gets—gives us the opportunity to really dive into some things that are important to people in the field, doing the work that is really important here in the province.

I do know that many of us—all of us—come to this with that conviction, with that seriousness and with that real desire to serve the people that not only we represent, but the province in general, because, as you know, one of the foundational pieces, of course, is a good education, and part of that is obviously what we do in the classroom and how supported that is.

So, Mr. Chair, I always read with interest the Estimates book, and I just want to focus on page 17 for a minute and specifically No. 2, supporting high-quality learning and well-being.

I do know that the department is aware of the Ontario Human Rights Commission Right to Read and their recent findings on that. And when I go through this particular document in Estimates, I don't see any mention of how that will—was impacted in the creation of this document.

So I'm just curious. If I—I'd like to ask the minister, what was the timeline in the creation of this document, and was this done before the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read report?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I'd like to thank the opposition critic, my friend, the MLA for Transcona for the question.

And it's always important and I'm glad that he highlights the fact that in the supplement to the Estimates, you know, talking about supporting high-quality learning and well-being. And I know that, you know, we've had conversations not only in question period but outside this wonderful, wonderful honourable place to come to work and to represent Manitobans, and how we feel that exactly, that title in No. 2 on page 17 of the supplemental guide, support for high-quality learning and well-being, is so important here in Manitoba.

Because we found that over time, when you drill down and we talk about all the hard-working educators in our school system and then, of course, all of those hard-working educators supported by, again, hard-working support staff within the schools—and whether that's an educational assistant or bus drivers, custodial staff, administration staff, senior administration within the schools and senior admin within school divisions. It is very important that we highlight the fact that we want to make sure that we're supporting that high-quality learning and well-being.

And, as I know the member from Transcona, I believe his last—was over 33 years of experience and I think his last job was at a—as a principal of a—early years school. I know how important it was for those educators to do assessments on a day-to-day basis and I know that teachers work very hard on making sure that they are assessing on a day-to-day basis.

And then within their toolboxes that they have, various different resources and supported by the department and also many curriculum experts as well, not only through the department but also through this great province of ours, we're doing many things to make sure that we're trying to create success for all students in this great province of ours, no matter where they live, their cultural background or their own personal circumstance.

And so, another thing I know that the member knows, and that's why it's sort of—his question was a little interesting, but I'll try to elaborate a little bit in the short amount of time that I have to answer—is the fact that each and every student is an individual and they are different.

And when you talk about assessments, that's why we have highly trained educators in the province, to be able to assess the students that are in front of them

in their classes to then be able to take those assessments and adapt how they are teaching and helping the students learn whatever is in front of them.

And whether that's numeracy or literacy, we need to make sure that we are working hard on a day-to-day basis, and again, making sure that from those toolboxes that those teachers have, they're able to make sure that their—the students in front of them are achieving success, whatever that success means for the individual student.

* (15:10)

So when we talk about—you know, the member talks about No. 2, the supporting high-quality learning and well-being, you know, I will highlight a couple things. You know, curriculum renewal process. We heard loud and clear from the K-to-12 commission, 30,000-plus Manitobans were—had shared their views. K-to-12 commission came out with many initiatives and things to think about in regards to education. We know that a royal commission on education hadn't been done since 1959, and it took our government—a PC government—to make sure that we were showing that we were listening to Manitobans and coming up with plans.

And so out of that K-to-12 commission we came up with the K-to-12 action plan, and I know it's a roadmap in response to the recommendations of the commission of the K to 12—in K-to-12 education, and I know that earlier on, when I was first appointed sometime in May, I had tabled a copy of the document for the member.

Mr. Altomare: What I was specifically asking about is the timeline in a creation of this document. Because when I look at No. 2, and I look at the early learning curriculum framework, I see nothing on right to read.

This is a very significant topic, Mr. Chair, one that has really come to the forefront because there are significant challenges being faced by a number of students in our schools, and one of them is, really, based on their foundational need—and basically a human right—in learning how to read.

Reading is a basic and essential human right, Mr. Chair. And what I was—what I'm specifically asking is, what was the timeline for the creation of this document, and why is there nothing throughout the document that refers to Right to Read, the Ontario human rights report, and the impending Manitoba Human Rights Commission report on right to read? This is very, very important. I can't stress it enough

that people in the field are waiting for what the department is going to bring forward regarding the impending ruling coming from Manitoba Human Rights Commission around right to read.

So I asked first: What was the timeline? Was this done before the Ontario human rights report came out? And then the second part is: If it was done before it, then just say it, okay?

This came out before; we didn't have a chance to really incorporate what is coming down the pipe. But if it wasn't, I want to know specifically what is the department doing to prepare for the Manitoba Human Rights Commission report that's coming out on right to read?

Mr. Ewasko: In regards to the member's question, so, the supplemental documents, of course, he knows we tabled them beginning of March and we know that—he knows, he should know and—because I've said it multiple times—that literacy and numeracy is definitely a priority of our government, and in addition to that is definitely Indigenous education and inclusion.

And that we heard loud and clear from the K-to-12 commission on education. And then that's why we developed the K-to-12 action plan, which I tabled for the member earlier on—I guess, mid—probably in the first quarter of 2022 because we'd launched the document in March, April of 2022, the K-to-12 action plan.

And the nice thing is, the K-to-12 action plan is a living, breathing document and it's a plan. It's a plan on how do we, again, create success for all Manitoba students and, again, no matter where they live, their cultural background or their own personal circumstance.

Something that I don't feel—and I think part of the reason why the member from Transcona ran in the first place, I think he was finding that when he was teaching, that the system—the former government just wasn't quite getting things done for students.

And so, you know, making sure that literacy is a priority and has been a priority, especially, you know, following the pandemic. I know that the members opposite want to pretend that the pandemic never ever happened and didn't have any impacts on anything, but we know that it did, especially on education.

And you know what? I might even take this time to thank, once again, all of our education partners, teachers, front-line staff who worked 'tireously', day in, day out, to make sure that schools were as—were

open. And that goes along with, you know, the extra work custodial staff had to do and, of course, the bus drivers on a day-to-day basis. And that's why, you know, following the pandemic we made sure that we invested.

* (15:20)

We invested \$22 million to strengthen student learning and supports. And the member's heard me multiple times talk about the breakdown of the investments that we've made into education. And also he knows that it's not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Early years assessments is being worked on, as the member knows himself because he referenced the page, the curriculum renewal process. So we're also embarking on taking a look at the curriculum and reviewing it and renewing it and bringing in education partners and experts from all over the province in the various different academic fields that we're—in the curriculum coursework that we're embarking on, making sure that students are learning on a day-to-day basis.

Also, in regards to legislation, I mean, we have standards for appropriate education and programming and that is—it supports responsive teaching. So it's right in our legislation as well. So this is always evolving.

And I know that the member from Transcona—I think that's part of the reason why he decided to run the time that he ran, because I think he knows that the former government were failing our kids, our students and that, you know, is well documented and I've spoke about it quite a few times.

And that's why I'm proud of our government and the hard work of the department to work with our education partners and actually show some collaboration and listening to those education partners throughout the province on how we can strengthen the existing system and make things better for all students, and not only the students, but all the staff that work with them on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Altomare: I can't underscore how important it is that the department show leadership in this area around right to read.

I noticed in the first two answers, Mr. Chair, that the minister doesn't seem aware of the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read inquiry report that was published last year. It's a really important document because right now, Mr. Chair, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission is undertaking a very

similar inquiry as we speak. Knowing that reading is a foundational basic skill, it's a human right.

We need to be prepared as a Department of Education for this impending release of this very important report. I can't underscore how important this is, and how important leadership will be from the department regarding this and the direction that the department will take.

So my question for the minister is: Knowing what was recommended in Ontario, what is the government or Department of Ed going to do to prepare for the Manitoba Human Rights Commission's report and recommendations? Because right now, in my first few questions regarding this, I haven't received a direct answer regarding that.

This is important. And smaller school divisions that are going to need leadership from the Department of Ed regarding this. There are school divisions in the city that have scale, that can have a response in place. But I'm thinking of areas outside of the city that simply don't have the scale to tackle this very important topic. And even for those school divisions in the city, they're going to need some direction from the department regarding this.

And like I said in my opening remark on this particular—my third question here, Mr. Chair, I can't underscore how important this is. I—what I would like to hear is that the department is preparing for this.

So my question is, again, what are we doing to prepare for the Manitoba Human Rights Commission's report and recommendations that are impending?

Mr. Ewasko: Yes, the Right to Read report, we're aware of, and as the member tries to put certain things on the record in regards to information that may or may not, and he's insinuating various different things. And he puts that on the record.

I mean, the fact is, is that we are working with our education partners. We're making sure that, as the member mentioned, there's some definite challenges that we've found that we have here in Manitoba. And the member knows. And the member actually mentioned a couple of them, with the geography and the sparseness of—the wide vastness of a lot of our school divisions within the province. We've had—the department has, and we have had sessions with superintendents to discuss the early years assessments as recent as just this past month.

And we are continuing to prepare to make sure that we are, again, making sure that we are having the

culture and the environment for students to learn in. We are also conducting the Early Development Instrument to get more data from our education partners.

We've also, as the member knows but has not highlighted it in question period to give us some congratulations on the fact that we have partnered and funded the Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium and have expanded that to the North as well, with a focus on numeracy and literacy.

* (15:30)

We're also working with school divisions and talking about best practices within those school divisions so that we can make sure that we're not necessarily recreating the wheel on various different things as well. And the member knows, as an educator himself, that these are things that, I think, students, parents, guardians, professionals, education partners have all strived towards for quite some time. We're restructuring the English language arts curriculum, which will include specific learning outcomes for each grade level as well. Literacy progressions to support teachers in guiding students towards their learning goals.

The member makes a great point. When we talk about a student's right to read, the right to know basic math, be able to progress throughout the K-to-12 education system, and that's why I think, also, some of the instrumental—monumental—things that our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has done; and I'll say, on top of the fact that she went and amalgamated the K-to-12 education system with the Early Childhood Learning sector, to make sure that that amalgamation of the two departments, I think, was—is a game-changer for Manitoba. And it will help with the transition of those Manitoba children going from early childhood education right to—right into the K-to-12 system.

As the member knows, because he's an early years specialist, that reading is complex, and it's a complex process and requires a variety of approaches. And, again, one size doesn't necessarily fit all, and—when teaching a diverse group of learners, which includes those students that are having difficulties, or have been diagnosed with dyslexia, or have not been diagnosed.

Mr. Chairperson: Before I recognize the member for Transcona, I would just remind the committee that the questions that the members ask should find their way back to questions that are in the Estimates book.

Mr. Altomare: I appreciate the guidance. And—*[interjection]*—oh, okay.

Mr. Chairperson: Just on a point of clarity. You were—you raised the issue of the Right to Read report, and that's not—*[interjection]*—yes, yes. Just if you raise it, just find a way to link it back to the Estimates book.

Mr. Altomare: I appreciate the guidance. It's referring to the early learning curriculum framework. And the Right to Read report—

An Honourable Member: Are you challenging the Chair?

Mr. Altomare: I'm responding to the Chair. *[interjection]* Am I challenging the Chair? What I'm doing is—*[interjection]*—can I—do I—can I respond to that? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The honourable member for Transcona has the floor.

Mr. Altomare: I was tying it to the early learning curriculum framework that's located on 17, and the fact that there's nothing on right to read in the Estimates book; that's how I was tying it.

The other piece regarding that is that this has come out previous, and I was curious as to why it wasn't mentioned into this Estimates book, because it's a very important piece that's part of early learning. That's what I was referring to.

So, are you suggesting I continue down this path?

Mr. Chairperson: I would suggest the member—you're talking about a different subject matter and why it's not in the book.

So, again, just to reiterate what I had said before, it's okay to reference that if you can link it back to the Estimates book. But I would say you were referencing the fact that it wasn't in the Estimates book.

An Honourable Member: Can I ask a clarification question?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Transcona.

Mr. Altomare: So, what does it mean to have a global discussion?

Mr. Chairperson: I would say to the member from Transcona that you had indicated, what had the government done to prepare, which is not linked back to the Estimates book. But the other questions were okay.

Mr. Altomare: I always appreciate guidance, Mr. Chair. Thank you for that.

I just found it kind of interesting because of the fact that we are—I said this earlier in my opening comments—we're at an inflection point. And one that requires some real leadership coming out of the department when we're coming out of a pandemic; we're coming out of a system that has been stressed.

And what I'm seeing here is a real need for some serious investments that tackle the real challenges that are being faced in our schools on a daily basis.

I have yet to see, Mr. Chair, a school division that has been happy with the level of funding these past six years. As a matter of fact, almost in unison at the recent MSBA convention, that they were saying that after six years of underfunding, they're finding it very difficult to meet the needs of their kids right now.

And what we have here is a real desire to ensure that our kids are being prepared for the next phases of their lives. And a really important piece to that is learning how to read. That's a foundational piece. I saw it on page 17, sort of referenced in the early learning curriculum framework. The minister himself mentioned that they're redoing or looking at a revamp of the curriculum there.

My question, then, is: At what stage are they at this revamping of the curriculum?

And, after hearing the response, I'll have more questions.

* (15:40)

Mr. Ewasko: I'm going to take this opportunity and I'm going to try to specifically answer the member's question without getting too political about talking about the past and the 17 years of, I think, not only the inaction to be able to adapt, but in the utter failing for our students in Manitoba under the former NDP government in education.

And so, in regards to the member's question in regards to the right to read—and, as I have already mentioned to the member that the department has met with superintendents in March, and we want to map out early learning assessments as a commitment of that K-to-12 action plan.

And I'm hoping the member, you know, much like other times when we're attending—whether it's Estimates or budget debate or question period—that, hopefully, the member brought some of his homework. And I'm assuming—because the K-to-12 action plan is a very well-written document and it's a document that came out of the K-to-12 commission and it's a living, breathing document. And this is something

that didn't just come from the department or just come from our department; this came from Manitobans.

And for the member to sit there and say that this is serious, we need to take this serious, then I almost want to ask the member, where was he in those 17 years of the NDP, his government?

But I'm going to tell—I'm going to move away from that, Mr. Chair, and I'm going to talk about all the good things that we are doing in the department to work on reading, literacy and also some numeracy, as well.

So, in curriculum and instruction, as I had already started to mention to the member, we're restructuring the English language arts curriculum, which will include specific learning outcomes for each grade level, literacy progressions to support teachers in guiding students towards their learning goals.

Early screening—very important. Very important. I had the pleasure of working with some incredible, incredible student services teams that absolutely highlighted the need and the fact to do some of that early screening. And they took it, and we took some initiatives ourselves, to go ahead and have those conversations with our education partners within the school divisions. And then we also partnered with other school division student services teams to see what were best practices across the divisions.

And at that time, with not a whole lot of help from that NDP government of the time and those two—those couple Education ministers that I had the pleasure of being a critic towards. So, with early screening, I mean, we're exploring options for early identification of learning needs to inform interventions through research and engagement with stakeholders.

We're doing various types of reading interventions. As I've already said, reading is complex. It's a complex process. There's a variety of approaches that are out there that have been there for quite some time, and sometimes things evolve over time, as well. We want to make sure that our approaches are teaching to the diversity of our learners, and as I've said multiple times already just today this afternoon, that there's no canned fix for any of this and individuals are just that—individuals. So school divisions are receiving also departmental funding for interventions and making decisions based on local needs, data and context.

Reading Recovery is an early literacy intervention that has been supported by department external expertise for many, many years. And many school

divisions select to use other interventions, such as Orton-Gillingham and/or Fountas & Pinnell, as well.

I think these are ways that we're, again, building on the strengths of others as well, and some of the goals are to make sure, again, that all of our students are receiving success in all areas of the province. And I think that the former NDP government failed to do that.

Mr. Altomare: I'm glad that the minister didn't get too partisan in his response. That was actually quite refreshing.

It's interesting that he just dove right in, head first. But, you know, what we're doing here is, I believe, a serious process. I would hope the minister continues on a more serious path because this is important stuff that we're doing here today.

I find it quite interesting that we're talking about this very important topic and, you know, being redirected to ensure that we're, you know, in the Estimates book and having a global discussion about that is really important because it gives us an opportunity to dive into what is going on at the department and the type of leadership that they'll be showing to educators as we move forward.

It's really important. This is something that we'll need clear direction from the department on. That can't be understated.

I know the minister talked about the restructuring of the curriculum, and especially at early years. So, I'd like to ask the minister: Will he commit to consulting with the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba to ensure that its latest curriculum document is aligned with evidence-based and inclusive practices?

* (15:50)

Mr. Ewasko: I appreciate the member's question and, again, highlighting the fact that we continue to try to be non-partisan and get to the bottom of some of the answers that the member's asking questions on. And to the member's question in regards to partnering with the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba, absolutely. Absolutely.

You know, I know that I didn't have the 33 years of education experience that the member from Transcona has, but I had 17 years, and of those 17 years I worked quite closely, again, on the student services team, working with students with disabilities.

And we're part of a great team in the school division, and I am surrounded by an absolute great team in the department that are working together to make sure that we're taking the various thoughts and comments and sometimes frustrations that parents and guardians and education partners felt with the previous government that didn't enact any plans moving forward.

And so that's why it was time to do the K-to-12 commission and out of that came the K-to-12 action plan. Also, the document *Mamāhtawisiwin*, which we're proud of, as well, which I don't know if I tabled that document for the member, but I should've. And if—I'm pretty sure he's got a copy. Matter of fact, he was in my office and I did give him an English version—to *Mamāhtawisiwin*, as well. And then with that was the framework for learning.

We know that, as I've said already, that we have met with the superintendents in March to launch the early years assessment piece. We have a plan and a commitment to continue to engage with all our education partners. I have met with the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba on a couple—on a few occasions and I definitely look forward to working—to continuing to work with them as we work with all our education partners.

I've heard multiple times from our education partners that it's a, you know, bit of a breath of fresh air being able to come and have a conversation, you know, as opposed to what they were seeing. And I'm assuming it didn't happen for the whole 17 years of the NDP government, but they were saying that, you know, near the end there in the last five, six years under the NDP, it was getting more and more difficult to have those conversations and have open dialogue, because there's always things to learn from one another.

In June of 2022, the department updated the standards for appropriate educational programming in Manitoba, so AEPs. I know the member is familiar with AEPs. And the standards, along with the Manitoba philosophy and inclusion, sustain equal access to educational opportunities for all students and support efforts to remove barriers to learning. Schools and school divisions are required at a minimum to follow these standards.

So then, when we talk about professional assessment in Manitoba, specific planning to support students begins prior to a diagnosis. If learning difficulties persist, the support team may involve other professionals, which includes clinicians and/or consultants.

And in 2021, Manitoba announced an increase in education funding, which includes an additional 5 and a half million for students with special learning needs. And the member knows, because I've said this multiple times: in the last three years alone, above and beyond the operating dollars that we have provided the K-to-12 system, we've funded students with special needs to the tune of \$17 million. This year alone, \$100 million, a 6.1 per cent increase to the K-to-12 system all across this great province of ours.

More work to do; we're going to continue to do it and I look forward to more years after this one.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member's time is up—or, minister, sorry.

Mr. Altomare: I'm glad that the minister referenced his experience in working in student services and with students with additional needs. It's really important that, you know, we're influenced by that work because, as he's referenced previously, a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work.

But we do know that studies have shown that kids with learning disabilities and additional needs are sometimes, you know, more susceptible to mental health struggles—absolutely, I know we provided those services—struggle with anxiety, depression. And these are, again, important topics, especially coming out of the pandemic, that have to be tackled and ensured that they're properly supported.

And so, in going down this line, will the government commit to supporting the development and implementation of evidence-based curriculum for English language arts and provide sufficient professional development to teachers and administrators in order to support the needs of all students?

* (16:00)

Mr. Ewasko: Absolutely. I mean, I know that the member from Transcona, with not only his administration background but his education background, and he saw and worked with many hard-working individuals at various different levels within the school system to make sure that, as I did, working with students with special needs, there's some definite 'challengems'—challenges, and you want to make sure that you're, you know, supporting the children themselves, of course, the students, but also working with parents or guardians to help with various different strategies.

And that comes from what I mentioned earlier in regards to reaching out and making sure that you're

doing assessments and working with those professionals within the school and seeing what is working and what is not working, and then that's when you start to bring in some of those additional supports.

The member mentions, you know, mental health, of course, and, you know, before I get there, I mean, our—you know, to answer his question in regards to language arts in the curriculum, the new language arts curriculum is being implemented and it's actually going above and beyond just English, Français and French immersion.

And some of the things that our government has already done in regards to—for mental health supports, we've expanded the services of the NorWest Youth Hub to the tune of \$2.9 million, and this includes funding for additional counselling and psychologists appointments, primary care visits and mental health support group sessions. In total, the additional investment will allow the number of the youth served at NorWest to increase by approximately 150 per year.

We've also invested \$1.92 million to create five additional youth hub sites in Winnipeg, Brandon and Selkirk to provide youth-centred services across a continuum of care so that young people can access all of the core health and social services they need in one place.

I worked for many years in Sunrise School Division; it was actually Agassiz prior to that. And many times under the former government, you had to travel all the way into Winnipeg and then get on some form of wait-list and to access various degrees of professionals.

Now, this is not going to be something that can be fixed overnight. I know that the member from Transcona knows that. This is not an overnight fix.

I'm not sure if his leader knows that, because from what I heard this morning, he's going to wave a magic wand and health care and a bunch of other things are going to be fixed. I'm not quite sure how that's going to happen but I guess we'll wait and see how—what some of those plans roll out. Because after 17 years, it seemed that they didn't have any plans or they were tired anyways.

In addition to those youth hubs, we're expanding the distribution of Thrival Kits to the tune of \$1.4 million. So, these kits are incorporating evidence-based mental health practices and coping strategies as well as interpersonal skills developments. At least 30,000 for grade 4 to 6 students across Manitoba are expected to benefit from the distribution of these kits.

We're also expanding Project 11. Established by the True North Youth Foundation, this is a school-based mental health promotion program for students in kindergarten to grade 8. It includes virtual and in-person lessons and activities designed to improve mental health awareness.

We're also enhancing access to school-based mental health and addiction supports, beginning in Brandon, Portage la Prairie and Steinbach. Pilot projects is going to expand existing school-based clinical teams with psychiatric nurses and addiction support workers.

I had the pleasure of working with many Addictions Foundation of Manitoba support counsellors that worked within schools, that were spread out pretty thin throughout school divisions, but I know that they definitely bring an added level of support to help the existing services teams—

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

Mr. Altomare: I do know that the minister has referenced how important it is to have data collection, accurate data collection. Has talked about at length, about dialogue with stakeholders and all the people that are involved in ensuring that kids with additional needs and kids with learning disabilities are having their needs met in our public schools.

We have seen a progression now where, like the minister referenced himself, there are multiple ways of tackling the needs that kids present when they arrive at school.

I've worked with a number of professionals that have dedicated their lives to ensure that kids with additional needs and kids with learning disabilities are receiving the very best education they can, based on the needs that they present. And we do know how important data is in this process.

So, question I have for the minister is: How is the government specifically tracking those with learning disabilities in our schools to ensure that their needs are being met?

Mr. Ewasko: In regards to the member's question in regards to tracking students with special needs and that and—I mean, back when some of our mutual friends and that and I started in the teaching profession, I—*[interjection]*—I'm not sure, I'd have to ask for clarification. It's okay. But I won't; he might bring it up in the next question. It's all good.

* (16:10)

So back when I first started teaching and I had the opportunity to take on an educational assistant role in the school division, in the school, I was working with students with special needs and, you know—predominantly male—and back then, this would've been late '90s, I guess, and into the 2000s, working with students with emotional and behaviour disorders. And, matter of fact, I was actually classified as an EBD teacher, and I think the member, you know, would've, because he taught for so long, he would've known the time when that—some of those stigmas and those labels were done, and I think we've moved past putting certain labels on students.

And I think the main focus is that what we're trying to do—and I think deep down, the member from Transcona is hoping for this as well from his own party, but I think we just saw some—a lack of effort there in the last few years of the former NDP government—is the fact that we want to make sure that there's proper supports for all students of all abilities in our systems.

And so, we work—again, we work with our education partners to make sure that we're tracking various—varying—various different things within our school system. And so, that's where school divisions are tracking, you know, what their students are doing. We are also using the Manitoba Health policy data to inform us and the department and our education partners, which then helps with future planning.

As I said, in some case—not in some cases—we're trying to stay away from the labels, but I did want to mention the provincial student information system. This is something that came out of the K-to-12 action plan, and I know that many of our education partners have been asking for for quite some time. We're in the process of implementing a student information system for the education sector, and this provincial SIS will provide timely and consistent access by creating a modern, integrated system which will put students at the centre while improving business processes, information gathering and enhanced reporting with the ability to share information within Manitoba's education system.

I know that the member himself used some form of information system when he was an administrator and then a teacher, as well. I did. But some of the challenges were that if you did have students moving from a school division to another, you know, never mind coming in from another province or outside—into our province from another province, but just division

to division it was a challenge to make sure that the proper data was going back and forth.

And that student information system is going to also help with that, as the member mentioned, the tracking of the various students to make sure that we are embarking on making sure that we're planning with the students at the centre of that planning, making sure that we're getting the best results for those students on a per-student basis, as well, and making sure that we've got the right supports put into place for them.

That's why, to mention the budget, Mr. Chair, 2023, we're advancing the student information system as a priority, and that's why we've increased the funding of \$1.4 million, total investment of about \$3 million.

Mr. Altomare: The tracking and the data collection is important because, ultimately, it does impact funding. It absolutely does. School divisions right now are feeling the pinch when it comes to funding. It's well documented that the past seven years have been very difficult, Mr. Chair, for school divisions.

I can provide an example regarding a school division in—that's in my constituency, in River East Transcona. They're having to deal with the challenge of up to—as of September of 2023 coming up, of the challenge of up to 1,500 new kids in the system, and many that will have additional needs that have been identified by the Early Development Instrument.

And—you know, and I do want to state that River East Transcona has taken the extraordinary step, Mr. Chair, of creating two full-time kindergarten programs based on the need being observed in their communities. They're going to have that at Polson School and Hampstead school. But what they've had to do, though, is create this program in spite of government support not being there, and that's creating a real challenge.

I know the minister likes to talk about the supposed support—financial support—that's gone to school divisions, but they're not feeling it because they haven't been feeling it for the past number of years. We're at a point now where River East Transcona School Division is taking the extraordinary step of taking out a one-time loan just to cover expenses to meet the needs of their students. They're not feeling that they have a real partner in the province in helping them meet the needs of their students, Mr. Chair.

This is a real concern and, you know, like I said in my comments previous, when we were here about

a week and a half ago as the session began, is that we were—we are at an inflection point, one that needed some leadership.

And I know that, typically, budgets are—come out a month before—*[interjection]*—school division budgets, right—before the actual budget is released by the Province, and in that time, many school divisions, including the school division that's in my—that is in the 'constit' I represent—was doing budget consultations and saying—talking about the challenges.

And I know the minister has met with many school divisions and has heard these challenges time and time again. And when given the opportunity and provided the opportunity with that whole month between the announcement in early February to when budget came down, there was an opportunity there to show some real leadership when it came to addressing these real needs that are being faced by students in our province, by school divisions that are tasked to do the service-delivery piece, one that they take very seriously, Mr. Chair.

I don't doubt the sincerity of the department or the minister when it comes to this. But I will say that there are challenges that are not being met.

And so what I would like to ask the minister is, what is the Province doing to address the learning needs in literacy achievement caused by the pandemic and as we emerge from the pandemic?

Mr. Ewasko: And the member made some points, some comments that I want to definitely make sure that I take this opportunity to correct some of the misinformation that the member puts on the record.

But I do want to thank the member for acknowledging the fact that we have met with school divisions and we continue to listen to them, not only myself, but also the department, and listen to the challenges that they are having within their school divisions.

That's why, you know, on a couple things I would like to backtrack for a couple seconds here and talk about early learning literacy and inclusion, especially. And since the establishment of the new department as I referenced earlier—the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) forming the new department in January of 2022—I think this offers greater opportunity to better support children in the—within the continuum of learning from early childhood right through to high school graduation and beyond.

* (16:20)

And because this was just created in January of 2022, I do feel that I've been surrounded by incredible change makers, not only within the department, but then also those partners that they know outside into the various sectors—education sectors, as well.

So, as part of our commitment to expanding the early learning and child-care system, the principles of the—diversity and inclusion guide our work. And so, as the member had asked a couple questions ago in regards to tracking and, you know, specifically tracking students with special needs, I think that's why we're trying to shift the focus to making sure that we're supporting learners. And we're not—I'm trying to get away from those labels to make sure that we're able to—make sure that all children are able to have meaningful participation in our various different programs.

The inclusion support program provides funding and supports for additional staff, as well as specialized grants to purchase equipment, provide training and complete renovations to help with those students that might need some additional supports or supports for physical challenges, as well. In addition, in 2023, the department announced \$60 million in quality-enhancement grants, which includes the enhancing the diversity and inclusion grant.

In regards to number of students and working towards making sure that we're ready and we have the supports in place for our newcomers—and I'm glad that the member from Transcona mentioned the partnership that not only myself but the department has with River East Transcona, because they've hosted us on a couple occasions for a few of our announcements. And for our newcomer and support grants that we have had, we've had a \$1.8 million on the Intensive Newcomer Support Grant funding for '22-23, and it was allocated to 16 school divisions, five of which were new recipients in that year for the school division allocations.

Through regular enrolment data and late enrolment reports from school divisions, we know there are increased numbers newcomer refugee students, many who have file—who have fled the crisis in Ukraine, requiring supports to address educational disruptions, trauma and, of course, language barriers.

And that's why we continue to work with the various different school divisions, to make sure that we're there not only at this time when we make the astronomical funding announcements that the member referenced of \$100 million, 6.1 per cent increase to the K-to-12 system, but it's also to make sure that

the department and myself are open to having that dialogue with our education partners, which includes school divisions, on a week-by-week basis to make sure that we're meeting the—

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

Mr. Altomare: I have to say, I'm enjoying the experience this afternoon because I think we're getting down to some real indications that—the direction that this minister wants to take the department and wants to take education in the province.

I know it's been a challenge these past seven years. I can't imagine, when the minister is—has to sit around caucus and talk to his caucus members and try to convince them to fund education adequately so that no one goes unsupported. I mean, there was a former minister of Education that cut the teacher library. You got the current Minister of Finance (Mr. Cullen) who brought in bill 64, 'secondeded' by the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson). You know, it must be tough sitting around that table when you're dealing with this type of reception.

And then, this is the piece that is the real—because school divisions right now, Mr. Chair, aren't feeling the support that they need to feel coming out of the pandemic. We've got real challenges that are facing us. And I've said this before: this is an inflection point.

And we're missing an opportunity here to really—bring in—and it's not just about funding, but to—and I know the minister refers to this, to the dialogue piece. The dialogue piece is important, but the second piece to dialogue is actually putting measures in place that school divisions feel are tangible and are making a difference. That's the piece that's important, right?

You can have all the dialogue you want, but if you're not going to do anything about it, then it's just dialogue. As opposed to having the next step, which is action. And that's an important piece.

So my question to the minister and his staff is, how can schools recover from the pandemic when they were receiving funding that hasn't kept up with inflation these past number of years?

* (16:30)

Mr. Ewasko: I think I am going to take this opportunity to just correct the member's narrative that he continues to put on the record, which I don't think Manitobans are open to listening to what he is selling. They're not buying what the NDP are selling on education funding.

We know that this year alone—I've mentioned it many times, the member refuses to listen to it—\$100 million; it's a 6.1 per cent increase, on average. No school division had received anything less than a 2.5 per cent increase. Matter of fact, only one school division received the 2.5; everyone else was 3.0 and higher.

The member continues to talk about River East Transcona, so let's talk a little about River East Transcona. I feel that I've got a good relationship with River East Transcona School Division. I know that this year alone, River East Transcona School Division received a 9.8 per cent increase. The member from Transcona wants to argue with me on that. That's \$11-million increase.

I know the member mentioned on how myself and the department meets with our school divisions, and we do. And so I had—did have a meeting with River East Transcona School Division, and we did talk about many of their challenges, whether that's new students coming in or expansion of communities within the school division catchment and the increase in student population.

And so we did talk, in end of November, December, somewhere in there, about what number they were looking at. And they actually had come up with a number of \$10 million. And so when the new funding came out for this year and we announced it, of the 9.8 per cent, they actually received \$11 million.

Keep in mind, and the member refuses to actually listen to this component, this part of it, but our education funding since 2016 has gone up by 23 per cent—23 per cent. The Canada inflation calculator—I don't really want to do the homework for the member, but he can look it up—the Canada inflation calculator, since 2016, was a 21 per cent increase.

So for years and years and years I had heard school divisions wanted to have fair and equitable funding, and we agreed. And so as we were looking at providing fair and equitable funding, what did the member from Transcona and some of his supporters change the wording on? Adequate funding. Adequate funding.

Well, if you start to look these various words up, they weren't happy with the fact that we were agreeing with them that they needed fair and equitable, and so that's where we came up with \$100 million and 6.1 per cent average increase, which takes in a whole lot of factors.

And the member knows himself that his 33 years in education, my 17—actually this fall would've started my 29th year in education—yes, and, you know, the member opposite's got his fingers going, so he's got the 'gazintas' and, hopefully, doesn't have to take his shoes off; it's all good. But we're working on that numeracy thing as well there, member—friend from Transcona.

So, just to say that we are working with the school divisions, we are working with the education partners. We are hearing the challenges, whether it's transportation costs, whether it is food and nutrition, whether it is our early childhood education components, that we're increasing seats, we're making life more affordable for families so that they can spend their hard-earned money—

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

Mr. Altomare: This gives me an opportunity to also put some facts on the record, right, especially when it comes to chronic underfunding, Mr. Chair, that has occurred since 2016: 0.5, 0.5, 0.5, 0.5 for 'cumulative' years has a 'cumulative' downward effect on the budget capability of school divisions.

I will say that the underfunding that's occurred from 2016 to 2022 actually resulted in a \$107-million cut, when you take into effect the impact of inflation, Mr. Chair.

So, when this government, then, all of a sudden in one year decides to, maybe, you know, throw a few crumbs towards some school divisions, they call it equitable. I want to—*[interjection]*—which one? Oh, you know what, we won't refer to that.

But what I will say is this: I am on the record, Mr. Chair, of saying that they have chronically underfunded education since 2016. Chronically. And right now, we're feeling a real impact of this. To the point, Mr. Chair, where many school divisions are now unable to provide the same level of service that they were once able to provide in 2016.

That's a problem. This is something that has to be tackled.

And right now, what school divisions are looking for, is they're looking for leadership in this area. And what they also, Mr. Chair, are looking for is, just for once, for the government to be honest and come out and say, you know what, we've underfunded for this amount of time; please forgive us. We're going to do

something now that's really going to have a positive impact.

People would respect that more than the shell game that we're being shown here. That's the piece that's really quite insulting to Manitobans. He talks about—the minister talks about, they're not buying it. I'll tell you what they're not buying, Mr. Chair: they're not buying what this minister is saying about education funding, because they're feeling it every day when their kids come home from school.

Lakeshore School Division has to decide whether or not they can buy a bus with the increased costs now, from \$140,000 a bus to \$180,000 in one year. Yet, this government feels it quite okay to send million-dollar cheques to corporations outside of Manitoba, when the real needs are right here. They need to be met, Mr. Chair.

These are decisions that are being made around the Cabinet table. And who's it impacting the most, Mr. Chair? The kids that need support in our classrooms. And I say it before, and I say it again: our kids, families and communities are really feeling the impact of these decisions that have been made these past number of years.

And for once, when you require some real leadership—and like I said, Manitobans are a forgiving lot—will anyone in this government have the temerity to actually say, we made a mistake. Mr. Chair, the answer to that, we know what it is.

Because what they're doing with this is they're trying to paper over years of underfunding, and hoping people aren't noticing. When we know the impacts are being felt at increased class sizes, more—with kids that are showing up with more needs every—each and every day because of the result of the pandemic; they needed some leadership coming from this government regarding this issue—these many issues.

* (16:40)

So, my question to the minister is: How are school divisions supposed to recover from a pandemic when this government refuses to fund education to a level that matches the rate of inflation at the very least?

Mr. Ewasko: And you know what I appreciate? My friend, the MLA of Transcona, is he put on the record that \$100 million, 6.1 per cent increase to the K-to-12 system, he called it crumbs—*[interjection]*—you absolutely did. You called it crumbs—\$100 million, 6.1 per cent increase—*[interjection]*—thanks, Mr. Chair—I'll go through you, Mr. Chair. I know this isn't a major debate; this is a question-and-answer thing.

Mr. Chair, \$100 million, 6.1 per cent increase to his own school division. We had 11.8 per cent increase—\$11 million—\$11 million—sorry, a 9.8 per cent increase.

I better correct the record because then the member will go and put that on the front page of the—and I don't want to downplay any community newspapers; I'm hoping the member still, because I haven't forgot about it—hopefully, the member had actually went out to my community and apologized for his insensitive comments to my local community newspapers. But a 9.8 per cent increase to his own school division, which is \$11 million—\$1 million more than what they had asked for; 23 per cent increase in education since 2016.

He wants to talk about leadership. Leadership? Mr. Chair, I think our parents and guardians and our students, they were calling for leadership for 17 years under the dark days of the NDP. And what did they get? They got, when the NDP formed government in '99 and shortly thereafter, parents and guardians, they want their students to succeed. They want the students to be incredibly great citizens. They want them to have success in numeracy and literacy; good stewards of the land; go through the K-to-12 education system; graduate; choose something to do after graduation, some form of post-secondary education.

You got multiple great opportunities right here in Manitoba. Could go to college, could take an apprenticeship, could go to university, private vocational institutions. And you know what? For a short amount of time or some time there, you could actually go and get a job as well. Manitoba's got a lot of great things to offer.

The member talks about leadership and also talks about that \$100 million is crumbs to education. Unbelievable. I might actually quote him in my next article in my local paper so that everybody is aware of that. What did we inherit when we inherited—when we won government in 2016? Oh, wait; I have to finish the sentence. What I was saying earlier?

So what did they receive when they took power? Students in Manitoba were third in the country in numeracy and literacy; 2014, 10th; and further behind ninth in numeracy and literacy and in science. That's not what—that's not leadership. That's a disservice to our students.

The leadership is now, is what we are doing. We went out to the public, 30,000 Manitobans, K-to-12 commission, K-to-12 action plan, Mamàhtawisiwin and the

framework for learning. That's a plan on how we get success for students in Manitoba no matter where they live, their cultural background, or their own personal circumstance. That's the goal.

And it is funding education. It's not all about money, because I know that's what the member wants to think. But a per-pupil ratio, we are a leader in the country per pupil for spending. Under the NDP, we went from third to dead last and further behind ninth. How is that leadership?

I'll take our record and our leadership, and—with the great team that I have in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning, to make sure that we continue to make success for all students in Manitoba.

Mr. Altomare: I notice that the minister didn't answer the question regarding what they're going to do with the challenges that are being faced by school divisions, the challenges that were created by their years of underfunding. That is on the record. We have seen the challenges that are being faced by school divisions on a daily basis regarding these issues, and yet this minister refuses to accept responsibility for the years of underfunding that occurred from 2016 until now. And like I've said earlier in my previous statements, Mr. Chair, students, families and communities are feeling it every day.

And while the department is doing the very best that it can—the employees of the department that come to work every day—they have to deal with the challenge of a government that's underfunded this department for years. Well, we can go into each and every detail regarding this, but the minister knows, through school divisions that contact him and his department, of the very real challenges that they're facing due to the funding pressures. We know that inflation is taking away a tremendous amount of ability to really pivot for school divisions, especially when it comes to having new student enrollment. That is a real difficult thing to react to.

And you know what they used to have, Mr. Chair? They used to have something called a surplus—a 4 per cent surplus—that good accounting practices call for. Do you know that almost every school division in this province is now under that 4 per cent threshold? Do you know that many school divisions are actually at zero and that my school division is actually in a deficit situation because they had to borrow to cover costs?

Now, this minister talks about leadership. Some real leadership from the department would've been something along the lines of we're going to restore your budget surpluses, because it's important to be able to pivot when we have new enrolment, when we have students that show up with additional needs that require that support. And you know what that would've told school divisions? That they have a real partner in this Province, where they can rely on the Province to do—to take an initiative like that.

Because, like I've said before, throughout this—throughout the Estimates process, is that we are truly at an inflection point here with our school divisions struggling, and there was an opportunity here that was presented for some really creative thinking so that we can respond to these needs that are being presented to us right now. This is what we mean by having a department that works in partnership, or a ministry that works in partnership with our school divisions, Mr. Chair. It's really important. This is something that can't be taken lightly.

So when the minister says he wants to correct the record, the record is clearly showing these past number of years that school divisions haven't had a real partner in this government. They've had to struggle to meet the needs of their kids, families and communities. That's the piece that shows a bit of a disconnect here. One that I think we have to close the gap on.

So I'll ask again. Given that the times that we're in, will they commit to meeting the needs of students in Manitoba and support teachers, school divisions, kids, families and communities so that they can reach their highest potential?

* (16:50)

Mr. Ewasko: Yes, absolutely. We are supporting students, teachers, support staff, parents, guardians, all Manitobans. And that's why I look forward to, in a few weeks, the member from Transcona supporting this year's budget. Because it is—it's about affordability.

The member from Transcona talks about this all the time, about, you know, asks about leadership. Well, I think I gave a fairly strong argument on why we are showing leadership, and the former NDP government did not so much, no leadership. We know that they took education from third in the country in numeracy, literacy, and about a year after that—science was included—to then dead last in the country. But yet, we're still—and we still are a leader in the country in regards to per pupil spending.

But here's the difference, Mr. Chair. We're actually making sure that students are going to start having even more success by not putting the labels that the member opposite wants to put on the students, but we want to make sure there's supports for all learners in this great province of ours.

And the member talks about leadership and about making sure that the challenges for school divisions—I already have spoken about the challenges that not only urban centres have, but then rural centres and then northern and rural centres, school divisions have, whether it's transportation, whether it's wage pressures—'whedger'—whether it's human resource pressures.

The member opposite from Transcona, I'm not sure what type of world he's living in where he refuses—and you know what? Maybe not so much the member from Transcona, but I know for fact his leader is ignoring the fact—ignoring the fact—that there was a worldwide pandemic and we're having challenges. We're not using it as an excuse. We're just saying—stating a fact as opposed to their fiction that they continue to deliver. We all know that the NDP cannot be trusted, and that's why we're showing leadership.

What's an example of something that we inherited when we formed government in 2016? Just to talk about cost pressures and affordability, since the member from Transcona—I have to remind the member: \$900-million deficit is what we inherited when we took over from the NDP. Did they have a worldwide pandemic? No, they didn't. No, they didn't. Nine hundred-million-dollar deficit.

Where did they take Manitoba Hydro and that—and the overall provincial debt? Almost \$50 billion—that's billion with a B—billion. How is that impacting Manitobans, our children's futures? They don't want to—Manitobans don't want to go back to the dark days of the NDP.

The member from Transcona asks about those cost pressures for school divisions. Well, raising taxes on all Manitobans, I don't think is going to help with those cost pressures. But the member from Transcona and his leader definitely feels that, that that's the way to go. They're in favour of a \$300-a-metric-ton carbon tax. Federal government just announced that on April 1st. The increase to gas might have an impact on that transportation cost that the member mentions in regards to buses and the forms of transportation for our students all across this great province of ours.

We talked about surpluses. What's the definition of a surplus? Surplus is when you actually get more money than what you necessarily need and you put it into a little bit of a savings account; that's called a surplus. So the question back at the member: Did the former NDP government ever replace those surpluses in school divisions?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Transcona.

An Honourable Member: No, you didn't. There's the answer.

Mr. Altomare: Is it my turn now, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Transcona.

Mr. Altomare: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thought I heard it was the honourable member for Transcona. I appreciate that.

You know, despite record revenue from three sources that this government particularly dislikes: record federal government transfers that have doubled since they've been in government, record income tax revenue that has come into the coffers of this government, record Manitoba Hydro revenue that has come into this government. Right, record revenue of over \$300 million this year—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chair, if I can continue without interruption? May I?

Mr. Chairperson: Order. *[interjection]* Order.

The honourable member for Transcona has the floor.

Mr. Altomare: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your guidance in this, too.

Because I'll tell you, with record revenue from three sources that they'll never actually acknowledge, what have they done?

They have made deliberate choices that have had an impact directly on our public school system. Record federal government transfers that are intended to even the playing field throughout the country—as a matter of fact, they're not even allocated exactly as to where the money goes.

Guess what? The federal government actually assumes that the province is going to take that revenue and use it for the improvement of the citizen's life in the province by providing necessary government services.

The second most—the second highest expenditure is public education, and the federal government has an expectation that with those transfer dollars that they get used in the proper areas. That's the expectation. And when given this at this important time, Mr. Chair, when we had the opportunity to really have a positive impact on the citizenry here in our province, they've taken it into a different direction.

And, ultimately, the judgment will be at election time, Mr. Chair. That will be, you know, we'll see how it comes out. Elections are important. The people that vote will make their decision.

Our job as legislators, of course, is to represent our constituencies and to also ask government questions regarding issues as important as public education and the dollars that are being allocated to this very important service.

I can't stress strongly enough, Mr. Chair, that when we're at this point in history here in this province, that we needed to have a truly visionary document being presented to people of this province regarding how we're moving forward with public ed.

We have seen school divisions and communities line up to express their displeasure, not only this year but for the past number of years, because we're going to get to this point because of the years of underfunding, Mr. Chair, and the cumulative impact of that. That's the piece that's really being felt now in communities, not just here in the city but outside.

And so while we sit here and talk about this process, and like I said, I've enjoyed this back and forth with the minister because it really does indicate what direction that they're going in.

So my final question before our time runs out today is, what are the government's plans, moving forward, to ensure that school divisions will receive funding that matches the rate of inflation?

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

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

CHAMBER

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:00)

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 Executive Council.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Chairperson: And before we go any further, I would like to draw our attention to the public gallery where we have seated from MDM Homeschool, 10 grade 8 to 10 students under the direction of Anna Doerksen.

We welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature and hope you have a great time. You will be witnessing some exciting exchanges this afternoon. And this is an interesting time where we get into the details of some things.

So, anyway, welcome here.

* * *

Does the honourable First Minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I do, Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

Budget 2023 delivers historic help for Manitobans with unprecedented investments in the services that Manitobans rely on most. Record funding will help heal health care, make life more affordable and lead to safer streets, stronger communities and opportunities ahead.

Mr. Chair, Budget 2023 implements the largest tax reductions in our history and includes historic investments that will bring total tax and affordability measures to more than \$1.8 billion for Manitobans, providing tax relief through increasing the basic personal amount, saving the average family \$1,000 this year, taking more than 47,000 low-income Manitobans off the tax roll.

We will increase income-tax bracket threshold, saving Manitobans hundreds of dollars more in income taxes next year. Mr. Chair, Budget 2023 will implement the largest tax relief in the history of Manitoba this year.

Safer streets: Budget 2023 includes an historic investment of more than \$100 million to address the challenges of violent crime and homelessness across Manitoba. We are investing in Manitoba's violent crime strategy, Manitoba's homelessness strategy, Downtown Community Safety Partnership and the Bear Clan Patrol.

We'll invest in new treatment spaces for Manitobans who are in need of addictions treatment services across Manitoba, as well as youth and child mental health services to improve access and reduce wait times.

Mr. Chair, the NDP will defund the police and support the revolving door in our criminal justice system. Our government is taking a different approach. On this side of the House, we are funding the police, cracking down on violent criminals and investing to address the root causes of crime in our communities. The members opposite don't have a plan to make our streets safer. We do, and we are getting the job done with this budget.

Healing health care: Mr. Chair, our government is responding with the largest investment in health care in the history of Manitoba. Budget 2023 includes an historic investment of \$7.9 billion in the health-care system, providing \$668 million more to heal health care for Manitobans. This represents a 9.2 per cent increase over last year, and a 22 per cent increase since 2016.

Investing in a diagnostic and surgical recovery task force, human-health human resource action plan. This includes efforts to recruit, to train and retain doctors, nurses and other health-care professionals from around the world. We will invest in a health infrastructure plan, including major renovations to hospitals right across this great province of ours. This budget will also provide support to advance initiatives under the seniors strategy, including a hearing aid program for seniors.

Manitobans know that we are healing health care for generations to come.

Stronger communities: Manitoba families rely on affordable and quality services close to home. Budget 2023 includes an historic investment in municipal operating funding, \$47 million more than last year and the largest increase in more than a decade.

To improve education, we are making astronomical investments in the K-to-12 public school system, providing \$100 million more than last year, a 6.1 per cent increase, and \$76 million to implement a \$10-a-day child care three years ahead of schedule.

This budget also includes major investments to community living and children's disability services agencies, for a funded average wage of \$19 per hour, bringing the total budget for disability services to an historic \$640 million this year.

Our government also made significant investments for the Arts, Culture and Sport in Community Fund, an area that was neglected by the NDP for more than a decade.

Our government is investing in the services Manitobans rely on now and into the future.

Mr. Chair, Manitoba has experienced an unprecedented economic recovery. Budget 2023 makes an historic investment in infrastructure and other initiatives that will transform Manitoba into a global trade and transportation corridor. Key industries such as manufacturing and agriculture showed record new growth, and our government is making major strides with historic investments in our economy.

There is so much more I could go on with, Mr. Chair. I know we will have various deliberations back and forth between myself and the Leader of the Opposition, but I just want to close by saying this is an historic budget for Manitoba. It's historic help for Manitobans. It provides for safer streets; it heals our health care; it builds stronger communities, and it provides opportunities—many, many opportunities—for Manitobans ahead.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) for those comments.

Does the Leader of the Official Opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I want to welcome the Premier to the final Estimates process before the next provincial election.

And we know that there's so many issues that Manitobans want to see addressed in our province.

You know, the issue of health care is certainly top of mind for so many people across Manitoba. You know, it's said these days that you can drive the entirety of Highway 2 and not see any more emergency services. It's said that so many people who are working on the front lines are leaving our province to go to Saskatchewan or Ontario or other places where they're being offered a more competitive salary and the chance to work in a health-care system not run by the Manitoba PCs, which seems to be an attractive proposition for some.

We also know that the issues of waits in emergency rooms and for surgeries and diagnostic tests is a major priority that needs to get fixed. We know that it's going to take years to fix the damage that this PC government has caused to the health-care system but we're up to the task.

We know that we have to invest in those people who work on the front lines. We have to hire more

doctors, more nurses, more allied health-care professionals, and we're going to have to pay them to work in rural Manitoba, to pay them to work in other areas of our health-care system where we urgently need more help at the bedside.

Whereas the PCs, over their time in office, have increased the health-care bureaucracy, we'd like to reduce the bureaucracy in health care and reinvest those savings into the front lines at the bedside where they would actually help patients and help people in Manitoba.

We know, also, that the cost of living is such a huge burden on so many families. And so, you know, the Manitoba NDP is the party that built these Crown corporations like Manitoba Public Insurance, like Manitoba Hydro. And the reason why we did that was to be able to keep your life, as the average person in Manitoba, more affordable.

So let's cut through the mismanagement and the bureaucracy that we've seen increase over the PC administration, first under Brian Pallister and now under the Stefanson government, and let's get back to the core mission for those Crown corporations of making your life more affordable.

So, the Premier highlights many challenges that she sees in the province in her opening statement, but when she talks about needing to fix the health-care system, why doesn't she mention that she was the Health minister? When she talks about issues around public safety, why doesn't she mention that she was the Attorney General and minister of Justice? When she talks about cost of living, why doesn't she mention that she's failed to take action as the Premier to help Manitobans in their time of need?

And so, these are the things that the PCs are trying to gloss over in their election-year rebranding efforts, but I think Manitobans understand which versions of the PCs they're going to get if they're re-elected again next year. It's going to be the same cuts and closures and chaos that we saw under Brian Pallister and that have continued under these two years of the Stefanson government.

So, we're putting forward a better plan. We'd like to make your life more affordable. We'd like to have more people working at the bedside, not less. And one step that this government could take immediately to help health care would be to give a contract to the allied health-care professionals. These are the paramedics who work in rural Manitoba. These are the respiratory therapists who work in our hospitals.

These are the lab techs and X-ray techs who do the tests for you, who—if you get injured or if you need to get a diagnosis from your local physician or nurse practitioner or health-care team.

And these people have had their wages frozen for five years. It's happening at a time when bigger provinces out there are making big offers to some of these people to take their talent to other jurisdictions. We don't want to see that. We want to see more people working here in Manitoba. We want to see more people putting down roots and making the decision to raise their kids and to raise their next generation here in this great province.

And so, for us, you know, the prospect of being able to put forward a plan and implement it and to govern well in Manitoba is a high honour. And so our team is going to be working very hard on that project this year and we hope to earn the support of people right across this great province.

So, today, as we kick off the Estimates process for the Executive Council, we look forward to diving into a few of these issues and, of course, getting some answers for the people of Manitoba.

So, I leave my opening statement at that.

Mr. Chairperson: In accordance with subrule 78(16), during the consideration of—oh, we do thank the leader—the official Leader of the Opposition for those remarks—*[interjection]*—yes, I was a paragraph ahead of myself.

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

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

* (15:10)

Mrs. Stefanson: The staff that I have joining me today are Kathryn Gerrard, who's the Clerk of Executive Council. I have Braeden Jones, who's the director of communications and stakeholder relations, as well as Brad Salyn, the chief of staff.

Mr. Chairperson: Would the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) like to introduce his staff?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: This is Mark Rosner. We affectionately calling him the Tories' worst nightmare.

Mr. Chairperson: Moving right along, the floor is now open for questions. *[interjection]* Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Kinew: I'd like to begin by asking some questions about Manitoba Public Insurance and some of the issues that we were raising in question period earlier today.

And I'd just like to begin by asking the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) how many times concerns regarding cost overruns on Project Nova have been raised at Cabinet.

Mrs. Stefanson: The Leader of the Opposition will know that discussions that take place within Cabinet are confidential, and so it'd be inappropriate to comment about what those discussions are and what has been taking place in Cabinet.

I will say that, you know, several discussions have been taken place with respect to this issue, as—and I know that the minister has really been taking the lead on this issue and I know that he and I have had many discussions. He's kept me up to speed with everything that has been transpiring and some of the actions that have been taken.

Mr. Kinew: So, there's been two directives issued by government regarding cost overruns at Manitoba Public Insurance. The first was in January and one more recently.

When did the Premier first become aware of the size and scale of cost overruns at MPI with respect to Project Nova?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I believe we're just trying to get the details on the actual date, and so if the Leader of the Opposition has other questions, once I get the answer to that, I'll be happy to share that with him.

Mr. Kinew: Sure. That sounds fine.

So, we did raise this issue—some concerns about increasing costs at Project Nova last October in the House in question period. Did the Premier take any action on reining in costs on this project prior to January of this year?

* (15:20)

Mrs. Stefanson: It was our understanding that the IT equipment at MPI was quite outdated, to say the least. For decades, the system had not been updated, and certainly, when the original proposal came forward, there was a recognition that it wasn't enough to fulfill what was really needed to ensure that the IT system at MPI was fully up to speed with where it should be in today's day and age.

So, as I understand, back in October we realized—because we ask these questions ourselves—but there was—the original scope was not enough of the contract, and so there was a change in the scope to reflect what was actually needed with respect to the IT equipment at MPI.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, just wanted to reiterate that the question's about what action the government has taken to address the cost overruns that have been apparent, now, for quite some time. The initial budgeted projection for this project was somewhere in the range of \$90 million and now it's closer to \$300 million, which is a pretty big increase.

And, you know, this is an issue that has been raised publicly. We raised it, but of course, we're not the only ones. This has been raised publicly by other folks and, certainly, organizations like the Consumers Coalition has weighed in because of the impact on rates for ratepayers and customers of MPI.

So, we'd just like to know, in addition to what steps the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) may have taken—whether there were any steps prior to January—whether the Premier has met with the board chair or members of MPI during the last—members of the board of the directors, I should say—within the past six months; whether there's been any meetings between the Premier and the chair, or the board members of Manitoba Public Insurance.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I haven't met personally with any of the members of the board with respect to this particular issue. I know the minister has had those discussions, though, and I know certainly if—I know once he is up in Estimates, he would be, I'm sure, more than happy to answer some of these questions, as well, during those Estimates.

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

I was curious whether the Premier's authorized MPI to make any transfers of funds in order to support the operations of driver and vehicle licensing branch of MPI since March of 2022.

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, the Leader of the Opposition is getting into details with respect to a Crown corporation that is under the purview of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen), and I know that he would be happy to answer these questions at his Estimates process. I think it would be more appropriate that the details with respect to these types of initiatives be asked at that level.

I think, certainly, we're here to answer, you know, higher level questions with—pertaining to MPI. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to get into more details, I suggest that there's a more appropriate Estimates process where that could take place.

Mr. Kinew: So, at this higher level, was the Premier aware of the significant contracts awarded to McKinsey as part of Project Nova?

Mrs. Stefanson: The Leader of the Opposition will know that MPI runs independently of the government. They have their own board of directors, they have their own management that manages the day-to-day activities within MPI.

Certainly, when it comes to any sole-source contracting with McKinsey, I was not aware of any of those contracts taking place until after it was brought to my attention that there were a number of them.

And we—the minister gave a directive to the board to seize any more sole-source contracts to—until, you know, further information was provided.

Mr. Kinew: So, the Premier describes a couple of concerns regarding McKinsey's contract with Project Nova, that there was a sole source—that's a direct quote—and that there were a number of them.

So, beyond the sole-source nature of these contracts—plural—is the Premier aware of other concerns regarding how McKinsey was awarded these contracts by MPI?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, I think that that would be more appropriately asked of the Minister responsible for MPI.

Mr. Kinew: All right. And thank you again, Mr. Chair.

Will the Premier commit that there will be no new increases to the cost of Project Nova?

Mrs. Stefanson: So, I know that we have been assured by MPI that Nova's cost is final and not will increase—and not increase, and is moving ahead on schedule and on time. That's what we have been informed by MPI.

Mr. Kinew: I thank the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) for that and I also thank you, Mr. Chair, for being recognized again.

* (15:30)

I wanted to turn now to the issue of personal-care homes and to talk about one personal-care home in particular, the Maples Personal Care Home, which is owned by Revera.

I think Manitobans all remember the very tragic circumstances at the Maples PCH. More than 50 Manitobans lost their lives and we learned in the aftermath of that tragedy of some very, very terrible conditions at this long-term-care facility.

What I think was also very disturbing, though, for Manitobans, is that this year we heard again in, I believe it was February, when public reports came out about the continued very, very difficult—and disturbing, I would say—conditions at the Maples PCH up to the present day.

There was one gentleman, a Mr. Lloyd Bone—is a resident of the care home. I had the opportunity to meet him, along with members of his family and some folks who were advocating along with the family for improvements for both Mr. Bone and also for others who live in long-term care.

A lot of very serious concerns. I'll table some photographs that the family shared just for the Premier and her staff to be able to review. Just—I do think it's important to see the conditions that seniors are forced to live in in the long-term-care system.

Just to maybe begin at a high level by describing some of the photos. You do see some of the kind of happy scenes of a daughter visiting her father and, you know, the smiles on their faces. But then you do see some pretty disturbing images of soiled sheets and filthy rooms and living conditions for this elderly gentleman, which I don't think any of us would want to see our loved ones living in, and you see some very difficult conditions for any human being.

And so, certainly, I share these images just to kind of put a face and a picture on some of this continued situation that really needs to get addressed on behalf of seniors here in Manitoba.

So, given the fact that we do see some of these images very starkly in the documents that we shared here, many of these have been shared publicly through the media. We also know that the descriptions from the family member of, you know, people being, you know, left for hours in urine and, again, rooms not

being cleaned such that, you know, the—you know, these things we're talking about actually started to stain the floor.

Doesn't give me any pleasure to describe these things; they're very disturbing. But I do so because these are, you know, Manitobans who deserve to have a better quality of life and better living conditions.

So, I just wanted to ask, I guess, at the outset of this section of questioning: Can the Premier tell the House how it is that, you know, two years after the tragedy at Maples, that care for seniors in this same facility is in such a terrible state, to say nothing of other care homes, which may have their own challenges?

Mrs. Stefanson: Listen, I believe, like the Leader of the Opposition and others, that seniors deserve to live in dignity in our province, and that's certainly the premise of where I come from and where our team comes from. And we want to ensure that, if that is not taking place, that we want to get to the bottom of that and find out what the challenges are.

And so, obviously, the Leader of the Opposition has tabled some, you know, some photos that are, you know, disturbing, absolutely. I think that this matter—I'm not sure if the Leader of the Opposition has handed these over to the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority for investigation. We certainly will do that and we'll hand those over to the appropriate, you know, to the appropriate individuals who will look into this matter.

What I will say, from a broader picture, is that after, you know, we discovered some challenges with Maples Personal Care Home and, of course, just congregate-care settings in general during the pandemic, we conducted an independent review by Dr. Lynn Stevenson.

And she came out with a report with 17 recommendations where we have committed to implementing all 17 of those recommendations and those are at various stages. Many of them—I don't have that in front of me right now—but most of those, I believe, have been implemented and the latest I know that we have earmarked more than \$50 million to ensure that we complete the rest of the recommendations from that report. So that's where we are.

We do recognize there are challenges in our personal-care homes. I, again, want to make sure that our seniors are living in dignity. And to the extent that there are individuals that the Leader of the Opposition

is aware of who—there are challenges there, we need to let authorities know so that we can fix that.

And so, obviously, some pictures have been tabled here today. I don't like to discuss individual matters on the floor of the Chamber, but—or, in a committee—but these are—you know, it's incumbent upon all of us, if we know that someone is not living with dignity in personal-care homes or anywhere, that we need to make sure the appropriate authorities are aware of that.

So I'm not sure if the Leader of the Opposition has already passed this on to the WRHA who is responsible for the management of personal-care homes in our province, but we can certainly pass these photos along.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I think that would be good if the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) does pass the photos on to the WRHA, to use her description. Certainly, we're working with the family to help them advocate for themselves and for their loved one who does need a PCH bed. But I think that correspondence or follow-up coming from the Premier certainly carries a certain amount of heft and would likely spurn further follow-up, perhaps more quickly than through the avenues that we have open to us.

So, I certainly would invite the Premier to do so.

In addition to, you know, the photos that were shared with us—and, you know, the family encouraged us to share these photos and to advocate on behalf of their loved one—they asked us specifically to bring his story forward.

We also heard descriptions from those family members and for the advocates and people who are supporting them about what it's been like there, you know, with the family members having to clean up in the room, family members having to advocate specifically to get clean laundry—sheets in particular—having to ask for the mop and pail, things like that. Family members have had to really go above and beyond just to get some kind of baseline, more sanitary conditions for this gentleman.

I'm curious if the Premier has visited the Maples Personal Care Home to see the conditions there since becoming the Premier or if she's visited other personal-care homes since becoming Premier.

Mrs. Stefanson: You know, I—again, I appreciate having a discussion in this Estimates process when it comes to the dignity of our seniors and—in personal-

care homes and making sure that they're living safely in those personal-care homes.

* (15:40)

But I think it's very important, when I look at these photos—and, you know, this appears to have been something from February 1st, which was two months ago, that I hope that the Leader of the Opposition wasn't waiting to kind of do this on the floor of the Legislature or the Chamber. You know, that these—I hope he would've brought this forward to the WRHA or to officials prior to this. This was two months ago.

And I think it's incumbent upon all of us to be part of the solution. So, I hope that when this was brought to his attention, that he also brought this forward to various authorities to get—to make sure that action is being taken. I don't like the fact that two months has gone by. I hope that this isn't continuing to happen, and certainly, we will look into it.

But it's very important that if you—you know, if the Leader of the Opposition or any member of this Chamber has information about the safety and well-being of someone in our personal-care homes, that we bring that forward to the appropriate authorities as quickly as possible so that they're not sitting and waiting in the same kind of situation that they are with some of these photos.

So, I'll leave it at that. Again, I don't like discussing, you know, issues—you know, specific, you know, cases, you know, on the floor of the Chamber, but I'm very passionate about wanting to make sure that our seniors are safe living in personal-care homes.

My father lived in a personal-care home for some time, and I know—and I can remember visiting him quite often in the personal-care home and how difficult it is, you know, for family members to go in and to see, you know, your loved one in a, you know, a compromising position or—you know, you just—nobody wants this. I don't want it for any family out there, ever.

And I just think, you know, when we are in possession of information, I think it's incumbent upon us to act as swiftly and quickly as possible. Because that—you know, the individual in the photos that the Leader of the Opposition has tabled in the House, I want to make sure that he gets the appropriate care that he needs and that he never gets that—that he's not in the position that he's in anymore.

And, you know, I just hope the Leader of the Opposition brought this forward to other authorities before bringing it two months later after the fact to, you know, to the Estimates process.

Mr. Kinew: This issue has been raised publicly with these photos, and certainly, we've advocated on behalf of the family.

And the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) should look at this intervention in the Estimates committee as a reminder to her, a reminder to take action. She was the minister of Health when the tragedy happened at Maples.

How is it that these conditions can continue in the same personal-care home not only after her time as Health minister, but after she's been the Premier?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I take these issues very seriously, and that's why I did take action to—right away. As soon as the situation that came about at Maples Personal Care Home, we took action right away and we got an independent review—Dr. Lynn Stevenson involved, who did that independent review of the facility and made sure that she came up with general—you know, she came up with general recommendations, 17 of those recommendations, all of which are either implemented or in the process of being implemented.

Now, we do know that there are challenges with respect to health human resources, and we know that that's nothing that is unique to Manitoba. That is something that, you know, every single province is facing across our country. I've had those discussions with my counterparts across the country. We're trying to work together to see how we can overcome some of those challenges that have been perpetuated as a result of the worldwide pandemic.

Now, I know some of these challenges existed back when the NDP was in government, and they had an opportunity at the time to take action. That wasn't after or during a pandemic at the time. But they didn't take action at that time to ensure that there were appropriate health human resources in place at that time.

So when we took over office in 2016 we started to have to clean up the mess from the previous NDP government. And, of course, we started to do that and then a pandemic hit, and we know what has happened since then.

And we have a health human resources challenge because many of those people who worked, you know, during the pandemic, you know, they were

working long, hard hours during those times. They were very, very difficult, challenging, unprecedented times, something we'd never seen before in the history of our health-care system. And they did incredible work, but many of them, you know—you know, it created challenges for them. And we recognize that some of them just wanted to retire after that, there's no question.

And so we know that that has caused challenges within our health human resources, and it's why we have established our \$200-million fund to recruit more than 2,000 health-care professionals. And we're well on our way to doing that. More doctors, more nurses, more health-care professionals working in our personal-care homes; that's, of course, what we all want to see.

But we need to ensure that, you know, we recognize, of course—the Leader of the Opposition needs to recognize as well—because all other Manitobans recognize the challenges that we face with health human resources. People right across the country recognize the challenges that we face in health human resources, and it's very important that we take action.

So, the Leader of the Opposition asks why, you know, what action I had taken. Well, we have taken action when it comes to health human resources and personal-care homes. That's why we announced the \$200 million, the 2,000 more health-care professionals in the province of Manitoba.

And so when he says we're not taking action, again, that's just false information. And the truth of the matter is that we are taking action. Those are the facts. Again, the facts versus the false information that the Leader of the Opposition wants to continue to put on the record in the Chamber.

But I will tell the Leader of the Opposition, I will tell all Manitobans that I care very deeply about not just those in our personal-care homes, I care very deeply about all Manitobans. I want to make sure, in particular, our seniors are able to live with the dignity that they deserve to live with in their latter years in life, and that they get the care that they need when they need it.

Mr. Kinew: You know, I don't know if the talking points are persuasive to the Premier's staff or to her caucus, but they're certainly not persuasive to the Manitobans who've had to live with this PC administration these past many years.

The pandemic is being used as a shield by this administration to try and cover up for their failures in

health care. These failures started prior to the pandemic. There was not a single personal-care-home bed built in this province leading up to COVID-19. And then what did the PC administration do? They froze operating funding for PCHs in their first pandemic budget.

And they failed again, second pandemic budget, to increase investments in personal-care homes. The Maples tragedy befell our province while the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) was the Health minister. She went on to her current office and here we are, two years later, with seniors still living without dignity.

So, the talking points may work around the PC caucus table, but they don't work for the public. Because regardless of whatever announcement the PCs make, they need to be judged on the conditions in which seniors in PCHs live. Frankly, we haven't seen progress in those areas.

And it's not surprising as to why there's been a failure to improve these living conditions. When we go back to the Stevenson report that was commissioned in the wake of the Maples tragedy, we have to conclude that this report was deeply flawed from the outset.

I think we all recall the press conference announcing the Stevenson report, where this person who was brought in to author it was asked about the fact that Revera lied about the staffing level in this care home at the time of the tragedy. And the look of utter shock and 'bewilderment' on this person's face, and then they put it into verbiage immediately following this, to clarify that this Health minister and this—or, rather, the Premier, who was then the Health minister, and this government, never told Mrs. Stevenson that Revera had lied and misrepresented the staffing level in their personal-care home.

* (15:50)

You know, there's a, you know, concept out there—fruit of the poison tree. It therefore stands to reason that since this government misrepresented the situation at Maples PCH during the investigation, that it compromised the integrity of the report which followed, which therefore helps to explain why the inaction that followed under the watch of this now-Premier contributes to the results that we see in the terms of undignified conditions for seniors.

So, let's examine some of these so-called announcements that this PC administration makes on this topic in particular. In April 2002, the Premier made an announcement and stated her government

would invest \$15 million to supposedly enhance infection prevention and control in the long-term-care sector, including hiring a provincial program manager, regional leads, 50 infection control staff, to hire more than 200 full-time-equivalent housekeeping staff, 44 full-time equivalents to make improvements to information and communication technology.

We know the answer to this question, but we'd like the Premier to answer it for us on the record here.

Can the Premier tell this committee whether any of these people have been hired?

Mrs. Stefanson: You know, the Leader of the Opposition wants to be disrespectful—that's fine—of me, you know. I'm more concerned about Manitobans, and I think it's disrespectful to Manitobans to say that, you know, that we don't somehow care about their care. And we absolutely do. And I think it's disrespectful to them to give false information to them out there.

What they deserve is the facts. And so, of course, we will, once again, where the Leader of the Opposition does not deliver the facts out there with respect to what is going on, and he's off in, you know, some tangent about, you know, the misinformation and all the sort of stuff out there.

The fact of the matter is Dr. Lynn Stevenson conducted a report—an independent review of what had transpired at Maples Personal Care Home—came up with 17 recommendations, all of which are—we agreed to implement.

And I can tell you that the active recruitment in all positions—again, the Leader of the Opposition is talking about positions in personal-care homes—active recruitment in all positions, despite some of the health human resource challenges that we've been facing, not just here in Manitoba, but across the world and across the country. Certainly, 468 of those full-time employees are estimated to be recruited by the end of March of this year. So that is March 31st, just a few days ago, and so that is the recent update of those—that recruitment activity.

So the \$15 million, plus we've put and invested more than \$50 million to ensure that we're able to finish off the recruitment of the other FTEs out there to ensure that we fulfil our obligation to complete the 17 recommendations from the Stevenson report.

Mr. Kinew: I just want to point out for the record that everything I said about Maples was a fact in the previous preamble. Everything I said about Revera was a fact. Everything I said about Lynn Stevenson

was a fact. And everything that I said about this government's failure on long-term care was also factual.

The one thing that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) said that was incorrect about my remarks beyond that is that I somehow characterized her as not caring. I made no speculation whatsoever in my preamble about whether or not the Premier cares. But the fact—but the fact that she would volunteer that, perhaps is a little bit of a slip on her part. So, I'll just leave that elucidation on the record.

On the topic of health-care announcements unfulfilled, I wonder, Mr. Deputy Speaker—Mr. Chair in this context—whether you remember in Budget 2022 when this administration under this Premier promised that all outstanding contracts with health-care workers would be resolved as of last week, the end of the fiscal year.

Reason why I ask that rhetorical question, the reason why I ask that rhetorical question to you is because we know that the allied health-care professionals are currently without a contract as we speak.

So I'm wondering why the Premier broke that promise that she laid out in last year's budget.

Mrs. Stefanson: I wonder if the Leader of the Opposition could just repeat—he had mentioned that there was a time frame, a certain time that he alleges that I said that we would have a new contract with the allied health-care professionals.

Could the Leader of the Opposition indicate what that time was, and does he have something that he might be able to table that suggests that?

Mr. Kinew: Page 105 of the budget that this Premier brought in last year, so the 2022 budget, for greater clarity. The specific wording here on page 105 is that all remaining wage-contract settlements by the end of this fiscal year 2022-23 will be completed. So that was last week.

So again, the question is: Why did the Premier break this promise from her 2022 budget? Because we all know that the allied health-care professionals are still without a contract.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I mean, we all know in negotiations that anything can happen during negotiations.

And, certainly, the Leader of the Opposition, I hope he's not suggesting that just because, you know, of an arbitrary deadline that we interfere in the bargaining process. I think that would be inappropriate. So, is that what the Leader of the Opposition is

suggesting, that we should have interfered in the bargaining process?

We believe—and I'm not sure, I'm not a party to those negotiations themselves, but I think from time to time things can come up in those negotiations that—where there's sometimes delays that are beyond, sometimes, our control or the control of either side within those negotiations. And so I think it's very important—the most important thing is that we net—let those negotiations continue in the way that they should, without any interference.

Mr. Kinew: If the Premier believes in what she's just contended, then why did she put this in her 2022 budget?

* (16:00)

Why did she put the words all wage settlements will be concluded by the end of the fiscal year 2022-23, if what she just contended is her actual belief, instead of, say, some sort of verbal contortion to try and escape accountability in an Estimates committee?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I know the Leader of the Opposition thinks that he's got some sort of a gotcha moment here. The fact of the matter is that when we are anticipating that, you know, potential collective bargaining agreements are completed, we budget for them. So, you know, we were anticipating and hopeful that those budget—or, those negotiations would be completed at that time.

But, again, as I mentioned earlier, there are reasonable, you know, reasons why sometimes these collective, you know, bargaining negotiations take time to complete. And there's, you know, things on either side; you just don't know what's going to come up in the middle of a negotiation. I think Leader of the Opposition should know that. Maybe he's not aware that there are other extenuating circumstances at times that will come up during a negotiation period that may delay things.

You know, I look at the example of a worldwide pandemic that delayed many things past where certain deadlines should've been, and certainly, when it comes to, you know, Leader of the Opposition says, why didn't we do this five years ago, he says. Well, we had a worldwide pandemic, and that will delay some of the things—some of these things. And so I think Manitobans expect us to deliver on things that are reasonable.

Again, I—we, as a government, don't get into the negotiations with respect to the paramedics. That is up to the, you know, the health authority or Shared Health that is responsible for those negotiations, and we don't get involved in the, you know, the day-to-day negotiations when it comes to those things. And we leave that up between the employer and the employee.

So, again, the Leader of the Opposition, I guess, is suggesting that we should've jumped in the middle of this and, you know, just signed on the dotted line. Well, that's inappropriate. That is not what you do when you're negotiating a collective agreement.

Mr. Kinew: You know, Mr. Chair, you're a reasonable person. A lot of people are throwing that term reasonable around a lot these days. And so—*[interjection]*

Well, I'll disagree with your colleague from Radisson, and I'll call you reasonable today, Mr. Chair. And I just want to point something out that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) tried to slip past the committee here in blaming the pandemic for the disrespect that's been shown to allied health-care professionals.

So, I think it's common knowledge that the pandemic arrived in Manitoba in 2020. You know, there might be some, you know, quibbling about, was that the start of March, the end of March 2020; maybe we should even talk about January 2020, you know, just as, like, very early days in terms of that. But I think there would be a consensus that 2020 is when the pandemic arrived.

These allied health-care professionals—and again, they do include the paramedics, but the Premier should be aware that it's also respiratory therapists, lab techs, X-ray techs—many other health-care professionals who are highly valued. They've been without a contract since 2018.

So, why did the PC administration freeze their wages for years before the pandemic? It's one thing to try and escape accountability by blaming the pandemic, but it's another thing to have been trying to disrespect these health-care professionals by freezing their wages and refusing to entertain a contract with them for years prior to the onset of COVID-19 here in Manitoba. So I'll leave that for your careful deliberation and consideration.

It does—you know, I would just make the commentary, it seems more likely that it's just, you know, a talking point to try and escape accountability, when the proper course of action should be to ensure that

there's a fair deal done here that'll help keep these health-care professionals working at the bad—the bedside here in Manitoba.

I also want to just put on the record here that, even though we're reading a deadline from the budget that the Premier herself brought forward to this House, that she also disparaged the words from the budget by calling it, and I quote, an arbitrary deadline. End quote. So, it's kind of a bizarre view for the leader of a government to talk about the commitments made in her own budget as being arbitrary.

But again, I'll just kind of put that on the record here and say it reflects one of two things: either (1) you know, the Premier did not respect the 2022 budget that she brought forward, or, perhaps—and the more likely alternative—she's just trying to escape accountability now at this committee by trying to diminish the words that were tabled in that Budget 2022.

I do want to pick up by way of a question, though, on the comment made that there was a settlement anticipated and that this settlement was budgeted for in the government documents. So I would like the Premier to tell the allied health-care professionals who are looking for a fair deal here, what was the amount budgeted for this contract?

* (16:10)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Chair, this is once again why you can't trust the opposition, because he put false information on the record once again. And let me read from budget—from this budget that he's referring to.

It goes on to talk about collective bargaining agreements that we made, a number of different collective bargaining agreements that we completed, and then it goes on to say that Manitoba values its public servants and is working towards completing—working towards completing all remaining wage contract settlements. That is no—by no means suggesting that we had promised to complete them by the end of that time. It says, very specifically, working towards completing all remaining wage contract settlements.

Now, those are the facts, and the Leader of the Opposition will know that when it comes to the allied health-care professionals—and I know he's laughing from his seat, he thinks this is a laughing matter; I don't think it is. I want to see that our allied health-care professionals, all those individuals working out there and doing incredible work to work with

individuals in our province, I want to make sure that they have a fair and equitable agreement. I want to make sure that there is—that the time is taken to make sure that that bargaining process takes place, Mr. Chair.

And so, you know, while the Leader of the Opposition tries to say that there's sort of a gotcha moment here, you know, it's simply not true, for one thing.

But secondly, Mr. Chair, it's being disrespectful. The Leader of the Opposition is being disrespectful to the allied health-care professionals. He obviously wants this to end quickly, regardless. I want to assure, on our side of the House, that they get a fair and equitable agreement.

And that's why we need to ensure that the appropriate and proper collective bargaining process takes place. We respect that process. The Leader of the Opposition doesn't appear to respect that process, but we do because we have too much respect for all of our allied health-care professionals in the province of Manitoba.

We want to make sure that they get a fair and equitable agreement.

Mr. Kinew: I would've liked to see Manitoba allied health-care professionals get a fair deal five years ago. Instead, they've had their wages frozen for five years. That's disrespectful. It's not also—it's also not a good strategy when there's a country-wide health human resource recruitment effort under way by every provincial government, seemingly.

So I think this certainly causes a lot of concern for those who've been supporting these paramedics and other allied health professionals and I would just encourage the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) to try to improve her government's performance on this issue because certainly folks in rural Manitoba, folks in the North, people right across Manitoba want to see these health-care professionals treated with respect.

Does the Premier believe that the consolidation plan started by former premier Brian Pallister helped to improve health care in Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition, you know, accused me of making a promise in a budget book which didn't actually take place. I just pointed that out to him. And rather than apologize and admit his mistake or his misleading of this committee, you know, he went on—off in another tangent.

I mean, again, this is why we talk about fact versus fiction. These are people across the way—the NDP will put anything on the record just to suit their own narrative. And yet, when he realizes that he is in the wrong and we've—you know, we have pointed it out to him in our budget books where he is mistaken, he doesn't apologize.

But what I'll say when it comes to our allied health-care professionals, I want to ensure that they get a fair and equitable deal out of this.

Yes, negotiations, I'm sure, started to take place back before the other—the collective agreement expired. But we know, also, that these deals take time. And we also know, if the Leader of the Opposition is talking about that being up in 2018, we also know that we had a worldwide pandemic starting in 2020. Okay? I want to make sure that those allied health-care professionals get a fair and equitable deal that they deserve.

They have done a tremendous amount of work for us day in and day out during the pandemic, before, after; they have been doing incredible work for us. And I believe they deserve nothing less than to allow this bargaining process to go forward so that they can negotiate their own fair and equitable deal.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I mean, if the Premier's election strategy is to keep litigating the cuts and closures of health care, then I'll happily engage in that process. The talking point here that the Premier's trying to put on the record is that she, quote, did not promise to complete, end quote, these negotiations. Instead, she stated that she was working towards completing, end quote.

I think the average health-care professional out there would be puzzled, if they were in a charitable mood, and more likely frustrated to hear the Premier, who has frozen their wages these many years trying to play a game of semantics rather than engage substantively with the issue here. On the question of respect, these workers' wages were frozen when the current Premier was the deputy premier. That wage freeze continued under her time as the Health minister, and it continues today, well into her term as Premier.

Will the Premier improve her government's performance when it comes to respecting allied health-care professionals?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's important when the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite put false information on the record in the Chamber that

we call them out on it. And I am going to call the Leader of the Opposition out, once again, on something that he misled this committee.

* (16:20)

He stated that the problems at Maples Personal Care Home started under our watch, and in fact, that is false. There were challenges before that where they were under the previous NDP government.

And in fact, back in 2013, alarm bells were raised in Manitoba over staffing in the long-term-care sector at Maples Personal Care Home. And the staff were actually picketing at that time under the previous NDP government, under Greg Selinger, the previous premier of this province. And I know Greg Selinger was hand-picked the current Leader of the Opposition and, of course, he should be made aware that, once again—[interjection]

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —he put false information on the record when he knew full well that there were challenges at the Maples Personal Care Home that the NDP did nothing about at that time.

So, we will take no lessons from the members opposite. But it's time that they start to put the facts on the record.

That's not the only thing. I also pointed out today that the Leader of the Opposition tried to make a claim that in the budget last year that we promised or made a commitment that we would have the collective agreement completed for the allied health-care professionals by the end of the budget. And it says right in the budget itself, it says it's—we were working towards a date.

So, it's very clear—very clear, Mr. Chair, that the Leader of the Opposition wants nothing more than to continue along the lines of misleading Manitobans. And we think that that's unfortunate.

But when he starts to make accusations, it's incumbent upon us to inform Manitobans and to let Manitobans know that we are going to stick to the facts. And while the Leader of the Opposition wants to continue down his fictitious line of, you know, putting things on the record that have no bearing of the truth whatsoever, we will continue down a line of ensuring that Manitobans know the truth.

Mr. Kinew: Here's some false information the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) just put on the record:

the previous premier of Manitoba was actually Brian Pallister. But I'm sure she was about to—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Mr. Kinew: —say Brian Pallister's name at any moment here.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Order, please. The—

Mr. Kinew: So, yes, because previous refers to—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: On a point of order, the honourable First Minister.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, actually, the previous premier would have been Kelvin Goertzen.

But what I am focusing on—what I was focusing on when I specifically stated the Leader of the Opposition is false, once again, on the information that he is putting on the record. He knows full well when I mention 2013 that it was an NDP premier at the time. Those are the facts.

And I will continue to put the facts on the record in this Chamber, while he continues down a road of false information.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay.

An Honourable Member: I'd like to respond.

Mr. Chairperson: On the same point of order—the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on the same point of order.

Mr. Kinew: I'd just like to state that there is clearly no point of order, mainly because there was no rule cited that was being broken. Instead, the Premier is trying to use a point of order to debate and is therefore, actually, kind of breaking the rules herself.

So I would think that perhaps we could just maybe cut off some of these attempts at debate and just return to the questions at hand, because, of course, there will be the opportunity for the Premier to respond when I pose the next question. Right?

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. It is, in fact, not a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: And I'm obliged by the rules to remind the First Minister and all members not to refer to a member by their first and last name—a sitting member—by their first and last name.

So, anyway, I did—I paused the clock and I believe the—the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, on the subject of Brian Pallister, does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) believe that the consolidation plan started by former premier Brian Pallister help to improve health care in Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: The Leader of the Opposition seems to want to go back in history, so perhaps we will go back to history when in the 1999 election campaign the NDP ran on a promise to end hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million. And he—and they also promised at the time to fix health care.

Well, fast forward to 2015, after 15 years of the NDP in government, supposedly would have fixed our health-care system by that. They said that they would have ended hallway medicine in six months with just a mere \$15 million. Well, I can tell you 15 years later, clearly, the health-care system was not fixed.

And I know from today's debate that the Leader of the Opposition is promising once again to fix our health-care system. Well, if they couldn't do it in 17 years, why would we trust that they'd be able to do it again, Mr. Chair?

So, I would go back. And in 2015, the Grace Hospital had the longest ER wait times in the country. Now, that was under their watch. The NDP government at the time, 15 years that they had to fix the health-care system.

Now, I don't recall there ever being a worldwide pandemic in there, Mr. Chair; I'm not sure if you do. But I don't think there was a worldwide pandemic at that time where there were significant challenges placed on our health-care systems, not just here in Manitoba but right across the country, we've had challenges with health-care systems.

So, 15 years, 17 years the NDP couldn't fix health care after promising to do so.

* (16:30)

So we know that the Leader of the Opposition who gets up today, you know, in front of a whole bunch of people because it's on the eve of an election; he's got to tell them what they want to hear—that he's going to fix health care.

Here we go. We've got an NDP party that is going to promise Manitobans, once again, that they are going to fix health care. Well, I can tell you that history proves that they never got it done then and they sure won't get it done now, Mr. Chair.

But I can tell you that, yes, there have been some challenges in our health-care system. There's no question. A worldwide pandemic puts a lot of strain on a health-care system. Again, you didn't need to just look at local media here in Manitoba. You look around the world, what different governments were facing around the world and their health-care systems. There was a significant challenge, you know, at that time.

And so we recognize, you know, and we want to learn from some of the challenges, the things that we learned from the pandemic, and we are continuing to do so. If there are ways, now, that we can make it more efficient to deliver health care in Manitoba, we will look for those ways, absolutely.

But don't be fooled by an NDP desperate opposition, who wants to get into power in the province of Manitoba because we've seen them make those same promises before. We know they didn't deliver those promises then, so why can Manitobans trust them now? I'll tell you: they can't.

Mr. Kinew: Gary Doer was a great premier. Hallway medicine returned to Manitoba under the PC administration.

Does the Premier believe—and I'll ask this question a second time because the Premier did not answer it—does the Premier believe the—actually, this is the third time, now that I think about it, because we had a point of order and all that, you know, that you had to rule on against the Premier—does the Premier believe the consolidation plan started by former premier Brian Pallister helped to improve health care in Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, Mr. Speaker—or, sorry, Mr. Chair, I do want to just go back and remind the Leader of the Opposition that when we took government in 2016, the health-care system was in disarray. There were a lot of challenges that we inherited from the previous NDP government that needed to be cleaned up. And so, of course, we embarked on a plan to make improvements to the health-care system.

I can recall, at the time—many times in my days in opposition, I was there for a few years—but I can recall times where people would go to an emergency room in the city of Winnipeg, they would present themselves, they would need certain diagnostics that wouldn't be available at that hospital.

So then they would go again by ambulance from that hospital to another hospital to get—and to wait in that hospital, then, to get the diagnostic procedures

that they needed. Sometimes they would have it, sometimes they went—they wouldn't; they would then be sent back again to the other hospital.

We recognized that there were challenges with that and we wanted to make sure that those diagnostic services were there in those emergency rooms and on those premises so that we weren't putting people back in ambulances to travel across the city of Winnipeg. And in rural communities, it was even worse at the time, during the previous NDP government. We don't want to go back to those dark days.

I will recall, I—you know, today—so, I think that there have been some improvements where—when individuals present in the hospital, at least they can get the diagnostic services that they need.

Now, after the pandemic, we know there's been backlogs and we recognize that; but that's after a worldwide pandemic, Mr. Chair. And so, we, of course, are putting resources into those areas to ensure that we are increasing the diagnostic and surgical procedures for Manitobans when they need it. And we're making significant headway in reducing and eliminating those backlogs, back to pre-pandemic levels. And those are the investments that we are, of course, making.

But I will note that the Leader of the Opposition, I believe, was asked a question today about whether or not he would go back, he would reverse what—the decisions that were made in the Pallister government, and he was asked whether or not he—would increase the number of ERs back to where it was before. And he said no, that he wouldn't do that.

So, clearly, he also agrees that we have moved in the right direction, to ensure that those diagnostic and surgical procedures can take place without having to send people by ambulatory or stretcher services to get those diagnostic and surgical procedures at other hospitals. I gather that's a—he agrees that that's a good thing and maybe he wants to comment on that, I'm not sure; I know he already has in the media, but we think that there have been some improvements.

But I—what I will say is that there is always room for more improvement. I don't want to see any Manitoba—Manitoban being left out and not being able to get the either surgical or diagnostic procedures that they need. I don't want to see any Manitoban waiting in pain to get the surgery that they need.

And so each and every day we will find ways to ensure that, whether it's through health human resource investments, whether it's through our

surgical and diagnostic tax—task force, that we are ensuring that those individuals get the health care that they need when they need it, sooner and closer to home, I might add, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, again, a lot of work has been done, but I think there's still a lot more work that needs to be done. We've learned a lot from a time during the pandemic, where we can make some improvements, and as I said earlier, I'll say it again, that if there are ways to improve and streamline the delivery of health care so it's better for the patient in our province, we will do so.

Mr. Kinew: I just want to draw your attention, Mr. Chair, to the substance of what we just discussed in this back-and-forth here between the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and I. The question was, does the Premier believe the consolidation plan started by former premier Brian Pallister helped to improve health care in Manitoba.

The Premier said in response, there have been some improvements. She said it twice, there have been some improvements. Brian Pallister's plan for health care; positive reviews from this Premier.

Does the Premier believe the closure of three emergency rooms in Winnipeg was the correct decision? Was it done in the right way?

* (16:40)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think it's important that the Leader of the Opposition know and understand that we inherited a mess, not just in health care, but pretty much right across the board, from the previous NDP government under Greg Selinger, who I know the Leader of the Opposition was very close to.

And what I will say to the Leader of the Opposition, I know he was asked this question today, whether or not he would go back and open up those ERs, and he said that he wouldn't. And that is interesting, so he obviously sees that we had moved in the right direction on some things. And I think, you know, but—let's fast-forward.

I know when changes are made to systems, that there's never just one or two or three or four changes that are made. Changes are, you know, the system of health care, whatever it is, you know, a system that you're managing, it changes over time based on new technology that comes into the system, based on new information that comes in to better offer, you know, where you can streamline and better—and offer services in a better way.

And so, we will always look at better ways to deliver health-care services to Manitobans; that doesn't stop. We don't just go back and say, okay, we're done. No, we're done with that. It's an evolving situation.

And I think we've learned a lot, particularly going through a pandemic with our health-care system, the things that we can learn and the changes that we can make as a result of that. And so we will continue to look at how can we improve the delivery of health-care services to Manitobans.

We will always look at ways to making and improving the system of health care in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Kinew: I'll ask the question again: Does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) believe the closure of three emergency rooms in Winnipeg was the correct decision?

Mrs. Stefanson: I believe I've already answered that question, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kinew: It's a yes-or-no question, and we haven't heard a yes-or-no answer, so I'll ask the Premier again.

Does the Premier believe the closure of three emergency rooms in Winnipeg was the correct decision?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's not a yes-or-no question, Mr. Chair, and I believe that any question needs to have context put to it. I've already put that context on the record. With respect to that, I think that there are ways that we can improve our system based on what we have learned over the years, and we will continue to improve the system moving forward.

Mr. Kinew: Okay, I'll reformulate it as a yes-or-no question: Does the Premier believe that closing three emergency rooms in Winnipeg was the correct decision, yes or no?

Mrs. Stefanson: And, respectfully, I believe I've already answered that question.

Mr. Kinew: So, I just want to ask further questions about Brian Pallister's plan for health care. Again, Brian Pallister announced this as the clinical and preventative services plan, and I think many Manitobans grew to have very strong feelings about those words—the Clinical and Preventive Services Plan.

And I would note the visceral reaction of my colleague from Concordia. We know that there was an emergency room closed in Concordia. There was also the community CancerCare clinic in Concordia that

was closed. And, of course, in northeast Winnipeg, there was also a closure of the community IV clinic, right? Those are people who need, you know, access to treatment for chronic conditions—in some cases, life-saving treatments—counted on in their communities.

And so, that term, Clinical and Preventive Services Plan, the Brian Pallister plan for health care.

Anyway, I would note that on this Manitoba government news release dated March 29th, 2023, last week, talking about an announcement that the Premier was a part of, along with the current Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon), that they use the same term—that the announcement that they're a part of last week was part and parcel of Manitoba's Clinical and Preventive Services Plan.

So, I mean, it's right here in black and white; it's very clear. But I would just like the Premier to confirm on the record that she is continuing to implement Brian Pallister's plan for health care. Can she confirm that for this committee today?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think it's important to note exactly what the announcement was that we made back in Brandon last week.

And I know that, certainly, it was well received for—by people in the Westman region and in Brandon because it had both to do with the hospital in Brandon, creating a hub there to provide health care closer to home, which has been very well received by people in the Westman and Parkland region. It offers 30 additional medicine beds, a new 16-bed intensive-care unit, up from the current nine, with additional staffed adult beds to meet the increasing demands of the health region and province and an expanded neonatal intensive-care unit. So those are all positive things for the Brandon hospital.

Those are—those investments are being made so that individuals can get the health care they need closer to home, rather than having to come into Winnipeg to get those procedures.

And also, as part of that, was a significant investment in cancer care—in western Manitoba cancer care: an additional exam procedure room and treatment spaces, a new medical linear accelerator, commonly used to—for delivering external beam radiation treatments to patients with cancer.

* (16:50)

And the Centre for Hope, which was a significant thing that was also a contribution partly by the late

Paul Albrechtsen and his foundation that gave 3 and a half million dollars toward this. So that's how, when we partner with community philanthropists, this is what we can do for communities.

So, a centre of hope that will provide supportive care services to western Manitoba patients and families for all cancers, providing a continuum of care that starts at the point of diagnosis and includes education, services and programming throughout a patient's cancer journey.

So, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, 'dogra'—sorry, Dr. Sri Navaratnam was there as well, the president and CEO of CancerCare Manitoba, and spoke very highly of this project. It was \$135-million project in its entirety and will make significant—make a significant difference for people in the Westman-Parkland regions. What that means is that they will have the access to those health-care services closer to home rather than having to come in to Winnipeg.

So, we believe that that's a positive thing. You know, I—it's disappointing to hear that the Leader of the Opposition does not believe that that's a positive thing. We think it is, and so do the people of the Westman region.

Mr. Kinew: Does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) believe it was right to close CancerCare clinics at Seven Oaks and Concordia?

Mrs. Stefanson: Certainly, this is—my heart goes out to every Manitoban who has been touched by either themselves, who have had to go through cancer, or a loved one or a neighbour or friend. And what they need to go through is a very difficult and challenging time. And obviously, I know, certainly, from having gone through this with my own mother and taking her to get treatment, she often went to get treatment at different facilities. And I think as time has evolved on and technology has evolved, those services have been

able to be offered so the patient, the—who is suffering with cancer can go to one location to get the various treatments that they need.

And I think that that centre, that patient-centred focus, is what is extremely important here while also looking at technological advances and advancements and making those investments in those areas in cancer care. And, for example, just one of those areas that we announced back in January was a \$6.6-million investment to create an innovative CAR-T cancer therapy program at CancerCare Manitoba.

And I know members opposite think that's funny; I don't think it's funny at all, actually, when we're talking about cancer patients.

But what I will say, certainly, is that this will offer top-drawer cancer therapy for those patients closer to home who need it, and I think that that is very important. These are people, in some ways, aged 25 or younger, including children with acute leukemia, that we're talking about, as well as people aged 18 and older with aggressive lymphoma, and other therapies when other therapies have not worked.

So, of course, it's extremely important to ensure that Manitobans get the cancer care that they need closer to home.

Mr. Kinew: I just want to say before the House rises that cutting CancerCare was wrong. Cutting CancerCare under the PCs was a mistake.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 4, 2023

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