

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

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

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	Ind.
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 25, 2018

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Please be seated. Good afternoon, everybody.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 226—The Vital Statistics Amendment Act

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I move, seconded by the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), that Bill 226, The Vital Statistics Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Kinew: I rise to introduce Bill 226, which is actually a bill that a constituent brought forward to me and said, hey, you should do this. I looked at it and I figured, wow, I can't believe this hasn't been done already. What Bill 226 would do is that it would make it possible for a third option for non-binary Manitobans to use that as a gender designation on their government-issued ID, like a birth certificate.

Pleased to present this bill to the House for consideration.

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

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Private Bills First Report

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the First Report of the Standing Committee on Private Bills.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Private Bills presents the following—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on PRIVATE BILLS presents the following as its First Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on April 24, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 212)** – *The Invasive Species Awareness Week Act/Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation aux espèces envahissantes*
- **Bill (No. 213)** – *The Allied Healthcare Professionals Recognition Week Act/Loi sur la Semaine de reconnaissance des professionnels paramédicaux*
- **Bill (No. 219)** – *The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Inappropriate or Unsafe Footwear)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la sécurité et l'hygiène du travail (chaussures inappropriées ou non sécuritaires)*
- **Bill (No. 221)** – *The Rail Safety Awareness Week Act/Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation à la sécurité ferroviaire*
- **Bill (No. 300)** – *The University of Manitoba Students' Union Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Association des étudiants de l'Université du Manitoba*

Committee Membership

- Ms. FONTAINE
- Mrs. GUILLEMARD
- Mr. LAGASSÉ
- Mr. LAGIMODIERE
- Ms. KLASSEN
- Mr. NESBITT
- Hon. Ms. SQUIRES
- Mr. SWAN
- Mr. WIEBE
- Hon. Mr. WISHART
- Mr. WOWCHUK

Your Committee elected Mr. NESBITT as the Chairperson.

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

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following five presentations on **Bill (No. 213)** – The Allied Healthcare Professionals Recognition Week Act/Loi sur la Semaine de reconnaissance des professionnels paramédicaux:

Bob Moroz, Manitoba Association of Healthcare Professionals

Jennifer Wojcik, Dietitians of Canada

Jim Hayes, Manitoba Physiotherapy Association

Esther Hawn and Heidi Garcia (by leave), Manitoba Society of Occupational Therapists

Bram Kok, Manitoba Orthotics & Prosthetics Association

Your Committee heard the following three presentations on **Bill (No. 219)** – The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Inappropriate or Unsafe Footwear)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la sécurité et l'hygiène du travail (chaussures inappropriées ou non sécuritaires):

Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour

Allison Ferry, Private Citizen

Amy Tuckett, Private Citizen

Your Committee heard the following presentation on **Bill (No. 221)** – The Rail Safety Awareness Week Act/Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation à la sécurité ferroviaire:

Kate Fenske and Sergeant Paul Leaden (by leave), CN Rail

Your Committee heard the following six presentations on **Bill (No. 300)** – The University of Manitoba Students' Union Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Association des étudiants de l'Université du Manitoba:

Dele Ojewole, Private Citizen

Tanjit Nagra, University of Manitoba Students' Union

Jakob Sanderson, Private Citizen

Tiana Kriegl, Private Citizen

Allison Kilgour, Private Citizen

Owen Black, Private Citizen

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 212)** – The Invasive Species Awareness Week Act/Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation aux espèces envahissantes

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 213)** – The Allied Healthcare Professionals Recognition Week Act/Loi sur la Semaine de reconnaissance des professionnels paramédicaux

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 219)** – The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Inappropriate or Unsafe Footwear)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la sécurité et l'hygiène du travail (chaussures inappropriées ou non sécuritaires)

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 221)** – The Rail Safety Awareness Week Act/Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation à la sécurité ferroviaire

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 300)** – The University of Manitoba Students' Union Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Association des étudiants de l'Université du Manitoba

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Nesbitt: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Raiders Junior Hockey Club

Mr. Nic Curry (Kildonan): I rise today to celebrate the Raiders Junior Hockey Club, the 2017-2018 MMJHL champions.

Since 1977, the Raiders have been proud to represent Winnipeg's North End and Selkirk in the

Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League. From humble beginnings, the Raiders have cultivated a culture of hard work, commitment and victory. The Raiders play their home game at Seven Oaks Sportsplex in front of a proud set of fans supporting with red and white colours in standing room only.

The Raiders are led by captain, Nic Matthews, and assistant captains, Eli Batt, Jordan Kreml, Carson Rybuck and starting goalie, Kyle McHolm. The Raiders are guided by president and GM, Ned Sanders; assistant GM, Stephen Bjornson; and head coach, Andy Williamson.

The Raiders have enjoyed incredible success in the last few years, reaching the finals four times since 2013 and winning three playoff championships. The Raiders ended the 2017-2018 season in first place overall, with 37 wins, three losses and five overtime losses.

After winning eight of nine games in the lead up to the 2017-2018 MMJHL finals, the Raiders lost the opener to the Transcona Railer Express. From game two, the Raiders never took their foot off the gas. Winning four straight games, the Raiders fan base fuelled their passion throughout with incredible attendance; standing room only for every game, including a double-overtime nail-biter that they won.

The Raiders finished in style and hoisted the championship Jack McKenzie Trophy after dominating the Railer Express with a final game five score of 8-2. Kale Ilchena scored four goals in this hard-hitting championship game, with captain, Nic Matthews, finishing the playoffs with a league-leading 11 playoff goals.

These back-to-back champions are also dedicated community volunteers. When the Raiders are not dominating the MMJHL, they volunteer at local soup kitchens, read at local schools for I Love to Read Month and offer mentorship to aspiring young hockey players through the Seven Oaks Minor Hockey Association.

Each player, coach and volunteer deserves equal credit for the Raiders' 2017-2018 championship season. I ask the Legislature to join me in congratulating the MMJHL champions, the Raiders Junior Hockey Club.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Kildonan.

Mr. Curry: Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to include the roster for the 2017-2018 championship

Raiders hockey club and also a guest list of those who were able to attend, both players and supporters and family.

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

Raiders Junior Hockey Club Players: Dawson Anderson, Lars Anderson, Elisha Bambridge, Eli Batt, James Barclay, Kale Ilchena, Carter Ives, Jayce Kennedy III, Jordan Kreml, Kruz Listmayer, Auzzie Lowen-Palmer, Devin Manness, Nicholas Matthews, Kyle McHolm, Cody Merritt, Dale Mounk, Jared Nielsen, Brandon Paradoski, Jeremy Pickel, Carson Rybuck, Nick Trudel, Chance Viczina, Kyle Wabick, Nolan Wisniewski. Coaches and staff: GM, Lorne "Ned" Sanders; assistant GM, Stephen Bjornson; head coach, Andy Williamson; assistant coaches, Dustin Degagne, Cam Hildebrand, Mike Lazo; equipment manager, Tim Tuter Bjornson; assistant equipment manager, Patrick Bjornson; trainers, Kelly McCartney, Jennifer Seeking. Family: Tara Bjornson.

Bureau de l'éducation française—ADM Position

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Ce samedi passé, j'ai eu l'occasion d'assister au forum sur l'avenir de l'éducation française au Manitoba au Centre scolaire Léo-Rémillard. Cet évènement a donné la chance à de nombreux francophones et francophiles de se rassembler pour exprimer leurs inquiétudes face à l'avenir de l'éducation en langue française.

Ce forum est un résultat direct des compressions en matière d'éducation de la part du gouvernement provincial, qui a osé éliminer le poste de sous-ministre adjoint au Bureau de l'éducation française sans aucune consultation communautaire. Ces compressions font preuve d'un recul dans l'histoire et d'une 'dépriorisation' du fait français au Manitoba, en un moment où l'éducation en langue française est plus populaire que jamais auparavant.

Ce forum était donc une initiative nécessaire, et un exemple des consultations communautaires qui devront continuer à avoir lieu pour assurer que la francophonie puisse continuer à s'épanouir et à vivre confortablement dans tous ses aspects.

Translation

Last Saturday, I had the opportunity to attend the forum on the future of French language education in Manitoba at the Centre scolaire Léo-Rémillard. This event gave many Francophones and Francophiles a

chance to get together and express their concerns regarding the future of French language education.

This forum was a direct result of the cuts to education by the provincial government, which saw fit to eliminate the deputy minister position at the Bureau de l'éducation française without any community consultation. These cuts represent a regression and a deprioritization of the French fact in Manitoba at a time when French language education is more popular than ever.

This forum was then a necessary initiative and an example of the community consultations that must continue to take place to ensure that the Francophone community can continue to thrive and live comfortably in all respects.

English

It was great to see so many parents and families advocate for their rights and give up time on a beautiful, sunny Saturday to discuss the future of French language education in Manitoba. With more and more people being enrolled in French language and French immersion schools every year, the supports to the Bureau de l'éducation française are more important than ever.

* (13:40)

Canadian Parents for French surveyed their membership. One hundred per cent of those parents said it was a bad decision to eliminate the ADM position for the Bureau de l'éducation française. Zero per cent of those parents agreed with this government's plans.

Now, French education is an important part of Manitoba's history. It's important to the people of Manitoba. It's time that the government sees that it's important as well. I know that we do on this side of the House.

Bonnie Ash

Mrs. Colleen Mayer (St. Vital): Tenacity, resilience and passion. Madam Speaker, these are the—a few words that can be used to describe the individual that I'm honouring today.

Bonnie Ash, executive director of the Morrow Avenue Child Care Programs for Families, has been a long-time friend and advocate for families of St. Vital. Her hard work and success can be seen throughout the community and felt when you see the children who are a part of the Morrow Avenue Child Care family.

In 1987, Bonnie started her first child-care location in the old Salvation Army building on Morrow Avenue. What we see today has grown to 10 locations all over St. Vital that provide approximately 500 children from the infant stage to age 12 with flexible care arrangements.

The Morrow Avenue Child Care staff, led by Bonnie, strive to create an inclusive and multicultural setting that gives families a sense of comfort, knowing that their children will be welcomed into an environment that promises physical, social and emotional development.

With additional programming such as Fit Kids Healthy Kids, Kids Club, our youngest community members are offered a wide variety of ways to grow and flourish.

But, Madam Speaker, Bonnie hasn't stopped there. No, she also has a proven record of collaboration with all three levels of government and local action groups.

This month, it was announced that Morrow Avenue Child Care would be receiving funding for a total of 60 new learning and child-care spaces, and her drive to continually expand the existing child-care facilities, this investment would not have been a reality.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the residents of St. Vital and the countless families who have been positively impacted by Bonnie and her years of hard work, I offer my sincere thanks.

The Morrow Avenue Child Care centre family celebrates this—in 2017, their 30th anniversary, and we look forward to seeing 30 more.

Madam Speaker, I want to ask all members in this House to join me in recognizing and celebrating the hard work of Bonnie Ash, who is in the gallery with us today.

Northern Health Professional Shortage

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): All Manitobans, no matter where they live in the province, want quality facilities, timely access to care and the comfort for their loved ones nearby.

About two weeks ago, we had a health-care public meeting in my community to listen to the concerns of the people of the—Flin Flon and area. There were immense concerns about doctor shortages in our community, lack of mental health

supports and increasing vacancy rates of health-care workers.

We now have only two doctors, no nurse practitioners. At the public meeting we heard many concerns regarding the increasing vacancies of numerous health-care positions in Flin Flon.

The northern regional health authority postings currently show 20 nursing positions, 11 health-care-aide positions, 10 mental health and home-care professionals, one psychologist position and numerous other administrative positions that are now vacant and looking for applicants. And that's just in Flin Flon, never mind the rest of the Northern Health Region.

There are more positions that require filling but they're no longer funded. This shortage leaves a dangerous gap in front-line services for workers, their families and seniors in our communities. The lack of health-care support in Flin Flon is at a crisis right now, and we look to this government to please take action.

If this government continues to ignore the immediate needs of our communities, then I find it hard to believe that they are doing anything other than just looking.

It's time to stop just looking and start bringing positive change by delivering more doctors, nurse practitioners, health-care aides and all front-line health-care workers to the North.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand in the Legislature today to celebrate national organ and tissue donors awareness week, also known as NOTDAW.

I was at Winnipeg City Hall today as Mayor Bowman raised the flag of life to 'officially' launch the light up green campaign for the week of April 22nd to 29th. You have the green light to save a life by agreeing to be an organ and tissue donor. We were joined by several city councillors; Dr. Faisal Siddiqui, a physician with Transplant Manitoba's Gift of Life Program; Mark Miles, who is a heart transplant recipient; transplant boosters Obby Khan and Ace Burpee.

Over the next week, green landmarks and ribbons will be seen across Canada, including the

Winnipeg sign at The Forks, honouring donors and donor families who have given the gift of life, the gift of hope, and to recognize the thousands of patients in need of a transplant and those who have died waiting.

Thank you to my colleagues who have been working on the task force on organ and tissue donation and to the many Manitobans who have sent us suggestions and made presentations.

As you know, Madam Speaker, our daughter Jessica fell ill with a kidney disease in 2010 that progressed to the point where she was placed on dialysis. Thanks to my incredible wife, Aynsley, and our son, Andrew, their gifts as living donors helped save Jessica's life.

A year ago, just over 19,000 Manitobans has registered as donors on [signupforlife](http://signupforlife.com). Transplant Manitoba recently set a goal of 30 by 30: 30,000 people who have signed up for life by April 30th. Thanks to the Logan effect, the 21-year-old Humboldt Bronco who donated his organs after the tragic accident, we now have 29,818 Manitobans who have registered.

The gift of life is the ultimate act of generosity, and I encourage all Manitobans to discuss organ and tissue decisions with your family and then register their intent to donate at [signupforlife](http://signupforlife.com). I have registered; I know many of our family, friends and colleagues have stopped me and let me know they have registered. Please visit the website and sign up for life as a donor, and tell your friends and loved ones. Give somebody the gift of life.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests that I would like to introduce to you.

Seated in the loge to my right we have the former MLA for Sturgeon Creek, Gerry McAlpine, and we'd like to welcome you back to the Manitoba Legislature.

And seated in the public gallery from Crystal Creek School we have six grade 2, 4, 6 and 9 students under the direction of Tim Reimer, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Pedersen).

And also seated in the public gallery from Steinbach Christian high school we have 25 grade 9 students under the direction of Curt Plett, and this group is located in the constituency of the

honourable Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living (Mr. Goertzen).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Changes to Health-Care Services

Request to Stop ER Closures

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, there is a lot of pressure on St. Boniface Hospital these days and the Premier's plan to close other emergency rooms in the city is making things a lot worse.

Now, we reminded everyone here of the stats yesterday. Again, wait times are increasing in every month since they started to close emergency rooms and urgent-care centres here in the city of Winnipeg.

We also know that vacancies for nurses in emergency rooms are up, making it harder for staff and, you know, those working on the front lines to be able to ensure that patients get the care that they need. And the front-line workers are being stressed out and pushed to the max. We know that mandatory overtime at St. Boniface is higher than it's ever been.

With all these points of pressure on our health-care system and potentially even an influx of more patients to St. Boniface ER, I'd like to ask the Premier: Will he back off his plan to close emergency rooms here in the city of Winnipeg?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, getting care to those in need, Madam Speaker, is what our reforms are about. It is clear that we had a system that was broken in the past and that failed to do that very thing and, unfortunately, under the previous administration action was not taken to shorten wait times, rather, they lengthened instead.

The member has to do further research in terms of his preamble because he has made a number of false statements in his reference to a variety of topics, Madam Speaker.

* (13:50)

But that being said, let me say, again, that our government is very committed to making sure that we reduce wait times; 16 per cent reduction year over year is not enough. We need to do more.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, actually, Madam Speaker, the Premier started to close urgent-care centres and emergency rooms in October. That's when he closed the Misericordia urgent care and closed the ER at the Victoria General Hospital, and every month since then wait times have been going up.

And the reason seems obvious, that those patients all have to go somewhere. And with the planned closures of Concordia and Seven Oaks potentially coming down the pipe as well, we know that all those patients will have to go somewhere too. And it seems that that's just going to add more and more pressure to St. Boniface Hospital and HSC.

Taking the case of St. Boniface in particular, we already know that there's a ton of pressure there. We know that mandatory overtime is being used at an unprecedented rate. We also know that people in the neighbourhood are complaining about the length of time that they have to wait under this government's watch.

So, again, with all this in mind, I would ask the Premier: Will he back off his plan to close those other emergency rooms here in the city of Winnipeg?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member's attempting to defend the record of the previous administration in his preamble and he's defending the indefensible because, of course, we had the longest wait times in Canada. Four of the longest waits in hospitals measured by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Madam Speaker, as you well know, were here in the city of Winnipeg.

The member's arguing for that to continue. That will not continue, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, Canadian Institute for Health Information says that surgery wait times are increasing under this government. We know that the WRHA's own numbers say that the wait times are increasing ever since they started to close ERs and urgent-care centres here in the city.

But what's particularly concerning is that some of the other cuts the government has made—cuts to outpatient physiotherapy, cuts to the special drug program and a reduction of funding to Pharmacare—is actually going to create a greater burden on the emergency rooms. When people can't get the care that they need in the community, they are going to have to present at the ER to get that sort of care.

Now, we know that all these points of pressure, all the chaos and confusion that the Premier is creating in the health-care system is only going to burden the remaining ERs like St. Boniface and HSC.

So instead of creating an even more untenable situation than already exists, will the Premier instead back off his plan to close emergency rooms at Concordia and Seven Oaks?

Mr. Pallister: As we proceed with the expansion of emergency rooms and concentrate resources, specialists, treatment capability, diagnostic capability in key points around our city here, Madam Speaker, we are actually following the model that's been used by Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa and every major centre. We are doing this to improve results for Manitobans who need health care.

The member speaks about untenable. What is untenable is for a member to stand in this place and defend the longest wait times in Canada. That makes no sense, Madam Speaker.

The member needs to give his head a little bit of a shake and take a look at the problem of 600,000 hours Manitobans spent in wait times in the last year of the NDP government. That won't happen again, Madam Speaker, not with this Health Minister, not with this government having the courage to deal with the need to change our health system and make it work where it was broken by the previous NDP government.

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

Government Issued Identification Non-Binary Identification Legislation

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): So, just a short time ago I introduced a bill that may seem like a small change to some, but for others in Manitoba it will make a world of difference. Now, what the bill would do is it would make possible for somebody who identifies as non-binary to get their government-issued ID to reflect who they are as a person. That is to say that a birth certificate could be issued to somebody that would reflect their gender identity as non-binary, and this is something that's very important to the people of Manitoba, so I don't think they would appreciate some of the commentary that's happening from the backbenches on the government side.

But my question is not for them; rather, it is for the Premier: Will he stand with those Manitobans who really want this change to happen? Will he put partisanship aside and instead support this very important change to birth certificates and other forms of government-issued ID right here in the province of Manitoba?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The NDP has not, in its history, ever failed to try to create a wedge issue and division where, actually, unity would have been better. I appreciate the member's reference to joining together in a non-partisan way on this issue. We are the first Legislative Assembly in the country to have gender-neutral washrooms, and that's something we should be proud of.

I welcome any advances on inclusion in our province; our government will be interested in pursuing those, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, I'd also like to commend you on your work to make the Legislative Building more inclusive. I know that the gender-neutral washrooms were an important step, but also the renovations to the very Chamber in which we now meet, I think, have gone a long way to making sure that the seat of our democracy includes all people.

But, again, passing this bill would mean that the democratically formed, elected institutions of our province and government would respect peoples' identities, would include people for who they are, that if people who are non-binary were able to have identification that properly reflects who they are, that they would be accepted for who they are by the Province of Manitoba.

So, again, I would ask the Premier if he's prepared to support this initiative and join with us in moving forward.

Mr. Pallister: Well, frankly Madam Speaker, unlike the member, who previously has committed to signing a cheque for \$70 million with Manitobans' money and directing it to the Manitoba Metis Federation without reading the proposal, I haven't had a chance to read the bill. Although I understand the media's been well briefed on it, this Chamber has not, and so I would appreciate the opportunity at least to read the bill before I'm asked whether I support it or not.

What I am willing to say, Madam Speaker, and have said previously, is that this is a government that's already acted and will continue to act to include members of the pride community and to make sure that their needs are met and that they are accepted and that they feel respected in our province. That's something we're proud to do.

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

Mr. Kinew: The genesis of the bill is that I had a constituent reach out to me. This young person, named Sam, explained the situation and said, hey, can you bring this forward. And I thought to myself, wow, I can't believe that this change hasn't already taken place; I can't believe that people who are non-binary may—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —be made to feel uncomfortable, perhaps even discriminated against.

Now, we know that the previous government did actually bring in Human Rights Code protections that would include non-binary people, but it's important that we take the next step and ensure that government-issued ID also reflects people and how they identify themselves, and adding that non-binary option would be the right way to go.

So, again, I would offer this comment to the Premier: this is something that we can join together and move forward for the good of the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: I don't think it's unfair to observe, Madam Speaker, the previous administration did have 17 years to take the actions that so surprised the member that they were not taken.

And I want to explain to the member that we have taken action as a government in respect of the issues he raises today, and I would also encourage him to respect the traditions of this place by introducing bills in this Chamber so that we can look at them before he takes them out for a public relations exercise somewhere else.

If he would do that, he would demonstrate to all of us and to all Manitobans he cares more about results and a little less about media attention, Madam Speaker.

Personal-Care-Home Beds Need for Construction

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): We know how important it is for so many reasons to continue to expand personal-care-home beds across the province, but in two years now this government hasn't begun construction on a single PCH bed anywhere in the province.

Many communities are facing challenges because of a lack of personal-care-home beds. We've learned of rural hospitals that have nearly 60 per cent of their acute-care beds filled by seniors waiting for placement. The government's put up barriers in front of most Manitoba communities wanting to build or expand personal-care-home beds in their communities.

Will the minister commit to restoring a reasonable level of support so that more communities can expand or build PCH beds?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, we know not to take the member's assertions in the House at face value.

* (14:00)

It was only yesterday he and the Leader of the Opposition were suggesting that a vacancy rate of nurses of 15 per cent was because the government was refusing to fill those positions. I'd remind him that on March 31st of 2016, at the Victoria hospital there was a vacancy rate of RNs of 17 per cent.

I wonder if he would answer the question in terms of why was the NDP not filling those vacancy positions, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Swan: You know, I know the minister doesn't like answering questions.

One problem for him is one of the first things he did in office was cancel the personal-care home in Lac du Bonnet, and it's their hospital that had nearly 60 per cent of acute-care beds filled by seniors waiting for PCH beds.

The community, though, wouldn't give up. They'd already raised \$3.2 million and spent \$2.5 million on design work, but the minister chose to put this project and another worthy project in Transcona into limbo.

Will this government, which promised to fast-track PCH beds, get on track and start building PCH beds in this province?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, the member will remember, I'm sure, that under the former government they had at least three announcements on the Lac du Bonnet PCH. They got into their Hummers; they drove out to Lac du Bonnet. They got out of the black government Hummers; they got those golden shovels; they turned over one spade of dirt, and then they got back into the Hummers and they never built anything.

Well, then a year later they got back in the Hummers, went back to Lac du Bonnet, back and forth. Not only was it bad for the environment, it wasn't fair to the people of Lac du Bonnet, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Minto, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Swan: We learned yesterday the only projects the government is currently considering are one which was all ready to go in Winnipeg when they took office, a project in Carman which is being financed by imposing a flat tax on every property owner in and around Carman for years and years and, of course, the project in Steinbach.

Now, this is a government which picks winners and losers, not by the need of the community or by the needs expressed by the regional health authority, but by community capacity to raise large amounts of money.

Will the minister go back to the drawing board and come up with a formula that will allow all communities, large and small, rich and poor, across this province, to be able to build and expand PCH beds in this province?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, there's already been three projects announced and there'll be more coming, so of course the member's assertion is wrong.

When it comes to building, I had the example of Lac du Bonnet. I was reminded—my colleagues—about Selkirk, where for many years there were these pillars that were sort of sticking out of the ground and people would drive by them, and there were tourists who were coming to Manitoba and they were confused because they thought it was Stonehenge. They thought maybe they got onto the wrong

plane and were—ended up in North America instead of overseas.

For years and years the government simply couldn't get the Selkirk hospital done. We were glad to open that hospital and look forward to opening many other health projects, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Poverty Reduction Request for Plan

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Nearly two months after this government's delivered its budget there are no details on a plan to fight poverty. The government pretends that fighting poverty is a priority, but then it rescinds—or it restricts the minimum wage to poverty levels, cuts supports to Rent Assist and then celebrates the fact that more Manitobans need Rent Assist.

Manitobans want to know when they can expect to see a plan to fight poverty from this government?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): Addressing poverty is an important aspect for us. That's why we're consulting with Manitobans. I know the former government, the NDP, don't want to talk about consultations. They don't like it at all because of the fact that they did no consultations at all when they introduced their poverty reduction strategy.

They put information that's completely off the record on the record here. I can tell you our government has supported low-income individuals. There'll be close 3,300 more people supported under the Rent Assist program when we took office than when we took—than we were introduced—won the election over two years ago.

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

Mrs. Smith: I don't know why this minister would want to celebrate 3,300 more people needing Rent Assist because they put them in poverty.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mrs. Smith: This means 3,300 more families of their children are going to school hungry because—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith:—this government fails to do anything about poverty in this province. They've had two years. We've seen no poverty plan. They continue to say, we're consulting. Well, where's this consultant—consulting going? Zero in this budget.

When is this minister going to get with the program and figure out how to end poverty in this province so children aren't continuing to go to—go hungry?

Mr. Fielding: Having programs, policies and having low-income individuals pay less tax is something that's important, having more money in their pocket. This budget, in fact, will see enhancement of the basic personal exemption; close to 31,000 people will be taken off the tax rolls altogether.

And I know the opposition, in fact the Leader of the Opposition, has jumped on the bandwagon with the Jets recently. But I can put the context, the amount of people that this supports, the 31,000 you could fit in the whiteout zone here at the MTS centre. That's an important amount of people that will not have to pay taxes. In fact, they'll have over \$2,200 more in their pockets in the next two years.
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order. Order, please.

I would just like the co-operation of all members, please. I think I've had to stand on my feet a couple of times in the last few days and even before that, and I would ask everybody's co-operation in terms of allowing members that want to ask questions or answer questions, that we be heard respectfully. And, particularly, I would just ask the member for Southdale (Mr. Smith) that he may want to listen very carefully to these comments of mine and, as a respect for the Chair, I would ask everybody to please adhere to them.

Mrs. Smith: I don't know why the members opposite think that it's funny and that they should celebrate people being in poverty. Fighting is—fighting poverty is something that is non-partisan. It's not an issue that we should be even talking about in here. Getting kids' and families'—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith:—needs met is what we should be doing. But this government is failing to do that. They've put zero in their budget to fight the poverty plan. A plan to fight poverty is needed immediately.

So, again, I ask the minister: When will he actually present a plan to eliminate poverty in this province?

Mr. Fielding: Ensuring and in—talking to Manitobans to make sure we get it right, we think is important from our side of the equation. We think that—we agree with the chamber of commerce, that recently put out their documentation in terms of poverty reduction, that getting people into work we think is important, and we've done a number of good issues in terms of that.

We got a program called jobs on the economy—jobs on market, rather, that has seen a number of people get back in the work world that wasn't there. We've built, also, things like affordable housing units that are there. We built—close—in coming office we've opened or provided funding for their operating dollars for close to 487 new units of affordable housing, and we're not done yet. We're building 140 more, Madam Speaker. We think that's one of the elements of a robust policy that's going to address poverty here in the province of Manitoba.

Seven Oaks Hospital ER Request to Stop Closure

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): I know I speak for the tens of thousands of residents of Tyndall Park and northwest Winnipeg when I say, do not close Seven Oaks' emergency room. We have not always had health services in north Winnipeg and we have had to fight and push to make sure there are services in our communities.

* (14:10)

Will the Premier stop his plan to close Seven Oaks' emergency room?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, the member will know that there is a need for transformation in the system. He'll know that there are far too many people waiting too long. He spoke in the House of his own personal experience not long ago about how he waited for many, many hours in the emergency room.

I'm glad for good health for the member today, but his experience, which he related in the House, about waiting for many hours wasn't a reason not to change the system; it was proof that the system needs to change, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Marcelino: I waited for nine hours, and I did not begrudge those who were working there. And it's the system now that really is in trouble, especially if you close it down.

When Seven Oaks hospital was opened in 1981 it was because of the voices of people in north Winnipeg who stood up. The residents of Tyndall Park, The Maples, Garden City and the North End all demanded the same access to health care as every other Winnipegger.

We all deserve good-quality health care in our communities close to home.

Will the Premier stop his plans to close Seven Oaks—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, actually, the member and I agree basically on this premise: that people deserve quality health care and they deserve it in a more timely fashion. That is not happening under the system the way it has been structured for the last 20 years. That's why there are changes; that's why the member was waiting too long at Seven Oaks.

Now, there is not a closure of the—at Seven Oaks; it's a conversion to an urgent-care centre. The vast majority of those who are currently in the emergency room at Seven Oaks would benefit and would be served by an urgent-care centre, Madam Speaker.

So the member shouldn't be providing false information to his residents and to residents of Winnipeg generally, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Marcelino: The same residents of northwest Winnipeg who stood up and fought for the creation of Seven Oaks hospital are raising their voices again. They are saying no to the Premier's plans to close ERs. They are saying the Premier's cuts to physiotherapy and drugs for vulnerable patients are wrong.

The Premier needs to listen. Will the Premier tell his minister to stop his plan to close Seven Oaks ER?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The member makes a far better case for change, Madam Speaker, than he does for the preservation of the status quo. He states in this place that he was happy to wait for nine hours while his life may well have been at risk,

but many other Manitobans are not happy to wait for nine hours while their lives are at risk.

And so we will make the necessary changes to preserve the quality of health care, but beyond that, this Health Minister will enhance the quality of health care. He already is, Madam Speaker, and I know this government is dedicated to making sure that Manitobans get the care they need and deserve in a timely manner, much more timely than the member opposite experienced in his personal situation.

Roquette Pea Processing Plant Inquiry Regarding Construction Delay

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): The Premier has bragged about his \$400-million investment in Portage la Prairie for a pea processing plant. Ground was officially broken back in September of 2017, so we're curious why the construction of the plant has completely stalled.

Can the Premier provide an update on the progress of the plant's construction?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I'd be honoured to, Madam Speaker. I actually toured the site the other day, and the site preparation continues in earnest. There may be some delays, there often are with projects, public and private, though hopefully never as long as the delays we're experiencing in getting health-care support from Ottawa and the Liberal government there.

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

Ms. Lamoureux: A delay, hey? To date, aside from the land development there has been no progress on the plant. There's not even been a construction permit drawn up, Madam Speaker.

Roquette, the company who was planning to build the pea plant has said that they were investing in Manitoba because of our, and I quote, reliable, competitive and sustainable hydroelectric energy, yet this government wants to raise hydro by 60 per cent over the next four years.

Can the Premier please share with the House why there are delays in the plant's construction?

Mr. Pallister: I find the question refreshing, Madam Speaker, because for years under the previous NDP administration we languished near the bottom in every measure of economic growth, whether it was

capital investment in the private sector where we now are first in the country and were ninth before.

So the member's questions are about delays, wonderful questions. We don't mind delays somewhat, Madam Speaker, they are sure preferable to nothing happening.

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

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, under this government hydro rates could increase by 60 per cent over four years. The carbon tax will go up for manufacturers. Massive cuts will be made to infrastructure spending on roads. And it is getting—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Lamoureux: —more and more expensive to acquire the labour skills needed for such projects like the pea plant in Portage la Prairie. These are all factors that will have a negative impact on the—on investors like Roquette.

So I would like to ask the Premier: Are any of these factors that I just listed possibly contributing to the delay of the pea 'prossing' plant in Portage la Prairie? [interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: We're working very hard, Madam Speaker, as a government, to face the challenges of fixing the mess we inherited here in respect of many things. One of them was the actual lack of open-for-business attitude that existed with the previous government that had us leading the country in many negative ways; 22 of 25, if you believe the Employers Council, where we finished last or second last of all provinces west of Quebec.

So when the member asks me, is there a reason for delay, one may be the pending carbon tax the federal government is proposing to impose on all the country. We have a made-in-Manitoba plan here, however, that is made for our province and works better for the environment and the economy. She might like to work on her colleagues to see if they'd like to copy our plan as opposed to trying to inflict one made in Ottawa on us here in Manitoba.

Climate Atlas of Canada Funding Announcement

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): Madam Speaker, unlike the previous NDP government's green plan, which the Auditor General has characterized

as having conducted no economic or scientific analysis in setting their 2008 or 2015 targets, our PC government has been hard at work to actually produce a sustainable and effective green plan that will benefit all Manitobans.

Last week, the Minister of Sustainable Development supported an important initiative that is dedicated to both agriculture and a better understanding of climate change.

Can the minister please share with this Chamber what exciting developments took place and how this will affect Manitobans?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): I'd like to thank my honourable colleague for asking that very important question on the environment. It's been quite a while since I've had a question on the environment, so I quite appreciate it.

Last Friday, I was very pleased to partner with the Prairie Climate Centre and Dr. Ian Mauro and Dr. Danny Blair for the announcement of a \$200,000 investment in the climate atlas, which is a tool that's going to help communities transition to a low-carbon future and make decisions as they adapt. So I was really pleased to partner with these two doctors and the Prairie Climate Centre at the University of Winnipeg.

Our plan is better for the environment and better for the economy, and where the members opposite failed to get it right on the environment, we're succeeding.

* (14:20)

Vale Canada Layoff Notices Northern Employment Concerns

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, we've just learned that Vale has given layoff notices to 169 workers in Thompson. This is a massive blow to the people of Thompson and mining in the North. This is after at least 150—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lindsey: —workers were laid off in the fall and there are more layoffs coming.

So we ask: What is this government doing to fight the job crisis in the North?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): Madam Speaker, these layoff notices may come as news to the member

from Flin Flon, but Vale has widely publicized this for many years, has worked with the City of Thompson on this shutdown of their smelter, and the Province continues to work with Vale and the City of Thompson to address these layoff notices.

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

Mr. Lindsey: Madam Speaker, we know the North will lose between 1,500 and 2,000 jobs in the coming year, and the government is sitting on its hands. We need action today to address the crisis, and the first thing we need is a government that actually acknowledges it as such.

Will the minister call this situation a crisis, and will he actually respond to it today?

Mr. Pedersen: The previous NDP government is responsible for the absolute discouragement of any mining activity in the province for the last 17 years.

We are working very good—very well with the mining community, with companies like Vale, with HudBay and with new exploration companies that 'seeg' Manitoba as the place to do mining business.

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

Mr. Lindsey: The minister stands up and talks about working with mining companies in the North.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Lindsey: He talks about all that he's done to help exploration in the North—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lindsey: —and yet we've seen no evidence of any of that. The layoffs continue.

We need real supports for mining, not massive hydro rate increases.

The people of Thompson are facing massive layoffs, and the prospect of more is on the horizon.

Will the minister actually present a plan for jobs in the North, and not just more talk, but an actual plan?

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Speaker, one of the definite plans that we have that is—working on that we will be unveiling very shortly is our mineral development protocol. That's working with First

Nations communities across the North who have mining potential near them. It's involving both communities and the mining development companies and mining companies in working together co-operatively so that everybody knows what's involved and there can be economic benefit for all of the North.

Increased Class Sizes Enrolment and Funding Concerns

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Six years ago, the government accepted external recommendations on small class sizes. Those recommendations were brought forward by teachers, parent councils, by school boards, by superintendents and by school business officials. A broad consensus, Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —of support for this initiative.

In fact, in opposition the Pallister government also signalled that it agreed and say—said that the class sizes can improve educational opportunities for young students.

So why is this government throwing aside the work and commitment of so many people who care about small class sizes in this province?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): As the member knows, what we have done is we have given the school divisions flexibility to determine for themselves exactly what form that they use to give their students the best results when it comes to literacy and numeracy.

We're following the recommendations, actually, of many teachers that find that this is a much more flexible and effective method than the previous method, which was prescribed from the Legislature down.

Madam Speaker: Before we go too much further, I'm sensing the level of heckling is increasing in the last few minutes, and I would indicate I do know that there's voices coming from both sides. I'm going to just give everybody a warning. I'm not going to identify the names that I've written down, but I would ask everybody, please co-operate. We only have a few more minutes left in question period. These are important questions and answers, and I would ask for everybody's co-operation.

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, we've heard from parents all across the province and we've heard from

so many who care about small class sizes. Those parents are telling us that they want more one-on-one time for their child with their teacher. Teachers also see the results, and they see the results in those outcomes right in the classroom. School divisions also understand that this is a smart investment and want to see those resources.

But under this Pallister government, enrolment is increasing and funding isn't keeping up. For the first time in years, Madam Speaker, class sizes are getting bigger in this province.

Why is the Pallister government increasing class sizes for our students?

Mr. Wishart: We're certainly very pleased to work with Manitobans, both teachers and educators, parents and families. We had a literacy and numeracy summit in mid-January that was very well attended, and the recommendations for that have indicated a better way forward for Manitobans. We will be tabling that shortly.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, there's nearly 4,000 more children in Manitoba schools than just two years ago. The Pallister government's funding is well below the growth in enrolment, let alone the growth in inflation.

Schools are being forced to make impossible choices between needed maintenance or reducing their teaching positions. And they can't be blamed for the results, and the results are clear: we now have growing class sizes in this province despite the evidence and despite, in fact, what this government had said was important.

So I ask again: Why is the Pallister government increasing class sizes for young children in this province?

Mr. Wishart: We've very pleased to be a growing province and pleased not only with the retention rates that we have for Manitobans, but also the number of new immigrants that come to this province to make it home and, certainly, a big part of that is the fact that we actually fixed the Provincial Nominee Program that had languished in four years of wait-lists for many Manitobans. I don't think we've doing that wrong, Madam Speaker; I think Manitobans like the result.

Replacement Bridge on PTH 2 Construction Announcement

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake): Madam Speaker, our government was elected on a province to rebuild Manitoba's economy, and investing in strategic infrastructure is one way we're fulfilling this commitment to Manitobans.

Last week, the Minister of Infrastructure announced construction of a new bridge along Highway 2 in Cypress River.

Can the minister please update the Assembly on the important work and how it will benefit all Manitobans?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the Interlake for that fantastic question.

Originally constructed back in 1956, the bridge was located on PTH 2, just east of Cypress River—is due for replacement. PH 2 is a vital highway to the provincial economy. The present structure is safe, but after 60 years, it is time to look at replacing the bridge to ensure traffic on this busy corridor is not disrupted.

A detour adjacent to this existing bridge is being constructed and it's expected to be completed by this summer. The 'bidge'—bridge replacement is scheduled to be completed by fall of 2019. This project shows our government's commitment to strategic infrastructure spending that will help rebuild Manitoba's economy.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Tina Fontaine—Public Inquiry

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

These are the reasons for this petition.

(1) Tina Fontaine was murdered at the age of 15 years, and her body was found in the Red River on August 17th, 2014.

(2) Tina Fontaine was robbed of her loving family and the Anishinabe community of Sagkeeng First Nation.

(3) Tina Fontaine was failed by multiple systems which did not protect her as they—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: –intervened in her life.

(4) Tina Fontaine was further failed by systems meant to seek and pursue justice for her murder.

* (14:30)

(5) Tina Fontaine's murder galvanized Canada on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, MMIWG, as she quickly became our collective daughter and the symbol of MMIWG across Canada.

(6) Manitoba has failed to fully implement the recommendations of numerous reports and recommendations meant to improve and protect the lives of indigenous peoples and children, including the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Justice to immediately call a public inquiry into the systems that had a role in the life and death of Tina Fontaine, as well as the function of the administration of justice after her death.

(2) To urge that the terms of reference of a public inquiry be developed jointly with the caregivers of Tina Fontaine and/or the agent appointed by them.

Signed by Raveena Gill, Dana Lance, Evan Lilley and many, many other Manitobans.

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

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Tina Fontaine was murdered at the age of 15 years, and her body was found in the Red River on August 17th, 2014.

(2) Tina Fontaine was robbed of her loving family and the Anishinabe community of Sagkeeng First Nation.

(3) Tina Fontaine was failed by multiple systems which did not protect her as they intervened in her life.

(4) Tina Fontaine was further failed by systems meant to seek and pursue justice for her murder.

(5) Tina Fontaine's murder galvanized Canada on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, MMIWG, as she quickly became our collective daughter and the symbol of MMIWG across Canada.

(6) Manitoba has failed to fully implement the recommendations of numerous reports and recommendations meant to improve the lives of indigenous peoples and children, including the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Justice to immediately call a public inquiry into the systems that had a role in the life and death of Tina Fontaine, as well as the function of the administration of justice after her death.

(2) To urge that the terms of reference of a public inquiry be jointly–be developed jointly with the caregivers of Tina Fontaine and/or the agent appointed by them.

Signed by many Manitobans.

Twinning Leila Avenue

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The residents of The Maples community have diverse needs, such as the issue of twinning Leila Avenue, which was raised with the previous minister responsible for Municipal Relations.

(2) The residents of The Maples appreciate that Leila Avenue is a City of Winnipeg city responsibility, but the new Minister of Municipal Relations has not complied with requests to ask the City to make twinning this road a priority, even though the provincial government provides the City with its share for funding such projects.

(3) Leila Avenue is the main road to approach the Seven Oaks hospital and one extra lane would ease the traffic that has been created by a corresponding increase in population in the area.

(4) The Maples residents are frustrated because both the City and the provincial government do not treat infrastructure developments in north Winnipeg equally with those in the south.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to request that the City twin Leila Avenue to reduce traffic and commute time for the residents of The Maples and surrounding areas, enabling the accessing of timely health services, which will contribute to both the economy and society.

Signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Government House Leader): Would you call Committee of Supply?

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider Estimates this afternoon.

The House will now resolve itself into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

FINANCE

* (14:50)

Madam Chairperson (Sarah Guillemard): 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 Finance, including Crown Services. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I will start where I attempted to start yesterday and didn't get much traction on, so I'm hoping we can get some answers from the minister with regards to his new assessment tool that he talked about now a number of days ago with regards to capital spending. And I just wanted to ask the minister to elaborate on how that tool is being implemented and how it works.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Happy to be back in Committee of Supply for the Department of Finance this afternoon.

I have with me at the table the Deputy Minister of Finance, Jim Hrichishen; secretary to the Treasury Board, Paul Beauregard; I have Bruce Gray, the assistant deputy minister for Fiscal Management and Capital Planning; and Inga Rannard, who's the senior financial officer, Finance and Administration Shared Services, in the Comptroller Division.

So I remind the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), the reason it's important to record that is because that individuals at the table can change from day to day, and this way he knows, in perpetuity and looking back on the record, who was here at the table to answer questions for the Department of Finance.

Member's question is about the new return on investment, or how we measure for value in all of our decision-making that we're undertaking at government. I welcome the question because, of course, there will be a lot of interest in this; a lot of interest, of course, springing from the fact that the government is doing a better job of estimating expenditures and then arriving with less variance between a budget and an actual.

As a matter of fact, that's exactly what the Dominion Bond Rating Service said about three weeks ago—maybe it was four weeks ago—after Budget 2018, when they commented that after two complete budgetary cycles, there is the clear evidence of progress by this new government in Manitoba.

Now, you could, of course, contrast that with statements that bond-rating agencies said about the previous NDP government—continues to disappoint, adjustment fatigue—those kind of comments talking about the continual change of a date by which the NDP said they would be back in balance. We had that discussion yesterday. We welcome it again.

Any case, for the purposes of this conversation, the member asks about, so how is the government planning, or how is the government getting this better result? And, of course, that result is evidenced even in respect of this fiscal year, in which the government had budgeted for an \$840-million loss and is on track, right now, with a forecast amount of \$726-million loss. And that means making up ground of more than \$100 million even in year.

So how is that done? It's done looking through a lens of evidence-based decision-making. It is about the focus that we are putting on return on investment and analysing the impact to Manitoba all the decisions we undertake. So we take an evidence-based approach to what we are doing. We take into account objective evidence when we are making decisions.

That evidence forms a large part of all of our discussions at places like the Treasury Board table, Priorities and Planning Committee of Cabinet, and of course, in ministers' offices with senior staff, EFOs, executive financial officers. So it's important and it must be done.

We are standardizing our approach. We are using evidence to guide decision-making. We are using technology, increasingly, to understand that there are benefits, if government pays attention to them, that can be introduced, that can reduce the size of operations through the inclusion of new technological approaches. And we are properly allocating capital to the highest priorities of government.

All of these things form or sketch out that better approach that we are bringing to the budgeting and decision-making process. We talked yesterday and the day before about how we're changing the culture of our civil service and wishing to change the manner that the civil service undertakes their work and the work itself that they undertake.

So I would be happy to talk about some of the very specific parts of this, including score-carding and other measurement forms that we believe will return better value for all Manitobans and will help Manitobans see, over time, that this government takes very seriously its responsibility to plan budgets accurately and then to get better results.

Mr. Wiebe: So, again, we're specifically talking about capital spending, and the minister talks about it being based on evidence and looking for value-for-money and talks about it being standardized. So what I'd like to know is, is that the process for awarding the contract for the Lake St. Martin-Lake Manitoba road, did that happen under his new assessment tool?

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the—for Concordia for the question.

Now, yesterday we had spoken at length about capital spending, and I would be happy to restate some of the points we made yesterday. However, I would say to the member, if he does

have specific questions about procurement activities within departments, including the Department of Manitoba Infrastructure, my advice to him would be to ask that in the Department of Infrastructure. He sees no reference in the supplemental information for Finance here procurement pieces belonging to Infrastructure.

The member knows that as opposition we had, when we were the opposition party, voiced tremendous concerns in concert with the Auditor General of Manitoba by the NDP when it came to sole-source and non-tendered contracts. We know that even in the case of flood mitigation devices, the NDP went—kept going back to the well. We sought to understand, and so did the Auditor General, the reasons for that. We were very troubled, of course, to discover personal connections between the minister of Infrastructure and the Canadian company, the individual who had the Canadian rights of distribution for a certain flood mitigation device. It was a water-fill device. The company's name was Tiger Dams, and the Canadian representative of that company had a close personal relationship with the minister of Infrastructure.

Imagine the shock of the Auditor General to discover that untendered contracts had occurred in this case not once, not twice, but on multiple occasions. And we asked the questions, where were the safeguards, what provisions were in place? And indeed, for those who are listening to these proceedings or who will follow them later and read the written record of this exchange, I would encourage them to do a search of that term and to read the Auditor General's scathing report on the practice of the previous government.

So I do fully invite a gaze to be put on procurement practices. And I could speak—because I'm the minister responsible for procurement under essential services, I could speak generally about our commitment to getting better value for taxpayer dollars. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) likes to say Manitobans are 'shartz'—are sharp and—smart shoppers—yes, and sharp shoppers, as well—but smart shoppers. And they want to get better value, and government also must get better value.

I refer the member to page 15 of the budget in budget papers. Yesterday, we made the point to say, clearly, under the NDP we had seen before that capital spending was tied to the growth of the economy. You can see incrementally that, as Manitoba's economy grew, so did the capital

expenditure in relation to. But then, after the point of 2004, 2005, increasingly—and here's another comment made by bond-rating agencies, that the previous government lacked fiscal discipline. And you could see that there was a lack and an increasing abandonment of fiscal discipline when it came to capital spending.

* (15:00)

Indeed, we saw that between the years of 2004-05 and 2016-17, that capital spending grew at four times the rate of the growth of the economy. That means it went from \$400 million to \$1.6 billion, and, indeed, there was no five-year capital plan that was evident. So when the member asks for, well, what is capital planning look like now? It looks something very different. It includes a focus on areas like health, safety and security. It means we are repairing buildings that need repairing, heating and ventilation systems, roofs, foundation works. We're doing this with schools and hospitals and government-owned buildings. We're maintaining buildings and investing in that which we own rather than conspicuously invest in new construction at the expense of that what we must maintain.

Evidence-based also means taking a whole asset life cycle into account and making good investments that will ensure that we have maximum length of use of these things we're investing in. This is only some of the ways in which this government is getting better value for taxpayer dollars, investing wisely on behalf of Manitobans.

Mr. Wiebe: So, again, the reason I raised this is because the minister himself raised this. This was something he was quite proud of. He was quite proud of his new assessment tool, and in listening to him, it sounds like he's quite proud of it still. And so, when he asks us to go to the Department of Infrastructure to talk about this particular road, well, I will, and I think we have, and I invite him to check the Hansard and maybe get on the same page with his Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Schuler). I think we've had them—we've had him on the hot seat, so to speak, a few times and probably a few more times before this process of Estimates is through.

But I'm not asking about that particular road. I'm asking about the assessment tool and whether that road, that procurement process, falls under this, would have met the standards that the minister's talking about. He's talking about it being evidence based. He's asking about value for money. He's saying this is going to be the new standard for

projects going forward in the province of Manitoba. So I would assume that this project would be one that would fall under that new standardization so that what I take that to mean is that these sorts of projects, untendered contracts, can be awarded now, under the minister's new assessment tool for capital spending. You know, the minister wants to talk about value for money. Well, the heavy construction industry certainly didn't say this was a project that met its standards of value for money. In fact, it said they thought it was about double of what it should have cost to build this particular project.

So, if this is the new standard and the minister is excited about this new standard, then I think he should let us know if that is, in fact—if this particular project falls underneath this new standard and this is the new standard, that untendered contracts can go forward, you know, and maybe for very good reasons. Maybe he could explain to us what those very good reasons might be in a case like this. But he should be glad to tell the committee what are those assessment tools or what parts of that assessment tool allowed for this and, in fact, is this something that then can go forward on an ongoing basis, either in the Department of Infrastructure or in any other department where there's capital spending being done by the government.

Mr. Friesen: So the member's asking questions about the need for accountability and contracts. I fully agree and our government fully agrees. The member is asking questions about value for money and I fully agree.

And I addressed the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association last week at their breakfast series, and it was a very good exchange and I was happy to be there. I had a chance to speak with Colleen Munro, their current president, had a chance to speak with members of groups. The member will know—will find interesting that I actually had a delegation from Manitoba heavy in my office, as well, only weeks ago, and a good exchange there, as well. Happy to always meet with groups.

However, in this case, I still say to the member that when it comes to specific contracts within specific departments, he should seek those specific answers within the Committee of Supply for those answers, and that's why he has that opportunity to influence his House leader to call that Committee of Supply.

In the meantime, I can speak broadly, though, about our commitment to better procurement,

because we do take this very seriously. Now, I just outlined in my last response that the NDP failed in this regard. The Auditor General underscored that failure by the NDP to get value on behalf of Manitobans. The record of these proceedings will show that that member of Concordia was completely silent and had no answer on these very serious allegations. He had no reference in his preamble to the chapter written by the Auditor General, I believe, only in—it could have been 2014 when that chapter first emerged. It could have been 2015.

In any case, here are some of the things that we did early on in government to strengthen the procurement practices. We know that in—that one of the Auditor General's recommendations was to strengthen the reporting of untendered contracts. Members here who just strolled to this committee room for these proceedings will have passed the Manitoba reading room in the Legislature. Most people call it the library, but, of course, its real title is the reading room. The reading room was—prior to our government making the change or calling for the change—it was the only place in the government of Manitoba where someone could go and see a comprehensive list of the untendered contracts. It was located on one stand-alone computer running an antiquated software program. I believe that the Auditor General actually spoke specifically on this and said that it had very weak search functions. I don't believe that you had the ability to compile a list based on search and then to actually print out that list. I think that was an encumbered process, and so I think that an individual had to either screen shot and print or somehow maybe jot a list down by hand.

* (15:10)

We've strengthened that. That list of untendered contracts is now available online. It's a searchable form. You can search material, combine results, print those lists or save them. But in addition to that, probably the more substantive changes that we have made is in scrutinizing the circumstances in which there can be arguments made to go to untendered contracts. In other words, there were rules in place even under the NDP. What the Auditor General remarked is that the rules were being bent and broken and twisted because departments had their preferred vendors, so they had ways to write contests, over time, that would arguably favour one vendor. And this isn't appropriate. It doesn't get the maximum amount of value. Just to say that company X had at one time bid the most competitive bid did not mean now that they continue to be the

most competitive bid. We must always have the willingness to consult and test the market, and we are doing that.

The last thing I would say is that when it comes to procurement in government, we know it happens in too many silos. We have addressed this. We know we have procurement in education, in health care, in infrastructure, in central services, and this fails to seize a larger—a wider opportunity. And we are availing ourselves of that opportunity and engaging with a third party, an external consultant, to help us understand what is the opportunity that presents itself to government in respect of our provincial procurement practices? How can they strengthen with more participation and combined efforts? And, indeed, we believe that is exactly the opportunity that was underexplored by the NDP but is finally now being fully explored.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the minister must know I'm going to ask about that. That's exciting. There's a new external consultant. Maybe he can just give us some information about that consultant. Who's the company that's doing that work, how much is the contract for that consultancy work worth, and when is the report being prepared?

Because, you know, quite frankly, what I hear, Madam Chair, from the minister is that, in fact, the untendered contract that was awarded for the Lake St. Martin road is, in fact—meets his standard for this new assessment tool on capital spending. And that untendered contract, you know, even though the minister didn't have answers, didn't even know it was an untendered contract, couldn't answer the questions, couldn't give the public a clear indication of why that contract was untendered, could—I don't even know if he knew it was untendered—but anyway, he—this is all fine, apparently, according to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen). So he's okay with that. And all contracts going forward apparently can be—can follow this.

So I wanted to also ask about the Inuit Art Centre and the Diversity Gardens. Would those also fall under this new standard, as the minister calls it; this is the new standard for capital spending in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Friesen: First of all, to the member's question, what I want to say first is that it was only last week—it was the 16th of April when our Premier (Mr. Pallister) reiterated our government's commitment to building and completing the Lake Manitoba outlet for the protection of the livelihoods

and lives of residents of the Interlake and Lake Manitoba basin area.

The member will probably remember that that announcement included a commitment that the entirety of this \$540-million project will be completed through an open tendering process, which includes no requirement that companies would be forced to pay union dues to submit a tender. That alone allows the Manitoba government to shop smarter and control every dollar for the balance of the contract, as the Premier (Mr. Pallister) said just 'thast'—last week.

So there the member can have the confidence that on this more than half-a-billion-dollar project that is essential for our project, that effectively closes the loop on a more than 50-year-old engineering and master report that called for ways in which to mitigate against flooding and—of Winnipeg and major communities through the use of diversion channels and outlets to redrain that water back into basins and back in—ultimately, into Lake Winnipeg and on to the bay. But in this case, that member can have the confidence that this is being done in a fully competitive way.

Now, I do compare that to the approaches taken under the former construction of the Manitoba East Side Road Authority. And, while I will not go into detail for the same reason that I'm not inviting more questions specific to the Department of Infrastructure—I would ask the member to save those discussions for that Committee of Supply—that member knows only too well how the Manitoba East Side Road Authority—essentially an Infrastructure organization, but a component broken off from Infrastructure and, proceeding unilaterally, failed to get better value—failed to get value—and did not produce the value that would have been necessary and was able—unable to demonstrate. And that's why we folded that operation back into the Department of Infrastructure.

Now, on the subject of the procurement services review, I'm happy to talk about it. I can tell the member—I cannot indicate for him who has won that award because—he will understand, as I mentioned to the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey) yesterday in question period, that there is a—there's propriety that comes with these announcements.

And so just because of the stage that this award is currently at, I cannot give detail about the award. But I can let him know that this work, this review of

our procurement services will be—was actually called on for by the KPMG Fiscal Performance Review.

It was the analysis of our government, as well, that an external consultant could be valuable in helping us modernize our procurement practices. We are engaging with an organization—with an entity who will have expertise when it comes to procurement. Some of the work that we've asked this third party to come back and assist us with will be things like talking about getting quick wins, how to get initial savings from better collaboration and procurement. It will include an assessment of what our current procurement practices look like now.

And I talked about current-state capabilities in these—in this heavily siloed system in which we're working. We will do a listing of capabilities, job functions and resource skills and competencies necessary to make Manitoba successful in this regard. And we'll talk about how to do performance tracking and relationship building with vendors and suppliers. And this is essential because getting a value once means also you must then be tracking after awards are made to know what was it like to work with this particular provider or proponent. And we can do a better job of that.

Knowledge transfer. A phased approach setting robust governance structures—scaling of the strategy to the broader public sector, as well. We've talked about the importance of summary reporting and also includes identification strategies for evaluating IT solutions, as well. We've had discussions about IT and ICT and so this work that will be undertaken will be an important step along the way of government getting better value and strengthening our own procurement internal services.

*(15:20)

Mr. Wiebe: Well, you know, the minister talks about an open tender for the Lake St. Martin project, and yet the first step out of the gate is an untendered contract for a road. So I would suggest that they—they're not on the right track. It's not a good start. It's not a good opening move when the first part of the Lake St. Martin project is actually an untendered contract, which the minister now calls the new standard for his government, which he calls the—that he feels meets his evidence-based standards and is now apparently the new assessment tool that he will consider fine for all other departments and all other projects to go forward under, that an untendered contract makes sense in his mind. He sees that as a value for money.

Well, the minister also talked about—well, he called a bottom-up approach to budgeting, but I think he may have meant top-down—bottom-up. So, bottom-up approach from—maybe he—I'll give him some time to explain this because I would understand an up—bottom-up to mean that departments are in charge, that ministers and maybe, you know, maybe us MLAs might be in charge of prioritizing projects and figuring out what's next, because I've got a list in my own community. We could get started today if we'd like. I can give the minister a list. But maybe he can just expand on that, top-down versus bottom-up in terms of capital spending.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question.

First of all, he did ask a question just earlier at the end of his question. He asked whether we could verify that our recent cultural capital investments were also done in accordance with this new value-for-money assessment tool or framework. I would point him to page 18 of the budget in budget papers. He will see there that's a good explanation of our whole focus on outcomes.

It mentions on that page that in the past, funding was provided to many of our most critical partners with limited or no reporting on outcomes. Failure was not addressed and success was not awarded. And that's why, when we've talked about bending the cost curve, we've talked about transforming our system. So, included in that list, it says: examples of the new approach to spending include a new value-for-money assessment tool to guide our investments in cultural capital, including the—it's page 15 of budget in budget papers—including Assiniboine Park Conservancy, the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the Royal Aviation Museum of Western Canada.

So, on that page, he can also take note of other ways in which we will get that better investment, talks about block funding arrangements, a greater focus—exactly on that same page—the greater focus on competitive procurement processes, and we just had that discussion now about how this external engagement will help to co-ordinate our thinking on how to best seize that opportunity, both on the long horizon, but also early on by harvesting initial savings.

One, perhaps, other example I can give the member, not in the area that has been explored at any length in these proceedings, but is that one having to do with school construction, and it was not long ago

that our government had undertaken to explore the feasibility of proceeding with school construction with a P3 approach, so a public-private partnership approach, and that was considerable work that we undertook. We studied our approaches; we interacted with the Public Schools Finance Board. We looked at other jurisdictions for successes and failures because one thing was certain: we knew for certain that P3 approaches were being underexplored here in the province of Manitoba, and it was conspicuous because it seemed that only the NDP government of Manitoba was underexploring these opportunities.

You could not name another Canadian jurisdiction, regardless of political leadership—Liberal, Progressive Conservative, New Democrat—all other provinces were engaged in P3. Only the NDP in Manitoba had put their blinders on, closed their ears and said we must continue to do things in the exact same way, shape and form as we have always done them. And, of course, that's not evidence-based; that's ideology-based.

So what we did is we measured. Now, we learned a lot along the way. We engaged with many experts, talked to P3 Canada. We talked to SaskBuilds. We talked to BC and their experience, and we discovered that there was much to learn.

We also came, and evidence led us to the decision that in this particular instance with these schools at this time, where we were with a new government, we had a better opportunity available to us and that was to use all of our enhanced approach and apply it to the Public Schools Finance Board. So we would call it, probably, an enhanced conventional school build approach. And I would welcome a conversation about what were some of the savings we were able to then get at because of the additional thinking and the non-ideological approach we took.

To the last part of the member's question, he says, so what does it mean when we talk about a bottom-up approach? What the member—what I want the member to understand in our approach is that what I'm saying is that we have broken down the Estimates process into its component parts. Now, I think, previously under the NDP the Estimates had become a mishmash. I don't know what went on behind closed doors. I only, as a critic for Finance previously, saw the evidence, the great variance that caused great concern between budget and actual, the additional capital requirements for borrowing that were necessary as a result of large deficits ran by the NDP, the concerns raised, the downgrades by

credit-rating agencies, and the debt-service charge accumulated that could not then invest more in schools, health care, education, linear infrastructure and all these other areas of government priority.

So, to the member, I would say this: this ground-up approach, breaking down that process into component parts means you must concentrate on new requirements and new proposals to spend, but the NDP had moved away from a more substantive focus on existing authority to spend. So under the NDP they had largely done away with program review, which meant the only way things got tested were new proposals to spend money. If a department or other area had gotten one time through Treasury Board an approval to spend it was no longer tested, and that is outrageous for people to think about that. Programs must be tested continuously to know that they continue to return value, that they can justify their existence, that there is no better way to deliver a service. In other words, things became galvanized quickly under the NDP approach.

We have re-emphasized this area of program review, and even in these early days this work is continuing to add value to all of Manitoba. We must test both new expenditures and we must test expenditures that are now within departments. That base budget commitment will be what continues to add value and will be what continues to give government, this government, the ability to hit our targets. Just as we've demonstrated in Budget 2018, we are hitting our targets.

*(15:30)

Mr. Wiebe: So I just, again, wanted to ask the minister about the external consultant that he's put out a RFP for. You know, I can understand he might not have those documents in front of him. Maybe it's available on MERX but I just—if—can I—can he give me—maybe he can just take this under advisement and get us that RFP, would be appreciated.

So just wanted to go back to this capital spending, you know, reduction—overall reduction that the minister talks about. And he talks about being very proud about bending that cost curve on capital spending, you know, cut in infrastructure spending by about \$600 million by this government since they took office. That's across the board. That's on hospitals and projects related to health care. That's on schools. That's for sure on roads.

Today we heard in the House a lot of excitement from the other side about a bridge replacement, and

they were—well, I mean, one member was quite excited about it. I'm not sure if anyone else was too impressed by that singular announcement.

I remember, in past years, when \$1 billion being the benchmark of capital spending on infrastructure in this province—sorry, not on infrastructure, on highways—was the standard that we were operating under, and now we're replacing a bridge.

But this is obviously going to have a significant impact. As I said, the minister's quite excited about this bending of the cost curve, and it's having its impact. And it's, of course, having its impact on the health care that Manitobans receive. It's definitely impacting the school system and the resources available for school divisions. Obviously, Manitobans, in a beautiful spring, a Manitoba spring like we're experiencing right now, finally, know a lot about the road conditions, and so they're feeling it.

But perhaps—maybe the minister could just talk about the other side of that coin, which he would know or he should know about, and that, of course, is the slowdown in the economy because of his bending of the cost curve: 7,500 less full-time jobs in just the last year.

And it was the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Schuler) who helpfully did some modelling for us of the economic impact of the capital spending on roads, and his—this was his predictions—sorry, projections, was that the most recent cut alone by this government will mean 1,500 less full-time jobs in Manitoba.

So I wanted to have the minister point to me, in the budget documents, where that significant slowdown of the Manitoba economy is reflected, and where his cut of \$600 million of capital spending, where the economic impact of that cut and the jobs impact is reflected in these budget documents going forward.

Mr. Friesen: First of all, I would challenge the member on the statistics he's quoting. I cannot think where he's getting numbers that would point to a shrinking of the economy.

Let him—let me quote some numbers for him that come from the economists, the chief economists for the province of Manitoba. Indications showing that our plan is working. Total employment increase of 10,500 workers, the largest gain in 15 years. Private sector jobs increased by almost 12,000 workers, the largest gain in 15 years, second highest increase in average weekly earnings among the provinces and

the highest since 2014. Labour income growth has improved to 4.7 per cent in 2017 compared with 0.8 per cent in 2016. Manufacturing sales have increased by 5.3 per cent this year. That is the best in six years. Wholesale merchandise sales increased by 8.1 per cent. That is the highest since 2014.

I noticed as well that motor vehicle sales has increased in Manitoba by 10.2 per cent. It's the best in 15 years. And truck and SUV sales are up by 15.6 per cent, the best in 20 years. I noticed as well that exports to non-US markets increased by 12.9 per cent, the best in six years, fastest population growth in Canada in the last three years. Also noticed that it was the first time, I believe, that we've cracked the 1 million number when it comes to labour force size in the province of Manitoba. I think there's a labour force number out there—*[interjection]*—labour force population of 1 million.

We're leading Canada in private capital investment in 2018.

So I would challenge the member to indicate where he is getting the statistics that he cites. I believe them to be inaccurate.

However, to this subject on hand. So this is a good teaching moment because really, although some of the factors and discussion items become quite complex, there are a couple of, I think, components that can clearly point that member to an understanding of the implication of overspending. The member has cited what he said was a cut to infrastructure. This government made a commitment, fundamentally, to not—to spend at least a minimum of \$1 billion in strategic infrastructure, and we've actually gone beyond that in this budget year. So we are both meeting that minimum commitment.

But, when I told the member to refer to page 15 of the budget, he actually sees two lines there. And the one line indicates this tremendous torquing of the capital investment by the former NDP after 2004-2005, and this graph actually doesn't show the whole story. I wish we had room in the budget papers to have shown the previous 20 years because it really would have shown the degree to which this rapid acceleration at an unsustainable level in strategic capital spending was a departure from a gradual trend line whereby previously, capital spending was tied to the growth of the economy.

So to see this rocket-like departure, especially in the years, conspicuously, of elections or just before

elections, clearly showed there was no plan. There was no plan.

Now, the member seems to suggest that those were the good old days, but I guess it depends on your perspective. So perhaps for the member of Concordia, taking a very narrow view, if he kept the blinders on, looked good on the—at the time. But remember that this same time period, if I could superimpose another set of data, it would be the data that showed the years in which the former NDP government artificially constructed what they said was a recovery period. And they said that the recovery period meant they didn't have to make payments into the Fiscal Stabilization Account. And, at the end of the recovery period, it wasn't in the NDP's favour, so they extended the recovery period.

Madam Chair, what we've done is we're returning the numbers to a more normal size of capital spending. The second line of that page clearly shows what the spending on infrastructure would have been if held to GDP. We're doing triple that right now in Manitoba and providing better investment through our evidence-based approaches for all Manitobans.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): I will simplify my question. It's regarding triple Ps, and it's the PPP or the triple—or the three Ps or Triple P. From what I heard, the government has decided to proceed with that type of contracting out for all school buildings that are to be built, or is that something that's still being planned?

* (15:40)

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for Tyndall Park for the question.

If he had been in the proceedings just previously, he would actually have heard a very robust response and question and answer that we gave exactly on this subject. I'm happy to repeat some key points, and then I'll invite him to check Hansard tomorrow and he'll be able to see the longer context in which that answer was given.

So our government takes an evidence-based approach to decision making. I spoke to the member of Concordia earlier about what that means, to take evidence into account in decision making. This kind of commitment to looking at data and making comparisons based on a matrix, based on merit, measuring, you know, using rubrics, standardizing measurements to be able to make the best investment was underutilized by the NDP government. We're

strengthening our processes. These processes are used in the private sector; they're used in other jurisdictions. We need to do more of the same.

So, to the member's question specifically on P3: no, we will not build this next slate of schools using a P3 approach, and, really, it is the evidence that led us to that decision. And for the member I would say this: if he looks at page 16 of the budget, he will see there an explanation of how we advised KPMG to advise us—or took the evidence presented by KPMG in respect of procurement practices, and KPMG and others said that under the NDP procurement strategies were too conventional. They—opportunities to modernize and get better value weren't taken up by the previous government. Every other jurisdiction, as we said, is doing more in respect of looking at alternate ways to go to market for these things, but it has to be done right.

So what that page and that explanation on page 16 clearly shows is that we did our homework. We looked at other jurisdictions. We looked at the evidence, and for a number of reasons we were led to understand that in this case at this time with the lack of scale that we could achieve for the schools we're proceeding on, it would—was a better process at this point in time to use the lessons we had learned and to enhance our conventional approach in the building of schools. I would want to make clear that as a result of incorporating this new thinking into our approach, we will save millions of dollars in the construction of these schools. We actually will build an entire additional school as a result of the savings that we've harvested. Public Schools Finance Board is confident of their ability to guide this process, but I would add this at the end to say but in no way does this mean that our contemplation of these alternate approaches is somehow limited.

We know that there will be additional opportunities in future to entertain the idea of P3 approaches. Maybe that will be for linear infrastructure, bridges or highways, as it's been done in other jurisdictions. Maybe it will be on things like in Saskatchewan where I note within the last five years a correctional institution—correctional plus mental health institution was completed. I believe that one could have been in St. Albert. Maybe it'll be in some other form, maybe it will be for schools. But we take an unideological approach and we look for value in all the decisions that we undertake.

Mr. Marcelino: Thank you for the answer. I think that clarifies that the current projects will not be

under PPP, but are there projects that have been directed to be undertaken using the PPP model? Is there any one?

Mr. Friesen: The member's question is whether this government is in other cases directing or specifying the approach must be P3. And to that question, I can say to the member: categorically, no. Because, of course, our government will always take an evidence-based approach. We don't take an ideological approach. He will never hear our government saying it must be P3 because we're rejecting conventional forms of capital construction. Instead, we will allow the evidence to guide us to decision-making and we will carefully measure the approaches against each other.

Indeed, in my own conversations with some of the architects of the SaskBuilds model—and of course, those architects of that model were, of course, surprised over time that there was so little interest from their neighbours to the east in Manitoba, under the NDP, of what they were doing. I know that in Saskatchewan there were numerous P3 projects, but you don't have to go all the way to Saskatchewan to see evidence of the successful use of P3, you only have to drive towards the member's constituency, and perhaps a little outside of it, to go to the Chief Peguis Trail to see only one example of a P3 approach that has returned value to Manitobans.

We will allow the evidence to guide us to decision-making. If the evidence points to the use of P3 and says, here the government would be able to harvest additional savings of X amount of dollars that could not be done otherwise, then that's the decision that we will undertake. But we will do so after careful examination. It's important for governments to get it right when it comes to either conventional approaches or P3.

Government has to have a level of sophistication to be able to do this work. But indeed, even when it came to conventional approaches, the analysis that KPMG did, the analysis that we as a new government have done of our systems, have clearly shown that opportunity is being left on the table even in conventional procurement approaches. Does it benefit taxpayers that we locate expertise for the construction of schools and then sequester them away from expertise that we locate for Health capital spending, and then we separate those from other experts that we have in Central Services where we have experts there for procurement in other areas, Sustainable Development and Agriculture? Wouldn't

it be more likely that we would be able to find areas of co-operation and look for areas of increased—or, I should say, decreased overlap and duplication of resources and personnel? But also, it's that better process that that is built when experts worth-work with experts.

So this is the process. This is the lens through which we see the challenge. It won't be P3 for P3's sake, it will be evidence-based approaches to get more value for all Manitobans.

Mr. Marcelino: The question that I now have goes to another one, which is the contingency plan for any disaster preparedness. Do we have any line in the budget that would take care of that, or is that something that is not there? And how much?

*(15:50)

Mr. Friesen: I'll answer the member's question directly. But, just before I do, I did talk about other projects both in our jurisdiction and outside that have used P3 approaches effectively. I would want to add to that list the—in Alberta there's the stony east—Stony Trail-Ring Road. I noticed that from initial cost estimate to the P3 final cost, there was a 58 per cent efficiency built in. I noticed that in Winnipeg, the—you know, when it comes to the Chief Peguis Trail extension project—it was a \$31.5-million savings from initial estimate to the P3 final cost, a 17.6 per cent increase in efficiency against the original estimate.

I can tell you that as the chair of the Treasury Board, we see far too often where projects come at a class D estimate and then a class C—and the member will know this as well from his time on the other side of the aisle—how with those—as the project's cost and scope is fine tuned, costs creep upward. And it is challenging to government to stay ahead of that. So government must always look for opportunities to get better value, and that's why we are doing so.

In respect of the minister's—or the member's second question, when it came to the appropriation for emergency funding, it is appropriation 27 from the budget—Estimate of expenditure and revenue. It's page 120 in the Estimates of expenditure book. He'll see Part A—Operating, Emergency Expenditures indicated at \$51.8 million. That is unchanged from the previous year, and he will know that indicating Part A, Emergency Expenditures, in this way is a convention of budgets.

Mr. Marcelino: My question, now, relates to the—whether there has been some lobby groups that have

met regarding the PPP approach of this government. Has there been any lobby group that has approached this government to consider PPP instead of the conventional way of awarding contracts, and if there should be any, can you please name them?

Mr. Friesen: I'm happy to answer the member's question, and I think the member's question goes to the idea of where are we taking our information from. So I can commit to him that we did very broad-based consultation when it came to the—to weighing the P3 approach. We met with many interest groups here in the province of Manitoba: construction groups, construction associations. We talked to procurement experts. We spoke, as I said earlier, to some of the architects and individuals at this—who built the SaskBuilds model in Saskatchewan. We talked to individuals in government in BC. I believe we also spoke to experts in government in Ontario on this. We met with P3 Canada. We met with industry officials.

So there would have been broad-based—of course we accepted the report of KPMG. We read the evidence, and I would say, moreover, we also broadly consulted with Manitobans.

The member will remember that we had over 30,000 interactions with Manitobans in respect of Budget 2018, and P3s and those approaches did come up in those budget consultation meetings. So I can commit to the member that we consulted broadly in the lead-up to our decision on schools and in our increasing knowledge of private-public partnerships.

Mr. Marcelino: Were there any submissions given by P3 Canada to the office of the minister?

Mr. Friesen: So oftentimes in meetings, proponents leave us with written information. I would not know, off hand, whether when we met with P3 Canada—I believe, if memory serves, that meeting would probably have been about two years ago. I cannot recall if they had left me with written information. If the member would like, I could ascertain whether that's a yes or a no, as to whether they had left written materials.

I would, although, add this. I do recall that in the weeks following our decision, as I mentioned on page 16 of the budget and budget papers, when we indicated that we would proceed with school construction, in respect of these five schools, that shortly thereafter P3 Canada actually released a press release in which they praised Manitoba for the approach they had taken, for the use of evidence.

So I thought that was very interesting that P3 Canada would actually cite us for the process that arrived at that decision making. Now they were clear to add that they challenged Manitoba to take the same evidence-based approach when it came to the next project, and the project thereafter, and the project thereafter, and indeed that will be our commitment.

But I think what that showed, at least to this government and I think it clearly demonstrated it to Manitobans, is that if you have those proponents of the P3 approach saying that you had done your homework, I think it showed that we had indeed done the heavy lifting that was required.

I also recall one other thing. I recall a Free Press editorial that came only days after that decision, and I only recall that editorial because it talked about benefit of the doubt. And the editorial—I think it was in the form of an editorial; it could have been something else, an opposite editorial—they—in any case, they talked about the benefit of the doubt to say, clearly, that is not where Manitobans thought that that press event would go, and maybe, in future, knowing that government was not captive to ideology—clear implication being that the previous government had been—that maybe in future circumstances, when there was some, you know, lack of clarity, the benefit of the doubt might need to be extended to this government that had worked so hard to get it right in respect of these five schools.

And if—and I might as well indicate to Manitobans, again, who may be reading this written record later, that those five schools that this government has committed to build are as follows: it's southeast Brandon—it's a K-to-8 school; Pembina Trails School Division, a K-to-8 school; a 9-to-12 school also in Pembina Trails School Division; Seven Oaks School Division, I note for the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino), a K-to-5; Winnipeg School Division, a K-to-8.

That is in addition to other schools that we already announced the previous year, schools, I believe, both in Hanover School Division and in Garden Valley School Division: 3,300 students in all will be able to boast a new school, and this will include 392 child-care spaces.

I did some chatting with the Minister of Education and Training (Mr. Wishart) a few weeks ago and asked him how this record of the first two years of school construction would have compared with the first two years of school construction under

the NDP, and I think it might be a factor of triple or quadruple the number of schools that was built within the same amount of time.

*(16:00)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): I'd like to thank the opposition for the opportunity to ask a few questions. Of course, it's the day that I don't have any material with me. [*interjection*] Oh, no, everyone's—however, we did a Public Accounts meeting on December 19th and it was very short and in that there was—in those documents, which you probably have with you, under the Finance heading, I believe the first expenditure was a—called 151 Carlton, Mississauga for about \$3.2 million, and then there was about 20 numbered companies.

I wonder if the minister—and maybe not this, but just could endeavour to commit to provide the members of the committee the—some background on those numbered companies and perhaps the—what work was done and the principals of those companies, because it's not clear at all from a numbered company what transpired there. That's my question.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question.

First of all, I share his surprise that the Public Accounts in the December meeting was so brief. I had set aside more time than that and it seemed that the opposition NDP party didn't have further questions. In any case, when it comes to reporting, I would indicate to the member that, no, we do not carry the Public Accounts volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4 to the Committee of Supply for Finance. I can tell him that when I was the Finance critic neither did the minister of that time. Those are two very separate proceedings.

The member knows, though, that there was no reason for him to wait until four months later to ask the question, and he knows, of course, because I know he knows the rules of the House, that there are opportunities afforded to him. He could submit written questions for answers. However, in this case, because he's asking about numbered companies and wanting to have a fuller disclosure of who the principals are of those numbered companies, I would indicate to him that we are bound to indicate those companies in the consistent format by the name of the company. So the reason they appear in volume 2 of the Public Accounts in that form is that that will be their registered name.

But I would also say to the member that he can as easily as my officials and I can—he could investigate and use the appropriate channels to simply request that information to know who the principals are for those companies.

What I would finally say to the member, though, is when it comes to the idea of adding value to those public accounts, there he has my full commitment. He will know that we've introduced legislation that increases the level of disclosure for things like salaries and compensation from the current \$50,000 to a new threshold of \$75,000. Someone might say, well, isn't that actually going against the spirit of accountability? No, it's going towards it.

When the rules were first introduced, the level of disclosure originally contemplated was approximately 10 per cent of the total number of civil servants. So it was meant to provide value by disclosing salaries of the highest paid individuals in government.

By never modernizing or increasing that threshold, the previous government captured more than 50 per cent of all salaries. And you have to ask yourself how that adds value. It certainly adds paperwork. It adds tons—literally of paper, but it doesn't add value.

So, by lifting that threshold to 75, we actually then are reflecting what a indexation factor would have meant for those public accounts and those numbers.

One last thing for the member, and that is this: When he read through the Public Accounts volume 2 vendor payments, he would have noticed that it was a—now a more helpful format, a column format, where you could clearly search and see both the names of the companies—sorry—for the numbers, but also the amounts then paid to those vendors.

That is a new format that we've brought in because we felt like the previous format in rows and lines was of limited utility to those who were seeking to use the information. That, coupled with the digital controls an individual can use online, allows them to use control-search functions to be able to better and more easily compile the data that the member's looking for.

Mr. Fletcher: Madam Chair, my question was 15 seconds. The minister spent probably three or four minutes with his dozen officials to provide an answer—no, there was no answer. And he—the

minister spent five minutes doing that, and we have limited time.

I'm—all I'm asking is that the numbered companies with contracts of millions of dollars, be provided to—and all I want is—Minister, will you provide this committee—you said it's an easy process. You have a dozen people here that can help you do it. You probably have another two or three hundred people in the department who could help you do it. All I'm asking is that you provide the information to this committee on those numbered companies.

And I'm also curious, 151 Carlton, based in Mississauga, the very first company—just like to know what that was about. And that's very simple. That's accountability. It's common sense. Numbered companies are numbered for two reasons: one, the owners aren't smart enough to use letters, or two, the owners are smart enough not to use letters because they're trying to avoid scrutiny. So allow us to scrutinize, and we can move forward.

* (16:10)

And, by the way, while we're on the topic, can the minister also not only provide the dozens of numbered companies under his portfolio, but we might as well extend it to any numbered companies that are listed in Public Accounts or any other publication. The government probably shouldn't be dealing with numbered companies, or if they are, there should be a way of seeing what that company is doing.

So you don't have to answer; all you have to say is, yes, I will get you more details about those numbered companies and what they were doing for—with the government. That's all. That's all you have to say. There's six, seven people. I'm just a humble independent MLA with no resources, no papers, no resources.

But, surely, the Minister of Finance of Province of Manitoba can provide some information on numbered companies. The only time you ever hear about numbered companies, the word Bermuda or Cayman Islands comes up. I know that's not the case here. So why not just demonstrate it, and let's find out what 151 Carlton, Mississauga, is up to. That was just weird. Thank you.

Mr. Friesen: Madam Chair, a number of things. First of all, the minister is wrong. His first question wasn't 15 seconds; it was a minute thirty-two.

Second thing, his second question was almost nine minutes long. So I will endeavour to answer at a length that does not go beyond the question and the preamble that he provided at nine minutes long.

Third thing wrong—[interjection]—when he said I, the Chair, so there's a—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

Madam Chairperson: The—order. The honourable member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher), on a point of order.

Mr. Fletcher: Madam Chair, the minister is criticizing the Chair on time allocation, and I believe that that is not appropriate. And if there is issues around timing, that would be your role to do, not the minister's. And if this minister, if he wants to work with numbers, all he has to do is tell us what the numbered numbers of the companies refer to. So if we want transparency, that's all we're talking about. And, Madam Chair, he shouldn't treat you with the disrespect that we just saw.

Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: I feel I have enough information to rule on this point of order. It is not a point of order. Every member has five minutes to ask a question and five minutes to respond, and I am now going to go back to the honourable minister.

* * *

Mr. Friesen: The member for Assiniboia has the same responsibility to be accurate in this proceeding as I have. When the member says that—when he casts aspersions on companies because they've chosen to list themselves with a number, I decline to agree with him. I can think of any number of legitimate instances in which a company could pick a number for their name.

I will correct the record. I do not have dozens of people seated next to me at the table, but I do have five civil servants here who are fine individuals and experts in their own fields. I did indicate the names of these individuals when we started these proceedings this afternoon, but I would add that we had—have since been joined at the table by Scott Sinclair, the associate deputy minister for Central Services.

I would say to the member, while he said I didn't answer his question, I did. He asked about accountability and I talked about the way the

changes we're bringing in the Public Accounts are actually increasing accountability for all members of the public.

In addition to this, because he asked about vendor payments, I remind him that we've also raised the level of those vendor payments, the threshold now being \$50,000 from five. Why? Because that is a standard threshold we believe that will provide value. It aligns with the practices of other jurisdictions.

I remind the member that the information that he is seeking to have from me today he did not have to wait until the end of April to ask for. He could have left the Public Accounts that night and the very next day he could have sought and received the same information from the company's branch. He is asking me to receive from the company's branch the same information as the member could do this afternoon. He could be in receipt of this information.

I will contemplate his request. My biggest concern is not the isolated request to have the names of 14 companies and have that look—have us look them up—that up for the member. It would be the implication of making that consent knowing that there are thousands of numbered companies in Manitoba. However, I must say for the record that I completely reject the assertion of that member for Assiniboia that somehow that every company that registers its name as a number has a—has some nefarious intent or seeks to not to disclose something in some—I don't know if he's saying it's an illegal way or unethical way. So I would invite him to clarify his comments because I think that they are troubling and I think that they would trouble many Manitobans who are company owners.

So I'm inviting the member to clarify his response, and I would let him know that there are still minutes remaining on my time.

Mr. Fletcher: First, we do count a dozen officials. There's six at the table and there's six in the gallery. And I'm sure they're all busy texting or emailing each other to make sure that all bases are covered. And there's probably people listening for our—on this—proceedings too. So I'm pleased the minister has a tremendous amount of support because at the end of the table, as an independent MLA, it's lonely. It's lonely being here. And it's—and one is the loneliest number.

But the fact is, numbered companies—the minister says every number—no, I didn't say that. I

said numbered companies are often associated. Now, why would that—the minister want to be associated with anything like that? So just bring us clarity. All I'm asking, all the people of Manitoba want is to see who is behind the numbered companies. What did the numbered companies do for the people of Manitoba?

Sometimes the company might have the word consulting. That's 'kinteresting.' That tells us something. Or it might say mining. It might be even easy to assume that that is a mining company. Unless it's the 3M, the Minnesota manufacture and mining. But, in most cases, the name reveals something, and it's also easily searchable.

Madam Chair, I am using up my time because the minister uses up his time. And I'm going to—is this going to be ending shortly. So I just want to say it's in everyone's interest, Minister. Please, just tell us who's behind the numbered companies, the—who are the principals, what service did they provide? And same with 151 Carlton, Mississauga.

*(16:20)

Now, again, that is a weird name. Because 151, of course, is an address in a street in Manitoba—or, in Winnipeg, but the Mississauga part—I don't know where Mississauga is, I don't even know if it's in Canada, but it is definitely something that should be investigated.

So those are the questions. The request is simply to provide material that the minister says is so easy to obtain. Fine. Obtain it. With the dozens of people—or eight dozen—one dozen—we can count one, two, three, four, five, six—six people behind me. I assume they're all with you, minister.

So, as they are tweeting and twitting and emailing each other to find out if this is an answer, I just hope that you can find it within yourself, within the vast resources of the Finance Department to simply provide us—the people's responsibility to see for ourselves what and who is behind the numbered companies and what services they provided.

You know, we're not Bermuda. We're not the Cayman Islands. We're not Mississauga, and I don't want us to—I want the minister to remove any suggestion that a numbered company is—that Manitoba deals with could be doing anything other than what is in the interests of Manitobans.

Also, and while he's at it, and separately—please, by all means, any other numbered company in public

accounts, that would be of great interest, and if the minister can provide that as well, I would say thank you. But if he doesn't, I say, come on. Just provide it. Be good.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Friesen: There's a number of things in the member's preamble that I found troubling, probably most of which was the assertion when he said we are not the Cayman Islands, clearly asserting the idea that a numbered company only exists to try to escape detection or to exist for purposes of fraud. And we must categorically reject that.

So I don't want in any way for my answer to be construed as an endorsement of that view, and that member's responsible for that view. In the eyes of the government, as it should be, a company is a company is a company. We do not cast aspersions on 529 Wellington because they included 529 in their title any more than we cast aspersions on AAA alarms because they have three As in their title. And so the idea put forward by the member that a company with numbers in the name implies wrongdoing must be categorically rejected.

However, also in answer to the member's question, he seems to also be reflecting on procurement practices within government. Now, of course, at this table this afternoon, we have had long conversations about the need to modernize our procurement strategies, and we're hard at work on that, of course, engaging with an external consultant to help us understand the current state when it comes to procurement, look for opportunities both on the short term, medium term and long term. And I insist for that member, those savings will be identified and they will be harvested. We can do better, like the Premier (Mr. Pallister) says, in terms of our engagement with procurement.

However, let me get back to this fundamental point for the member. He says that he was somehow shortchanged in a December Public Accounts meeting because at that time he wanted to know more about numbered companies and who the principals would be and had to wait until today, today being the 25th day of April. But that is not true because, Madam Chair, the member could have gone to the company's office—and I'm now on their website. The company's office has a page called how to search the registry. And under the Companies Online, it says you can search Companies Online to determine if an entity is registered and incorporated in Manitoba, free of charge; and if additional

information is required, a file summary can be obtained which will provide you with a report containing the latest information on record for a business or corporation. And that cost is \$3. And I noticed that you can make that charge on your Visa or Mastercard.

The member began this exchange by asking for 14 names. That member makes enough salary that he could have put the 14 times three charge on his Mastercard or Visa, gotten the AIR MILES points for it, gotten the Avion points for it and had immediate access to the information.

Now, let that member answer a question from me: Does he really believe that the only reason a company would incorporate a number in their title is for purposes of evading legal practices? If it is right, then let him please clarify that for the record this afternoon.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I can't say why I don't have this information or didn't hear the minister's response, but I didn't, so I'd like to just ask again about the external consultant that he was talking about earlier. I had asked about the contract costs and whether we could get a copy of that RFP or whether that was available publicly. Could he—again, he may have answered that and I just didn't hear. Could he answer that question?

Mr. Friesen: So what I said earlier to the member in response to his question was that—and he can check Hansard for a full response—but, essentially, at this point in time, simply because of where that request for proposals in—is, I cannot give him an update until it's made public. And the member will understand that at some points in that contest process that I wouldn't be able to indicate a proponent.

Mr. Wiebe: When was the RFP issued and when does the minister expect that it would be public?

*(16:30)

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question. I can indicate to him that this particular engagement was structured in two parts. First, the government went with a request for quotations, an RFQ process, that launched in mid-December. That process then was followed up by an RFP that was commenced at the end of January and ended at the end of February. And shortly, the government will be disclosing the proponent's name.

Mr. Wiebe: I'm just going to push a little bit further on that one. Shortly? Can he—can the minister define that?

Mr. Friesen: That information should be public within the next four to six weeks.

Mr. Wiebe: I just wanted to maybe steer us back a little bit more on track, here, picking up on items that the minister has identified during this Estimates process, and just ask questions about FTEs that are listed in the Regulatory Accountability Secretariat on page 39.

So the minister had said that the line for other expenditures had increased by \$172 million to accommodate the desktop and other operating costs, and at that time he said it would—that also included the cost of five FTEs redeployed from other departments and agencies.

So there's currently three FTEs listed there. So I just wanted to clarify, does that mean that there are additional eight FTEs working in this area and does the minister think that those staffing levels will be permanently reflected in that staffing line of that unit in future years?

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question on the Regulatory Accountability Secretariat.

As he knows, our government has made a fundamental commitment to regulatory review. We know that the 'regulation'—regulatory burden in Manitoba is too high, and so this is the principal entity that is responsible for establishing those principles of regulatory accountability. It engages with third-party groups, companies, businesses, industry, non-profits, other levels of government. It looks for ways to reduce regulatory requirements to create efficiencies on these external stakeholder groups; it co-ordinates with other government departments and offices; and it facilitates that count of the regulatory requirements. As the member said, it oversees the software that will be used for reporting purposes and tracking purposes.

He does note correctly that on page 39 under that subappropriation 7–1f that there are three FTEs. Think of them as permanent members of the Regulatory Accountability Secretariat, and as he says, there are five others that have been seconded from other departments to work in collaboration with this core group. Secondments from other departments is a long-standing practice of the government of Manitoba.

Mr. Wiebe: So will they be permanently reflected in the staffing line of the unit in future years, and are any of those staff in the Regulatory Accountability Secretariat political staff and, if so, how many and who are they?

Mr. Friesen: So, first, let me be clear that secondments—and this is a conventional use of secondments—would not require that the very next year in the Estimates—the secondments would have to go back to the original department. Secondments could happen in a way that locate resources with a new group for a longer period of time than one year. So no, the member should not anticipate that next year that this work will be done.

The reason for the secondment is that there would be a need to borrow resources on a limited-time basis. And certainly the case can be made here. The member will understand, because we've been very open about the work of the Regulatory Accountability Secretariat, that the first process was to actually count and to know.

There had never been a count of the regulatory burdens facing Manitobans, non-profits, individuals, other levels of government and business. And that count revealed that there were over 900,000 separate regulatory requirements, single pieces of paperwork or otherwise, that would be necessary for individuals to interact with or seek services from the provincial government.

No wonder the Canadian Federation of Independent Business had given the previous NDP government an F when it came to regulatory accountability. I can recall that my first report card as a new Finance Minister—I think we got something like a D—or it might have been a C—which wasn't great, but at least what it showed was a huge improvement.

I note though—more importantly, I think—this year, we did receive an A from the CFIB for significant progress in regulatory accountability and red-tape reduction. What they cited in specific was not only our bill 22, The Regulatory Accountability Act; bill 24, the red tape reduction and government efficiency act of 2017, but also, they talked about the fact that we had done the count where no previous government had even concerned themselves with the out-of-control growth of regulatory requirements.

So to the minister's question—or, to the member's question, I'd say, so the reason the secondments would continue is that it's something of a moving

target. And he should clearly understand that part of the work up front was the initial count, the initial interactions with all these stakeholder, third-party, and other-level-of-government groups. But then also, now, to build an IT framework that will run and report and monitor the growth of regulation. Now, consistent with other discussions we've had at this table throughout the proceedings, he will understand that we believe it's quite possible that over time, the technology itself will drive efficiencies in this work.

* (16:40)

So to the minister's question, well, will you always need to be at three staff plus five more, no, I could speculate that over time technologies and other efficiencies may result in him seeing that subappropriation 7–1f at a lower level. But I would invite him, of course, the next time we have these proceedings, to continue to test that number.

But I can now confirm for the member that there are no political staff who are included in those seconded individuals from other departments, and that is in sharp contrast, I might add, to practices under the NDP where political staff went hither and thither and, I believe, that in—I think that's a word; I like to throw in one challenge each day for Hansard just to make sure I keep them on their toes. My main assistant in my office, and I will name her, Monique Rowson, because today is, of course, administrative assistants' day across Manitoba. So I thank all of my senior assistants, all of my assistants in my office for their excellent work, but I know that my assistant had told me just today that she had got her start here in government working with Hansard, and I told her, well, that must have been an interesting job, and she assured me on some days it was a very, very interesting job indeed, but no more interesting than at times when she got to actually type out the exchanges here at Committee of Supply.

No political staff of any kind in those secondments. If the member wants to know more detail, he—I invite him to ask for it.

Mr. Wiebe: Just on the issue of political staff, last week when I had asked the minister about the political staff in his office, he—

Madam Chairperson: Order, please.

A formal vote has been requested in another section of the Committee of Supply. I am therefore recessing this section of comply—or of Committee of Supply in order for members to proceed to the Chamber for a formal vote.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): 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 Executive Council.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): So we were just discussing in question period some of the job losses that have, I guess, previously been announced, but are now starting to take effect for employees of Vale in Thompson. This is an issue that is having a big impact on the people of Thompson. Like, anecdotally, I could tell the Premier that a couple weekends ago I spoke to a gentleman who took a significant loss on a house that he was selling in the city there. Believe he had to sell it for less than half the value that he bought the house for.

And, again, bigger picture, we also know that there's something like 1,500 to 2,000 job losses expected across the region over the coming years. That's according to the government's own estimates.

So I'd share with the Premier, because I'm not sure that he's aware, but I did meet with the Finance Minister prior to the budget. I had a number of issues that I raised. But one of them was northern jobs and did ask him to give some consideration for some sort of a plan be put in place to assist people who work for Vale and, by extension, the City of Thompson. Again, not looking for a subsidy for the company, but perhaps the consideration of deferred taxes and hydro until such time the nickel prices rebound and then, you know, those deferred taxes and hydro rates could be collected, something of that order. This is something that I've raised with the mining industry and with a, you know, executive from Vale Canada. And, you know, it is what they would like to see. Again, raised it with the steelworkers local in Thompson as well, something they want to see also.

But I'd ask the Premier if he's prepared to put a package together, some sort of plan in place, to help people of Thompson and those who are being impacted by the job losses at Vale because what we're seeing today, I guess, is the formal announcement of job losses which had previously been telegraphed, but there is on the horizon the prospect that further job losses be brought down by Vale in addition to the ones being affected by the

smelter and refinery winding down, that there'd be other, I guess, layoffs having to do with the operations in Thompson.

So I'd ask the Premier if he's putting something together: Is there a plan to assist those in Thompson being affected by the Vale layoffs?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): So these announcements aren't a surprise to anyone. This has been coming for a long time. It's well known, well understood by the previous administration, yet there wasn't action taken at that time, planning done, specific measures taken. We have launched, since we became government two years ago, specific plans to develop the economy of the North, working very diligently to do that. Began with the consultations around Look North project, which were done in opposition prior to that time of us being elected so that we were actually moving to develop strategies prior to becoming government and are now acting on some of those.

Some of those indications of our different approach had been the secession of the subsidy style that was used by the previous government to keep Tolko in operation in The Pas; over \$20 million was thrown at a elsewhere-profitable company that wasn't profitable here for some reason, and we succeeded in that respect, in the short term at least, and we all hope for sustainable growth of that industry in The Pas and the benefits the First Nations of that area as well and all who work there.

In fact, I was just congratulated recently, and I appreciate any positive comments; I hear many of the other, as we all do in politics, but positive comments from the provincial indigenous leader, the grand chief, in respect of the approach that we took in The Pas, and he has communicated to us that this has actually been very beneficial to First Nations communities in the area in terms of the way we're—the way we are approaching that to encourage private companies to work in partnership with the people of the area, indigenous, non-indigenous as well.

Of course, there are a number of programs, as we all know, that are available now to anyone who loses work opportunities and is forced to go and be unemployed for a time. And there are other social programs we all contribute to thereafter as well, and that underpinning of our social security blanket is real and there. But, of course, what we're after isn't for anything but better job opportunities in the North, and that's why we've strategized and worked with communities across the North to develop those

opportunities in a sustainable way. It's why we're working in partnership with the communities that we partnered with over the last several years in the development of a strategy.

And I'll share more details about the Look North strategy in due course with the member because I think it is important to understand that that obviously pertains to communities affected by, although well predicted, always difficult to face layoffs in Thompson, potentially in other communities in the North as well.

Mr. Kinew: I'd note the Premier's comments about The Pas and, you know, the region around The Pas and, again, would direct the Premier to provide some information about Thompson and the community that will be impacted most directly by the lay-offs in Vale—or at Vale, I should say. It's my understanding that there's a—you know, even once the smelter and refinery are wound down by Vale—that there is going to be a target for cost reductions in that operations centre that is tens of millions of dollars in size, and as a result, that could potentially impact many jobs. We know that there's currently a plan to layoff hundreds of people, 169 of those being announced today. But the concern articulated both by management, also by labour, also by the city administration in Thompson, the mayor—the concern is that there's going to be many more jobs lost. So I'd like to know if the Premier could talk about what is planned for the community of Thompson. Perhaps it's in the Look North document; perhaps there's another plan more specific to address those laid off.

Some of the ideas that I've heard from people in Thompson are that retraining opportunities would be important. One of the other ideas, I think, that a lot of people float in the community is that cold-weather testing for some manufacturers should be explored, expanded and seen as an opportunity, again, not just to create jobs, but also good jobs, high-wage jobs that, you know, can really sustain families and help the community perhaps rebound from this difficult period.

So, curious to know whether there's, you know, specific details the Premier can tell us about plans for Thompson. Are there specific initiatives that we can examine? Are there programs or targeted forms of intervention that the Premier could tell us about? That would be welcome news, I think, for the people of Thompson.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I can share with the member that we're—we are changing the reality of taking the

North for granted that, unfortunately, the previous government lived by. And that's best evidenced by the inaction that was taken in northern communities with a full understanding these layoffs were coming.

The unfortunate evidence of that would lie in the trip by the former premier, Mr. Selinger, and his deputy, Eric Robinson, up to The Pas in anticipation of the upcoming election where they, according to the former chief at OCN, offered to, in exchange for votes, provide jobs at Manitoba Hydro. That's not economic development. That's not the right way to treat anybody and, certainly, it's a disrespectful way to treat First Nations. That was the economic development strategy as far as we could tell in terms of the North by the previous government. Our government's changing that former reality by focused strategies that we've developed in partnership with northern communities. Community leaders and individuals—indigenous, non-indigenous, Metis—across the North have participated in that process, and it's a viable and a long-term plan.

The member asked about specific targeted initiatives, and that's something that we can perhaps look into, but our macro strategy is to develop the North overall so that people who enjoy living there—and there are many, most, I think, who've experienced northern living, like it—can work in another northern community if there's an opportunity there. They're ready to move; they've told us that—if they have to. But they all—obviously, once you make those connections in a community, it's a tough thing to do.

So we'd like to see economic development in every community in the North, but realistically we understand that that depends on partnering with the private sector as well. And private sector development, private sector capital has to flow into these areas to make this happen. It isn't just up to government. It's up to government to create an environment where private capital can be put at risk. That's why—you know, and that's happening in Manitoba and it needs to happen more, of course, in the North. But the way it'll happen is through things like our mineral-development protocol so that the barriers, the uncertainties that have existed for too long to block private sector capital from flowing into opportunities for exploration and subsequent mining projects, mineral development, can create jobs. And it's in the prospecting stage, in the extraction stage. But, unfortunately, the leader of the NDP doesn't support that, obviously; signed the Leap Manifesto which says leave it in the ground. So he obviously

doesn't think that mining is an important thing, and I'm wondering how he feels he's justified in expressing such concern about losses of jobs in a mining project when he himself doesn't support mining projects.

* (15:10)

Mr. Kinew: It's a lot of false information in the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) concluding statement, there. I did sign the Leap Manifesto; however, the Leap Manifesto doesn't say to cease activities. What it says is to talk to people in your neighbourhood about how to create an environmentally friendly future.

So that's what I did. I had a town hall meeting in Fort Rouge and talked to people from my area about what their priorities were in advance of the Province bringing down their carbon tax plan, and I've been speaking with a lot of people about this issue. Some people take a more aggressive approach, some people take a more conservative approach, but I do believe in the importance of consulting with people and of listening to people and really engaging them on how to create a lower carbon future.

Again, I had a meeting with the mining industry association to discuss some of the challenges in Thompson and, you know, they indicated to me that it was, you know, easier to work with me than it is to work with the current Premier, and, you know, I'm supportive of the mining industry and the ability of resource jobs to remain in the province.

I know in my own home community in northwestern Ontario, you know, a lot of the people I grew up with, most people became commercial fishers or guides, I guess, as they entered adult life, but recently New Gold opened a mine, and now some of the people that, you know, had limited job opportunities, all of a sudden they're working in the mine. And these are good-paying jobs and they're providing the dignity and the independence that makes jobs so important.

So I definitely support that, but again, mining has to be done in the right kind of way. We know that there's environmental rules and regulations that are needed and all those kind of protections put in place around remediation. Those things all matter.

So, again, I just put those words on the record, and I'd note that the Premier, you know, perhaps can come back and share some details about plans for Thompson, maybe in the House, maybe in the committee in the future.

We've talked about a few different subjects so far. One of the, I guess, big priorities for the government—or perhaps it's not a priority, you know, in fairness to the Premier; it's one that's being kind of downloaded onto the Province. I'm not sure it's the Premier's own priority, but it's the issue of cannabis legalization. We know that there's going to be a lot to come there.

The Premier has announced plans around the distribution, I understand that's going to be done by the government agency, and then also announced the RFP and the awarding of the contract for the distribution of cannabis to four proponents.

One of the stories that I saw recently is that I think one of the proponents that was approved here in Manitoba, National Access Cannabis, is being—or has announced a partnership with Second Cup to retail, I think, cannabis in, I think, joint locations, operations that would be run as sort of a partnership between National Access Cannabis and Second Cup. It was sort of a national announcement; didn't really have much details on the locations but did mention that, obviously, that this company is going to be operating in provinces, including our own, across the country.

So I guess maybe just to begin on broaching the subject of cannabis retail legalization, all of that to come this year, wondering if the Premier can tell us whether or not that National Access Cannabis and Second Cup partnership is going to be operating here in Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: Well, because all this is in development, I won't be discussing any details of it. It'll roll out under its own steam in due course. And the—I can tell the member, though, that the checking on, as is necessary, each of the tentative successful bidders is nearing its completion, I believe, at this time, and other discussions are under way in terms of indigenous involvement, as well, on-reserve. And so that is also under way. I would correct the record, though. The Leap Manifesto does say leave it in the ground, and the member, in supporting it, has put himself in a vulnerable position; if he wishes to express support for mining in any way, he's contradicting his previously stated position.

In terms of his consultations with the people of Fort Rouge and their non-support for mining, that doesn't surprise me. But, certainly, for us as a government, we do, and we are looking for ways to expedite it.

In terms of consultations, I would share with the member that extensive consultative work done prior to us becoming government and since, in terms of the Report and Action Plan for Manitoba's Northern Economy, which I invite him to read, I think he'll feel great confidence—it was just released last October. But I think he'll feel great confidence in knowing the sincerity of our efforts in the North, as revealed by the fact that we have a task force, for example, comprised of northerners. Tony Mayham is the CEO of Keewatin Railway Company; he's involved. Norman Ross is an OCN resident, a well-known economic development specialist in that area and respected. Julyda Lagimodiere is one of the Cabinet members of the Manitoba Metis Federation. Mike Pyle, CEO of Exchange Income Corp.; David Kobliski, Nelson House Development Corp.; Dianne Russell from the Flin Flon & District Chamber of Commerce; Mike Spence, of course, the mayor of the Town of Churchill; David Muswaggon is from Pimicikamak First Nation; he's on their executive council. Mark Scott is from the Mining Association of Manitoba; he's the board chair. Oswald Sawh is the CEO of community futures development fund. Doug Lauvstad is the president of the University College of the North.

That was the task force members. The co-chairs: Christian Sinclair is the chief of OCN; interesting background: military training and economic development training, a well-educated, well-spoken gentleman; Chuck Davidson, co-chair, president and CEO of Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, grew up in northern Manitoba.

So great, great involvement by a cross-section of Manitobans who sincerely care about the future of the North. Our plan was developed by northerners for all of Manitoba to benefit from. And, if it's about anything, it's about people, and the current situation in the North is one that requires attention, and we have focused our attention on it. The purposes, the general purpose of this task force, which first met in December of '16, is to inspire an economic movement in northern Manitoba—and we're enthusiastic about this—to identify sustainable and long-term solutions—*[interjection]* where are you pointing me? Highlight the section I need there, please—identifying sustainable and long-term solutions that lead to economic growth and diversification, building understanding and collaboration across communities.

And so, with this plan, and this is not our only plan for economic development, but it is a key part

of it, it'll work in conjunction with other economic strategies that we've developed not least of all, and I'll elaborate on this a little later, but this plan will work in conjunction with the economic strategies that we're having developed now as a consequence of the Deloitte report that we commissioned to look at how economic development was done in the past. We found through that report many flaws, lack of co-operation, lack of focus, lack of strategy, lack of consultation. And so we're shaping our approach in a different way. And we're excited to do that, and I'll share more information with the member in a minute.

Mr. Kinew: So I note that the—I guess it's the due diligence on the successful candidates for the RFP is nearing completion on the cannabis front. I think that the Premier has awarded—I think it was four companies to sell cannabis in Manitoba. I guess there's due diligence being carried out on those four companies.

* (15:20)

I'd like the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to provide an update on the location of the proposed cannabis stores. Can he tell us how many there will be in Winnipeg, how many in Brandon, how many across rural Manitoba?

Again, I think that this information is likely in hand, so I'd be curious to see what the results are and whether Brandonites, Winnipeggers, people who live in other parts of the province could get some indication as to the number of stores that will be retailing cannabis in their respective cities.

Mr. Pallister: I should also mention that the Leap Manifesto actually calls for an end to all trade deals as well. And so in supporting the Leap Manifesto, I'm taking it that the member would be against NAFTA, or CETA, or—well, any interprovincial trade deal as well, because it's absolute. That's clause 10 in the Leap Manifesto. So calling for an end to all trade deals, that's an interesting position to take. Anyway, that's the Leap Manifesto for you.

It's interesting you know, that pipeline proposal that went through such a rigorous process, just the revenues from that project, were that to go ahead, would pay for a national pharmacare program multiple times. And yet some of the same people that would oppose the pipeline project to get a raw material shipped out to people who want to pay for it and create jobs here in Canada, those same people want a free national pharmacare program, but they

don't understand that the money has to come from somewhere.

I'd be interested to know—because I know the member was in a recent session promoting the idea of a national pharmacare program without any reference to what it would cost, I wonder if he actually isn't in a difficult position, saying he wants to leave resources in the ground on the one hand, not have trade deals on the other, and at the same time advocating for an expansion of social programs that have to be paid for somehow.

How would they be paid for if the resources stayed in the ground, and how would they be paid for if we couldn't have trade deals that would allow them to be marketed even if you got them out of the ground? That would be difficult to do.

Anyway, the people of the North are kind of hoping that mining and exploration can happen, and that would mean not leaving everything in the ground. Because if you left it in the ground, you wouldn't be able to sell it effectively and there'd be not much reason to explore or prospect. You wouldn't have a reason to do that.

The people of Thompson aren't solely dependent, of course, on mining for enterprise. And they are looking, and that's what they told us in this—told our team—can we close that please? In the northern summit tour that the committee embarked on with meetings in December of '16 in Thompson, meetings in fact at that time with representatives from Vale and The Mining Association of Manitoba, meetings in The Pas in December of '16 with industry representatives, meetings in Flin Flon with industry representatives from HudBay and UCN, and meetings continuing into 2017.

A wide array of work was done by this group and their—what they discovered is interesting and I'll share that with the member, given another opportunity to do so.

Mr. Kinew: So, again, the question was about the number of retail locations for cannabis in Manitoba, including but not limited to Winnipeg, Brandon, other towns and cities across the province.

You know, we know that the announcements will be, I'm sure, made with fanfare and media interest when the proponents announce their individual plans and, you know, I'd respect the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) wish maybe not to interfere and let the cat out of the bag for each individual company's plan to announce their locations, how

many there will be, where they will be located, but I'm sure that the Premier does know how many, on the aggregate, there will be in each of these communities, and I would be curious to know, also, just so we can start to engage in this conversation about what retail cannabis is going to look like here in Manitoba. We know that there's bills on debate. I think they moved ahead to the next stage just a few nights ago in terms of legislative process, but a lot of this is going to have to do with the rules that are set under those pieces of law and also it's going to have to do with the implementation, some of the decision making that the province does around the retailing of cannabis.

So I'd ask the Premier again if he can share with the committee how many retail locations there will be for cannabis stores, you know, by location, and by location I don't mean individual location; I mean how many stores in Winnipeg? How many stores in Brandon? How many stores in other municipalities?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I've endeavoured to explain to the member there's a process under way and I respect that that process has to be pursued, that's one of determining not only who may establish stores, whether it's private sector companies or consortiums of sorts, that seems to be the makeup of most of the successful bidders so far. It's kind of co-operative groups with different ownership structures, but those have been or are in the process of being verified to make sure that they're—they can be approved to get into the business of marketing the government approved and regulated cannabis and then, of course, later, according to the federal government, they'll be moving to edibles and oils and broadening out the array of products that may be available.

So I should also mention to the member that local governments have a say in this. We've respected their right to say no. If they don't wish to have cannabis dealerships in their areas they don't—they're not going to be forced to do that—and the same, of course, with First Nations communities, right? First Nations communities aren't going to be put in a position where they're going to be—have pot dealerships forced on them by this government, so that process is under way as well. That's a consultative requirement that we need to abide by—not constitutionally, but just in terms of common sense—that we give the opportunity for communities to verify if they do or do not wish to have cannabis dealerships in their jurisdictions, so that process is under way.

I just go back for a second, though, to give a more substantial answer to the member in respect of the North and the strength we feel that can be developed there. What the economic summits that were held, as I referenced earlier, around the province in various communities came back with, was a few key points and the one at OCN in particular, I thought, was really interesting. But Thompson's was great as well, and they talked about untapped potential, lots of underutilized resource potential—again, not advocating we leave it in the ground, you know, they didn't say that. They wanted us to make sure that we looked for opportunities.

And I'll tell the member more about our protocol development exercise, because we've really been complimented by First Nations leaders on this, for going out to the communities, co-chaired by a former chief, now of Norway House, Ron Evans, and former deputy premier, Jim Downey, both with a tremendous love of the North and both with a work ethic that is unrivaled, I think. And they've been going out to First Nations communities all over the province meeting with leadership, really listening, and we heard from them—so far we've heard from them and we've already acted on suggestions they brought back from the First Nations leadership how to make the system work better.

The goal here isn't to get a one-size-fits-all thing at the end of the day, but it is to get to a point where exploration companies can have a sense of confidence when they go to these communities and the communities can have a sense of confidence, too, that there are certain protocols that will be followed so that it's not left to doubt or negotiation every single time a company's looking to develop a project.

* (15:30)

This, other jurisdictions have done and benefitted from it whether—you can talk about Plan Nord in Quebec. British Columbia—certainly many parts of British Columbia on resource development, certainly not exclusive to mining either, but to—also to lumber projects have benefited by having understandings developed among First Nations leaders with industry leaders—both at the table, both sets of people at the table—with the opportunity to make that understanding, a better certainty, exist in their jurisdictions. Those jurisdictions are benefiting from that work. Manitoba will benefit from it too. Should've been undertaken—it's like planting a tree, you know. Best time to plant a tree was 40 years

ago. Second best time's today. So we're working to plant that culture, that opportunity for greater benefits in our province in terms of the North now, something—a region of the province taken for granted in the past that we most certainly feel has got tremendous potential, and we're looking to work with the communities there that are sincerely wanting to see development, and they are, to make sure that that can be a reality.

Mr. Kinew: Continuing on with the questions about cannabis, I was reading about, you know, some of the figures that have been booked in the government's budget for the implementation costs related to cannabis legalization, and also I think it had to do with the costs of the implementation of carbon tax, not necessarily the revenues that would be collected, but just, like, the costs of implementing these changes. But the figures that I saw had them sort of lumped together.

I'm wondering if the Premier (Mr. Pallister), maybe just focusing on cannabis, can talk about the implementation costs. And I know, seriously speaking, that there are going to be many, many of them borne by the provincial government. You have the impacts on the health-care system. You have the impacts specifically on mental health and addictions. You have issues around justice, enforcement, all sorts of different details, I guess, around implementation to be carried out in those different areas.

So I'm wondering if, you know, the Premier, you know, can share with the committee some of the numbers around the cost of implementation of the legalization of cannabis, and if he can do so, I guess, with—if he can do so with specific reference to where those implementation costs will show up in different departments of government. Do we have an idea what the implementation is going to be for law enforcement? Do we know what it, you know, Justice, department-wide, what's the impact going to be there in terms of, I guess, whether anything's being contemplated in Municipal Relations, so on and so forth?

Again, the question I'm interested in, I think that it makes sense that there are going to be many additional costs borne as a result of the legalization of cannabis, but my interest is in perhaps taking a deeper look, deeper dive, and just getting a better understanding of what this is actually going to look like.

So, again, just would ask the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to walk us through some of the areas that the implementation of cannabis will show up in terms of expenditures in the government's books.

Mr. Pallister: So I just need some clarity from the member, then. So he's not interested in learning more about our plans for the North, then?

Mr. Kinew: Well, I'd asked several questions, specific questions, about northern jobs earlier on, and, not hearing any answers, I moved on to questioning about cannabis. So the focus of the questions now are about cannabis. Again, I am always interested in information about northern jobs, but, again, the specific questions I'm asking now have to do with cannabis. I'd ask that the First Minister, you know, provide some insight into the costs being borne as a result of the legalization of the drug later this year.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'll take the member at his word, then. He said he was interested in northern job creation—so am I—but he also said he didn't get any answers, so I'll continue to give him more answers to the point that he gets satisfied with the answers, I guess.

So, Thompson, we had an economic summit in Thompson. I referenced that earlier, but I didn't share with the member what the findings were from the meetings with local people, and I think that's something we should talk about.

In terms of categories, in terms of the summary discussion—youth, there was a clear agenda shared by everybody at the Thompson meeting that we need to focus on youth to focus on long-term economic growth, getting youth engaged in learning, engaged in the community, engaged in enterprise, engaged in local economy. That's a goal I think we can all share, and that's a really difficult goal to achieve if you believe in the Leap Manifesto, because what that Leap Manifesto says—if I can find it here—is really interesting on that front. It actually says, on the mineral exploration, it not only says you should leave it in the ground, it actually says there should be no extraction, and it says that if you wouldn't want it in your backyard, then it doesn't belong in anyone's backyard. That's what the document says.

So I don't know, that kind of rules out a lot of things. If you don't want it in your backyard, you can't have it. Let me think. How many—anybody here want a manufacturing plant that processes peas in their backyard, or a—say a potato processor ready

to invest \$1 billion in the Manitoba economy in their backyard? I guess if you don't want it in your backyard, we can't have it.

How you're ever going to do mining with an attitude like that, I don't know, but that seems to be the member's position. But it isn't ours.

So in Thompson they're interested in job creation for youth and they felt that that was an important focus. They talked about housing, talked about community collaboration, the need to collaborate better between educational institutions, industry and government to realize opportunities.

And they really reinforced at this meeting our approach on the scholarship and bursary programs that we are focusing on lower income younger Manitobans, naturally, by—the nature of our post-secondary training seems to be mostly directed—not all, but mostly directed at younger Manitobans.

Inspiration. What—they really commented on this part of things, the inspirational thing. There are success stories, and I know, I've been in opposition half my political life, I understand we tend to focus on problems when we're in opposition, sometimes too much, but I would say there are success stories in the North. We need to talk about them, and I would say that the development in The Pas, the change from the old Tolko-subsidy approach to a new approach, is paying dividends. Certainly, that's what the Grand Chief has told us, and so I think there's a refreshing change that's happening attitudinally also with many First Nations.

I've seen the attitudinal change with some of our First Nations community leaders in my 20 years in public life away from wanting—always first going to the federal or provincial governments and saying we want funding for this project, to now saying we want to develop this project, and that's a big difference in attitude. It doesn't sound like much, but it is a big difference in attitude. It's a attitudinal shift that's happening in the North not just in indigenous communities, but northern communities as well. It's interesting to observe and healthy to see, because what communities are looking for isn't a handout as much as it once was, but a hand up and genuinely wanting to see partnerships develop where they can see increased opportunity for their young people.

So Thompson, lots of great ideas there and I'll get into the—I know the member'll be interested in this because this does answer an earlier question he asked that he didn't feel he was satisfactorily treated

with information on. I'll share more information with him in a minute.

I should mention, though, that we really focussed on the tourism development piece as well. Really done something the previous government never did, which is to direct, in a disciplined way, funds towards tourism and promotion of the province, and our principal focus has been, in the first two years, on northern Manitoba tourism opportunities. And not exclusively, you know, polar bears and beluga whales—but that's an incredibly attractive aspect of what draws tourists to the Churchill area, but the North generally, and that's pretty exciting and we're starting to see the results of that.

Mr. Kinew: Premier just said that indigenous people were previously looking for a handout. I don't agree with that, but what is he referring to when he says that?

Mr. Pallister: It's actually referring to the previous government's tendency to offer subsidies and handouts as a way to buy political support, as opposed to offering incentives for partnerships that would see real growth and sustainable job creation. I was referring to the attitude of the previous government in the way in which they would go to northern communities, offer money for political support, offer handouts.

* (15:40)

I was talking about the handout programs that the previous government offered Tolko, a prosperous company, multinational. I was talking about the handout programs that the previous government offered OmniTRAX, a prosperous, multinational company. I was referring to the attitudinal approach taken by the previous government which was mistaken, misguided, demeaning and belittling to the independent spirit of indigenous people in our province.

Mr. Kinew: No, he wasn't. And he knows that.

An Honourable Member: No, I was—[interjection]

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

I haven't recognized you here.

An Honourable Member: Oh, okay. I'll put it on the record.

Mr. Chairperson: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: No, he was not referring to that and instead chose to dodge the question.

But notwithstanding that, he makes reference to Churchill. There was an opportunity for the Premier to travel to Churchill. I think it would have been well received earlier this year. His Cabinet minister showed up in the community. But I'm wondering why the Premier himself didn't attend. It seemed like an easy way to show support for the community, make some time, spend a bit of time listening to folks, be there for the announcement.

There was, I think, announcements made about the town centre, the roof, other renovations inside the movie theatre, things like that. But, again, I think it was notable that the Premier wasn't there, because I think many people were expecting to see him. And it surprised me.

So I wonder why the Premier didn't attend that trip to Churchill.

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate the question because it says a lot more about the member than me.

And what it says about the member is he cares about how things look more than how they are. So, while our government is pulling together a cohesive plan, a fundamentally well-focused investment strategy for the people of Churchill—while we are developing those strategies, he's concerned about a photo op.

I don't care much about photo ops. What I care about is that the people of Churchill have protections, which we have arranged and made sure were there for them, that we have negotiated with the federal government to share in terms of things like cheaper food availability while their rail service has been interrupted, suspended and is waiting for progress to be announced.

That I am concerned about. What the people of Churchill care about is results, and showing up for a photo op isn't one of my favourite things to bother about. What I worry about is results for the people of Churchill.

So we pulled together a proposal that we will be investing in, and we used it to work with the federal government to lever somewhat more action out of them. And we encourage them to act in their areas of constitutional responsibility in respect of rail and port. But we are—that is not a small commitment. That's a \$500-million commitment, which sure as heck beats a photographic opportunity in a local

paper as far as the people of Churchill are concerned, including their mayor.

Mr. Kinew: You know, it may be that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) can only see the value of going to a community like Churchill for a photo op, but I would suggest to him that while he was there, he could have taken the opportunity to listen to the people of Churchill.

There are many people in Churchill. It was my experience—it was actually a great experience to visit the community for the first time earlier this year. But it was my experience when I went there that people are so confronted by a challenge right now that they will literally stop you in the street. They will pull their truck over to stop to talk to you, to explain the severity of the situation. Whether it's the price of food, whether it's the price of gas, that—you know, when I walked into the grocery store to take a look at the prices, not only was I, you know, I guess confronted with the very stark evidence that the rail line closure is happening in the form of higher food costs. I had people coming up to me in the Northern store and saying, well, this is what milk used to cost, here's what it costs now. Here's what the fruit used to cost, here's what it costs now. Again, walking on foot around the community, a lot of people stopped to talk as they're going about their business.

So, again, there could have been tremendous value the people of Churchill see in their Premier on the ground. Maybe to make a commitment but, perhaps, more importantly, to listen. And I think that that, you know, sense of validation, of being heard is very important. And it's a key attribute of leadership to be able to listen to people. But even before you listen, just to show up. When you have people having a crisis, when you have people who are struggling, I think it's important to show up and just say we're here and we're going to work with you to try and improve things.

So that would have made the Premier's trip worthwhile. So, again, I'm still puzzled why the Premier wouldn't take the opportunity, you know, to spend a Sunday afternoon in the community. Or, you know, Sunday morning. I forget exactly how the timing worked out, but seems like it would have been a relatively straightforward process and would have gone to a lot of good in the community.

So, returning to the issue of cannabis, but on the same issue of the Premier's travel, I understand that the Premier took a trip to the United States to examine what's going on in Iowa regarding

legalization of cannabis. I'm under the impression, though I don't have the exact details in front of me, that I think the Premier met with various experts, maybe some academics included in that lot. I don't know if there was any government officials that he met with on that trip to Iowa, but, again, I guess the idea behind this trip is a fact-finding mission, if I understand it correctly.

And so again, to return to the topic of cannabis and what plans this government has that they can put on the record here, I'd ask the Premier, I guess, first, to talk a bit about who he met with on this trip to Iowa and also what information was relayed to him. What did these different experts that he met with have to say to him about the experience in their state? And I guess it would be interest to this committee is, you know, are there parallels between their experience in Iowa and what's going on here in Manitoba? You know, I guess there's maybe—you know, we're in the Prairies. They're in the Midwest. So there's maybe some similarities across those lines, but I'm not sure about the demographics in Iowa, how comparable they are. Impact on state coffers, whether there's any lessons that can be drawn there in terms of the impact here in Manitoba. But I am curious to know who the Premier met with, what the conversations entailed, what sort of information was gathered and how can it inform the deliberations that we're having about legalizing cannabis here in Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: So showing up to listen is exactly what this government's doing, exactly what we're co-ordinating with ministers, with our backbenchers. That's what we're doing by working with individuals who are concerned about the North but about many other issues, whether it would be cannabis or carbon or any number of issues. So when the member speaks about showing up when people are in crisis, I understand he has more experience with that than I do, but the fact remains that we have—in fact, he has more experience with creating crisis than I do. But the fact remains that we've organized our government to show up in areas where it matters most, and they did. They showed up in Thompson at numerous times.

He referenced minister's visits. We've also organized our Look North program to make sure that people got to the community, and so they did and they heard from the people there in a sincere way—not an optical illusion, a real way—by taking the time to bring people together and actually constructively listen, not anecdotally by walking down the street

and hearing from somebody about something, but actually organizing to focus to get results for the community. That's how we organized our listening.

Northern mineral and other resource potential development was item 1 in terms of the priorities that northern communities told us they wanted us to develop, and that's why we're focused on the mineral development protocol. Indigenous engagement and partnerships was item No. 2. We have reached out to every northern community, every indigenous community in the province, and we continue to on various initiatives, whether it's child and family reform; on the implications for mineral development protocols, as I referenced earlier; on economic development initiatives that we're looking to pursue; in terms of an array of other issues that affect indigenous people both on and off reserve. Strategic infrastructure investment also a key concern and, of course, the suspension of rail service in Churchill comes up frequently in northern discussion and obviously in the community of Churchill was of uppermost importance.

* (15:50)

But this is why we pulled together—and if I can get the document I can reference some of the categories of investment that we're committed to making in the community of Churchill, many of which far exceed anything ever done by the previous administration in their time in government, because we recognize that in terms of categorical investment there are a number of areas: sewer extension capital project; in terms of the legal services that people need, Victim Services, Community Safety, Legal Aid. There are many, many others, where, going forward in terms of road development, in terms of the health funding and in terms of the community centre itself, which, of course, is the hub of the community there, there is significant capital investment required to bring that centre to its proper state that was left unaddressed for a long, long time by the previous administration. We're ready to address it.

So we've listened. We've heard. Our team has done a sincere effort, I think, at endeavouring to understand what the real needs of the community are and to address the real needs of the community that goes far beyond what the member has advocated in terms of an appearance, visible appearance one day with a camera in hand. So in terms of things like health and seniors, active living, festival programs and cultural supports, co-ordinating with Manitoba Hydro—this is a project that we're looking at to get

people off propane, onto hydro, a more—obviously, a greener alternative and a better long-term alternative.

I referenced earlier the travel initiatives and the tourism support that we're investing in and that we were—we are looking to enhance: Communities Economic Development Fund. We've got education and training. In terms of UCN's operation there, children—Churchill Adult Learning Centre and northern studies centre—or resource centre. Some of these programs have been in place; others are going to be strengthened, continued and enhanced over time. Housing operations—the list goes on.

Churchill is—has been a recipient in the past of some support. We're ready to commit to doing more. We also, of course, entered into a 5-and-a-half-million-dollar contribution agreement for the supply and shipment of critical propane to ensure the community's safety and that it had sufficient supplies to get it to the summer of '18. So, in every respect, we're making efforts to ensure the security of the people of Churchill that go far beyond a fly-in-drop-down-take-a-picture-and-leave situation.

Mr. Kinew: Well, some other great ideas that, you know, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) might like to replicate if he goes to Churchill is, you know, you could hold a town hall in the community. Met with many people there in the town centre.

An Honourable Member: Thinking of flashbulbs.

Mr. Kinew: We had a town hall meeting. Heard a lot of the concerns. We don't use flashbulbs anymore. I think that practice ceased a few decades ago. I couldn't—we could have used a rim shot there in the committee room for that one, but notwithstanding that, we just have the—

An Honourable Member: Stand still. Wait for the Polaroid to develop.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, and we don't develop film, either. It's all collected on a, you know, photosensitive sensor.

But, again, yes, there were cameras present. It's important, I think, to record the comments that are made, and it's important to document what people share. And often I think it's more powerful to see video testimony than just to see the transcript, you know, of someone's conversation. So that's why we did that.

We also went to the hospital, saw a very, very impressive health centre, really, in Churchill.

They actually have, you know, I think, personal-care-home-type beds available there, but again, I think it would be a matter of finding folks who would need them and matching them up with the service. They also have two acute-care beds in their emergency department. Again, very well-appointed, state-of-the-art facility there. Again, that could serve a lot of people in, I guess, maybe other fly-in communities. And I think a lot of this infrastructure there in Churchill was built up because there used to be a base there, right? And so they made a lot of these investments. And so, again, you know, that's just a small amount of things that, you know, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) could do if he decides to go back, and I'm sure people would attend a town hall with the Premier as well and share their ideas.

Again, most conversations right now do lead back to getting the rail line fixed, and that's why people were very happy to hear that we're working on a motion, a brief, before the Canadian Transportation Agency, the federal regulator for railroads in the country, and that that process is moving forward I think was very much appreciated by them because it can result in—in order to repair the rail line it could result in—you know, an order to pay into a hardship fund that could be accessed by Churchill and other communities.

So that was, you know, time well spent and just, I guess, a small sampling of some of the time we spent with people in the community.

But again, the question was about a trip to Iowa that the Premier went on, a trip to Iowa to collect information about cannabis legalization. Again I suspect that there's many jurisdictions in the US that we could look for some indication on what to expect. Colorado, obviously. I think they were first out of the gate, so there's probably a lot of study that can be done around them.

But again, I'd be curious to know, because the Premier, I believe, actually did travel to Iowa—I'm not sure if he went on a similar fact-finding mission to Colorado or California or any other states like that, but I would be curious about the Iowa expedition and the trip there.

The Premier could share with us details on who he met with. Maybe not, you know, granular detail of what they said, but maybe a high-level summary of the information that was shared with him there, and what parallels, if any, the Premier found or that, you know, this committee might earnestly endeavour

to further investigate between the legalization of cannabis in Iowa compared to Manitoba.

So again I'd ask the Premier to share his finding from his trip to Iowa and what lessons they have regarding the legalization of cannabis.

Mr. Pallister: Yes. So the legal and social transition of cannabis from illegal to legal is a pretty momentous decision that the federal government is moving ahead on, as the member knows, rather rapidly—I think for many people, anyway. It's complicated and it creates challenges which we're rising to, but it nonetheless is going to create problems, I think, because of the rapidity of it. Because there's a lot of young people who—in particular—according to the researchers at the University of Iowa.

It's a—their driver-simulating facility measures—and I won't get the scientific terms right, but I'll try to explain it—basically measure the impact of impairment on driving skills. And they have a—they're one of 10 accredited facilities in the United States, and they can—they have a football-size—football-field sized testing facility where the simulator works where you could actually go—if you're concerned about truck safety, which I know the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey) would be, because there's a lot of trucking involved in getting goods to, you know, to the northern communities—trucking safety, for example. They can actually put the cab of the semi into this simulator and measure the effect of impairment on it—and impairment whether it's alcohol or drugs.

It was a fascinating day that we organized. It wasn't—we just organized it. It wasn't a conference or anything. It was just the researchers came together and just devoted some time to me to educate and give some input. I won't—I don't have my written summary here, but I could just say some things anecdotally, that the first thing they said was alcohol's the biggest problem; it's not cannabis, and it won't be cannabis, and even now it isn't cannabis. It's alcohol.

So that was the thing they reinforced, and a lot of their testing is on drinking and driving that they do, you know. Their observation, though, on the cannabis was interesting. They—when they bring different groups together—and they had charts for every age category and—male, female, and so on and so forth, but they also had video. So they would have a person in the simulator, and like I said, there could be a tractor cab in there, or it could be a car, it could

be a truck, it could be a—you name it. But they had video that showed the feet of the driver as well as the road—the simulated road they were on, so you could see if they were veering or whatever. And it was really interesting when they showed this that clearly, logically, the more cannabis one consumes, the less skilled the driver.

* (16:00)

But what they found was the younger men, almost to a person, came in and said: I can beat your test. And they found that the under—if I remember right, the category they showed me was under 35 years old, males, were pretty good at keeping it in the lane. But where they were not good was lateral vision and rear vision. And the rear vision—their skills on rear vision were bad and on transition.

So, when they came off of a, say, an interstate onto a ramp, then they'd veer. Or when they went off a paved road onto a gravel, they—that's where they would lose it. And the foot measurement of how often they went brake to gas was incredible. They—people became—they became more hesitant, and generally the men would slow down.

They also did testing with what happens if you have a passenger, and they found that men don't slow down when there's a man with them, but they slow down—and this is going to sound sexist, but it's a test—when a man had a woman with him, he would slow his vehicle down. And so that was an interesting observation too, in terms of the degree of care.

Also said that the work in combination of cannabis working with alcohol—I didn't know this before, but he said it's not geometric. It doesn't—the use of cannabis in combination with alcohol doesn't expand impairment, it's just simply a mathematical calculation. If you're this impaired with alcohol and you use cannabis, it's the same as if you didn't use alcohol. It just adds that much more impairment to the measurements.

So it was interesting. I'm not doing justice to the science of it explaining it that way, but it was interesting to know that, I think.

Mr. Kinew: Well, that is interesting, and I take it for granted that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) didn't participate in the impairment part of the study, but I am curious: Did the Premier jump in the simulator? Did you take it for a spin down the virtual highway there? Did he, I should say, sorry.

Mr. Pallister: We were in it. I didn't drive it. That would have required me to have used an illegal substance in a foreign country, which I—I'm not going to get in—I'm not going anywhere with you right now, with—I'm not referring to the member opposite; I just want to say that right now.

But it is interesting that they also found one of their statistical categories that drove better, to a certain degree of impairment, which was nervous—they separate their statistical categories by sex, so—and age. So they said 60-plus-year-old women, if they were somewhat—if they had a certain amount of cannabis in their system, actually drove a little better. Just saying.

And they attributed it to the nervousness, that there is a nervousness factor in driving all the time, right. When you're driving, you know, you're watching the conditions and you're nervous, and to some—at a certain point, people can get too nervous, right.

They also said that rear-end collisions is going to be an issue. I think that was stats. Now I should tell you who the academics were and their experience, because it was interesting how they work this. It isn't just one field; it's different fields.

So they had Timothy Brown; he's a doctor, director of cognitive modelling. His—and this, I should go back and say, this is—the National Advanced Driving Simulator is not heavily funded by government. It is self-sustaining. It does work for private—Toyota, you know, vehicle manufacturers. It does work for agencies that—some agencies that are also funded by government, but it does work for other agencies and governments around the country, and it uses—it has world-class simulators.

It conducts research—it works with an agency in Canada as well, whose name escapes me right now, but they work with the Canadian government on some issues as well. About 40 people work there. They specialize in studying the connection between driver impairment and the vehicles they're driving.

So Tim Brown is the—was the cognitive modelling specialist. So he was the guy who develops the testing facilities. Gary Gaffney is also a doctor who is an associate professor of psychiatry, and he has specialized in cannabis-related issues. So that was his area of expertise.

I'm just—I'm sorry I don't have my notes here or I could refer to more of this. But the—we met with I think four people who have doctorates who work

together in the agency plus a number of staff at the facility.

And it's—for all of us could tell stories about friends who have had accidents or people who've died because of accidents related to impaired driving, and they're not fun stories, and we know that. And I think, for me, I take this change very personally because I know. Because I have good friends who've lost people, that it's a very hard deal.

For Manitoba, we don't need Colorado's stats. We don't want Colorado's statistics here. And we're being pushed into this quickly, and it's going to impact on real people, real families. So—got to make sure that we do everything we can to get that message out there.

I'm not sure the federal government is doing that. I'm not satisfied that they're trying to change attitudes on driving sufficiently with their advertising budgets, with their education programs. Took a long time to change the attitude to drinking and driving, right? Took a long time. And it's going to take a while to change the attitudes here. And according to these men and women, the particular target should be younger people, younger drivers, because that's where they're seeing the attitude being, you know, I'm just going to beat your test, I'm a better driver stoned, and they're getting that all the time.

One suggestion they had—and it wasn't a professional suggestion; it was just human-to-human. You know, it wasn't—it's—the one guy said the best ad that they ever did was 20-plus years ago when they said this much wine is this much beer is this much hard liquor so that young people—all of us—could understand the relative impairment factors with those substances. He says they need to add pot to that so people know this much pot is the same as this much in terms of impairment. That was just a suggestion that he came up with.

Mr. Kinew: You know, before moving on, I'd just note for the record that I have heard second-hand that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) does have a personal connection to the issue that we're speaking about. I believe he may have shared it at a meeting of the premiers in the past, and you know, I do think it's important to acknowledge that it does have a very human toll. And I want to acknowledge the hurt of, you know, I guess, the Premier's circle. It's not my place to, you know, go beyond that, share any details, but I would just share with the committee that I do, you know, feel a sense of compassion over

the issue that was related to me. And so I would just put that on the record as one human being to another.

I am curious about the visit to this site and I guess, other details that the Premier could share. I don't know, like, if this was the—like, the sole destination. Was this, like, a full-day session? Were there other meetings taking place at—I forget off the top of the head if this was the university—*[interjection]*—University of Iowa, yes—if this was the University of Iowa, this was the sole meeting at that school.

Were there other meetings? Like, was there other people on campus that the Premier met with, other—I guess, findings to report? I'm just curious if the Premier can share with us what—you know, what other information was gathered, or was this, I guess, the primary focus of that trip?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, this was the destination. Just drove down on the weekend and I think got back Tuesday night or whatever. But it was, I think, time well invested. I've shared with my colleagues what some of the observations were.

And, you know, I think there's always usefulness in talking to these people who make this their profession, you know? They're trying to make sure that they understand exactly the nature of the impairment and how it affects driving. And then, you know, we're trying to deal with a suite of—as the members well know because we've had debate on them—a suite of bills all at the same time, and the—as Anne McLellan told me when—you know, the chair of the Prime Minister's advisory task force on this—she said, with this timeframe, errors are inevitable. There's going to be mistakes. Well, those mistakes costing people's lives is hardly acceptable to any of us, and so everything we can do to assist in getting ahead of this change is good.

* (16:10)

I think the other thing I have to share with my colleague, and I thank him for his comments, is that what they're finding in—they're going to find in California, just like they found in Washington state and they found in Colorado is the major problem's going to come on impaired driving with edibles. When edibles and oils get introduced into the mix, it's going to change things because people who have—who are used to consuming and know their dose on pot are going to get into edibles, and it's a different deal. It's a different high. It's a different time frame. And it's going to mean people that used to be high at

a party and then left three hours later and—oh, and that's another thing that scientists said is after 180 minutes, with any reasonable dose, you're okay. So, if you're smoking, after three hours—if you're smoking pot, after three hours, the level of impairment is back down to not a significant problem, a measurable problem.

If you're eating it, different deal. Later, on the graph. You know, not as high, not as soon, and then what happens with younger people—apparently, it can happen with anybody, is that you don't get as high right away. You don't get the effect right away. So you end up double dosing, triple dosing. And then the effect is greater and prolonged. And then you run into a problem getting in a vehicle because the party's over, but the party ain't over in your head. But the party might be over later for another reason because you're getting in a vehicle, driving a few tons of steel down the highway, and your driving skills aren't there.

So that's a danger, and it's a reality from the preliminary evidence that they're getting in states where legalization has moved ahead.

The surprise for most states on legalization has been the high, high demand for edibles. Part of that is younger people are conditioned less than they ever were to smoke, right? So the move to an edible as opposed to smoke in the—you know, like the old days. So there's that different impact that's going to be something that our—we don't want our stats to show there are higher—there's higher accident rates, higher incidences of death on the roads, obviously.

That's where the advertising piece comes in, and I'm not saying this is only the federal government's responsibility. Obviously, we're dedicating a percentage of funds to public education, but we also know there are impacts—health—the member alluded earlier to health impacts. And there are health impacts, and that is most certainly the case for younger people in high brain development stages. So that has consequences. It has consequences for the linkage with psychiatric problems and psychosis, and these are medical costs. And the provinces will bear those. And in many other categories, of course, the provinces bear the bulk of the costs, not the federal government.

So the federal government needs to do its part on the advertising piece because it—because people just don't watch a TV program in their own province anymore. They're, you know, they're flipping channels. They could be watching

something from Penticton one minute and Halifax the next. And we need a national education strategy on impaired driving awareness.

Mr. Kinew: Thanks again, Mr. Chair.

So bringing that discussion back to Manitoba, and so the Premier (Mr. Pallister) had this, I guess, experience, learned a lot, shared a lot of that here in terms of the impacts of impairment, what it all means. Just alluded to a national education strategy. I'm curious to know whether that is in the offing, or is that, like, something that the Premier's going to bring forward to the other first ministers? Curious about details like that.

But I think bigger picture, you know, I'd ask the Premier to reflect on the lessons learned from Iowa and other jurisdictions and then bringing that back now to Manitoba. You know, how does that inform the rules on the road with respect to cannabis, the rules around enforcement? The Premier alluded there to, I think, a timeline for different forms of consuming cannabis. Is that going to translate to different, I guess, regulations and rules and tests and things like that? I don't know. But I am curious to know how this knowledge that's being collected, how does this get applied back in Manitoba and then, I guess, does it also influence the enforcement of retailing? Like, are—I assume there's going to be a lot of rules around how people are able to retail. I assume there's going to be like no, you know, serving impaired customers like there is with alcohol, and assuming there's going to be enforcement around, you know, similar to what they do in bars where they have, you know, people coming in, you know, unannounced and doing spot checks. I assume stuff like that's going to happen, but I'm wondering, like, it's information that's been gleaned from other jurisdictions. How is it being mobilized here? What other pieces are just, I guess, like a made-in-Manitoba, to use one of the Premier's own phrases there. I'm curious to know, like, that discussion was had? How does it impact what we're going to see here in Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, I like that made-in-Manitoba phrase. It's—

An Honourable Member: Pretty cool.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, I—27 years ago today was our first made-in-Manitoba child, 27 years ago today, yes.

An Honourable Member: Congratulations.

Mr. Pallister: Yes.

The new member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) looked at me like I was quite old just now, and she's right.

An Honourable Member: I have a 27-year-old too.

Mr. Pallister: Oh, do you? No kidding.

So I think what I'll do here is just recap what we've done so far before getting into sort of the next phases. But multifaceted approach, Bill 11, right, introduced last December, is The Safe and Responsible Retailing of Cannabis Act. I won't read the act into the record, but we have taken steps, and we are ahead of most other jurisdictions across the country in respect of this.

That being said, the member, in alluding to the First Ministers' meeting, I can share with the member without revealing private—without breaking confidence, I think, in private discussions, just to say, yes, yes, certainly, I pushed our colleagues to recognize that there is a difference between gross and net. Some of the premiers were talking about economic opportunities and high revenue that they're going to get from selling pot and da, da, da, da. And Premier Couillard, who I can reference in respect of this, who is a very knowledgeable physician, was very clear with our colleagues that there is a net, not just gross, and that there are real costs, and he, of course, is knowledgeable in the area of child medicine, so he was referring to the health costs that are going to come about as a consequence of legalization. Others talked about the shorter term costs, the new equipment that might be necessary, these types of things.

What we're doing here is recognizing that we need to legislate for safety first and that we are moving to do that. Bill 11 establishes, obviously, the structure, amends The Liquor and Gaming Control Act, Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation Act, authorizes and regulates the distribution of cannabis and the sale of it. But Bill 11 also establishes a foundation to protect young people, protect children. It sets a minimum age, as the member knows, 19. There was much discussion about that. We consulted with Manitobans, and Manitobans responded to the tune of—gosh, I think, in terms of the prebudget consultation, over 35,000 responses. And the largest category of response, I might add, was cannabis. People have many differing views on what should happen. We had people saying the age should, well, it shouldn't be legal; the age should be 100. And we

had other people saying it shouldn't—there shouldn't be an age restriction at all, all along the continuum.

We established that 19 for purchase and possession is the age. We created a legal model for the distribution and sale of cannabis. We've made provisions to provide law enforcement with the power to enforce prohibitions against illicit sales. Obviously, some of those restrictions were clearly in place before. That didn't stop the black market from having a strong distribution system. It didn't stop people from using the product, but it also—that bill also set social responsibility standards for retailers for their employees. And this we'll get into more detail when I can, and the member—I know the member understands I can't reveal every aspect of the RFP at this point because it's in process. But there are training requirements, there are standards that have to be in place for people to be able to distribute this product.

* (16:20)

We've adopted here what several other provinces have done as well now, a private model—private retail model. We're using the government for what it does best, using the private sector for what it does better. So the Liquor and Gaming Authority will license the stores. We're going through the approval process. Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Corporation oversees the bulk purchase of the products. But there's a retail licensing process. So two classes of retail licences: (1) controlled access licence where the product must be kept behind a counter or behind shelving that prevents viewing by younger persons and (2) age-restricted licences that prohibit young persons from entering the store. And this is to recognize the sort of retail capacity or reality of different-sized communities around the province at the same time.

So there's provincial licensing. There's compliance. There's inspection oversight.

Mr. Chairperson: I—sorry to interrupt, but I guess that I wasn't watching the clock, and the First Minister's time is up, so.

An Honourable Member: It is so interesting. Maybe he can get a leave.

Mr. Kinew: Some of it's interesting. Some of it's new information. Some of it's already been released publicly or read on the record there.

But I guess, like, you know, with specific reference to the information from the trip to Iowa—

driving, you know, level of impairment—how is that information feeding into what's going to be legislated and regulated in Manitoba? I'm curious to know. How does the knowledge gleaned in that jurisdiction, other jurisdictions, how is that mobilized here in Manitoba? How is that informing, I guess, the rules that we see? Keeping in mind, I guess, some of the laws were already developed, right? Like, some of them were already tabled in the—or introduced in the House, I should say.

But I guess, you know, as this legalization move happens, there's continued development of standards and rules. So I'm wondering if the Premier (Mr. Pallister) can share: How does that information get mobilized, and what are we going to see coming down the pipe as we move forward? Well, bad pun there. Unintentional. But as we see it coming down.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, I've—we've introduced internally a fine mechanism for anyone who inadvertently or with ill intent introduces—joint rollout has become one of the more common ones people like to use on this.

An Honourable Member: Bad joke jar?

Mr. Pallister: Yes.

I would say in terms of my—just my personal research, I would say probably the information will be—is partly reinforced in some of the steps we've already taken, but it is also related to the consumption of, as I referenced earlier, edibles, oils, which is coming, right? And we've got to get ready for that. And that, as I said earlier, is a big concern because that's where your driver safety issues have come up.

I can share with the member just in respect of adverse outcomes, there's only one nation in the world that has legalized cannabis, and that's Uruguay. Okay? Nine states in the US have legalized retail cannabis, but it remains illegal at the federal level.

When I was asking questions in meetings in DC with Homeland Security, I asked questions specifically about border crossings and if, for example, say, a young man is driving a truck and comes up to the US border crossing, and I'm sitting across with the—all the premiers sitting across from all these Homeland Security people who oversee our borders, of course—their border with us. I said, well, what would happen if your border inspection agent asked the young man if he's consumed cannabis in the past year, and he said yes? And they

looked at each other, and they conferred for well over 30 seconds before they answered. They don't—they didn't know. They don't know. And it's coming. And it's coming. And those questions going to get asked. And what are they going to do? They don't know yet. I mean, we've got to deal with this.

So we have meetings and undertaken to work with our trucking association and with the US people to get better answers, but it's coming fast. And, you know, if the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey) and I owned a company where we're shipping carrots down to Minneapolis, we'd kind of like to know before we hire a guy if he smoked pot in the last six months or eight months, right? And then it gets into—it gets—no. If we don't ask the question, the border guy's going to ask the question. And if the border guy asks the—or man or woman at the border asks that question gets a yes, we're in trouble because those carrots are going to wilt.

Like, there's serious ramifications for what's happening here, and it's happening fast, so we need to get in front of it.

Here's what happened. Like, we got lessons learned from other places, and this is part of what research helps us understand better. In Colorado, they had increases in ER—or ED—terminology—emergency department visits for cannabis intoxication. Now, part of that is because Colorado has become a site for what? Cannabis tourism. So people come into the state and get really, really, really ripped on Colorado bud, and they're in an emergency department in Colorado, so there's a cost associated with that. Of course, in the United States, a different structure, but here the cost is all absorbed by taxpayers, right? Colorado and Washington found patients would present to EDs with anxiety, panic attacks, public intoxication, vomiting and non-specific symptoms, all precipitated by cannabis use. Well, there's a cost. There's a cost for us, if that's what happens here.

And cannabis tourism from North Dakota, where they just passed a referendum and it's okay medically, but not otherwise, you could see tourism as a consequence of that, and there'll be a consequence, if Colorado's any indication, for our health-care system, from Americans wanting to get free health care to deal with their symptoms of being stoned. Colorado and Washington both have had that experience. Hospitalizations due to cannabinoid exposure quadrupled post-legalization—quadrupled. Does that have ramifications for us? Yes, it does.

Now, I'm not belittling municipalities for wanting revenue. Asking for half is a little bit out of line—well, quite a bit because our preliminary numbers show nowhere near that cost consequence for municipalities—nowhere near that. Provincial governments, what, 70-plus, 75-plus per cent of our estimated costs—we won't know really what those are. We could estimate. We'll know in a year. But post-edibles, post-oils, we'll know more.

Colorado experienced a doubling of calls to their poison control centre post-legalization, and who are they treating? Particularly kids. Yes. This concerns all of us and more.

Mr. Kinew: So, a few points I'd like to follow up in that answer. One is the Premier (Mr. Pallister) referenced a meeting in DC with Homeland Security. So I'm wondering if he can share a bit more about that. Was that the purpose of the trip, was to go and discuss legalization of cannabis, or was this, like, another meeting that happened while going to DC on other matters? Just wondering if the Premier can share a bit about that.

Or, if this was a trip, again, to inform the deliberations around the legalization of cannabis, were there other meetings that took place there? Again, I'm very interested to know who the Premier's met with on some of these fact-finding missions. So just like to ask first a bit about some more information on that journey to DC and the conversations there.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, certainly. Yes.

I travelled with other premiers to meetings in District of Columbia with—this was a Council of the Federation mission, so there were a number of provinces represented; I would say most. And the—I wouldn't say there was a single purpose to the meeting; I think the idea was—it was probably largely centred on concerns about trade, that particular mission, but not exclusively. So we had team meetings as like the one I referred to with Homeland Security, where every premier was present, and we also had other meetings where we established those meetings individually.

So, I don't have my schedule with me. I believe the members of the opposition have it already because it was FIPPA'd for. So they quite rightly know the nature of the meetings already.

But I would just say that the meetings with the Secretary of Agriculture, meetings with a variety of state senators—not state-like, not state government

senators, but senators from various states, principally border, though not exclusively border states, was the nature of the meetings there.

* (16:30)

Good discussions, number of topics—not exclusively cannabis, though, and that was what the member, I think, was asking. Not exclusively cannabis related, though that came into a number of discussions—questions on trade; questions on water projects; questions on asylum seekers, as well, as a consequence of the flow, which, at that time, of course, was—had been higher than it currently is through Minnesota, principally. So we had meetings there with officials from that area and discussed strategies around how we could assist in giving people from the communities where our evidence showed asylum seekers were originating from information so that they would understand the dangers of what they were doing, what they were facing with the decisions they were making. A lot of good discussion on that.

Just if—I'll finish off, and not to belabour the point, but I do think it's worth knowing that the—what other jurisdictions have experienced isn't good. It isn't good, and we shouldn't take this at all lightly. We're not taking it at all lightly. I started talking about the legislation, but the members know the legislation. I won't belabour that point. But we are, as I said, ahead of a number of other—oh, that's—that wasn't meant to be a pun, either, I should mention that. We are advancing better than other jurisdictions.

So our harm prevention act, the 24-hour driver's licence suspension if a police officer believes that a driver is under the influence of drugs, further consequences for beginner drivers, prohibiting cannabis consumption in or on a vehicle and requiring cannabis to be stored in a secure vehicle compartment—these are all part of the safety aspect of this. Amendments to the non-smoking acts that the members, I think, are familiar with already, the vape—vaping: prohibiting recreational smoking and vaping in outdoor public places, including streets, sidewalks, parks, beaches, school grounds, restaurant patios, et cetera. And then, of course, just three—four weeks ago now, Bill 26, The Impaired Driving Offences Act, that responds to the impaired driving concerns that've been raised by many.

We've had—also had good instruction and knowledge shared with us from the RCMP concerning black marketing, the underground

economy, potential consequences as it relates to the underground economy's response.

I would just also say, respiratory illness is a consequence—he said as he coughed. Smoking cannabis damages lungs. Regular use can lead to chronic bronchitis. *[interjection]* That was perfect timing by the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith). So these are also issues.

The other—one other issue of many is that cannabis products with higher potency can be associated with psychotic symptoms. There's some evidence that people use—*[interjection]* oh, I'm done? I'll go at—I'll go on it again in a minute.

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, the First Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Kinew: I'd note the response by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) there on that previous question.

The other point I wanted to follow up on that he'd mentioned in that previous answer two answers ago was about the estimated cost being around 75 per cent, I think, was the figure, like, in terms of some of the provincial impact. *[interjection]* Yes, that's about 75 per cent.

I don't know, does this mean—I'm curious, like, the question of municipality share has been well debated, and it seems like there are going to be some costs borne directly by municipalities, probably law enforcement chief among them for cities like Brandon and Winnipeg, potentially others, though—enforcement, bylaws, things like that, and just, I guess, other admin costs.

So I'm wondering, does that mean—if it's 75 per cent provincial costs, does that mean municipalities can expect a 25 per cent share? What does the Premier say to that?

Mr. Pallister: No, it's—you know, I have tremendous faith in the municipal level of government, tremendous respect for the people who run for local councils, are elected. I think that's a great line of government. I've said many times I think the best value for money that taxpayers in this province get is in—with no disrespect meant to us, but—the federal elected people, but I think local, municipal representatives work very hard for their people, and so there's no disrespect at all in saying that the bulk of the costs will not be municipal.

That's just a fact and, you know, we've just got preliminary estimates, but I would also say we absolutely are committed to being fair to our

municipal partners. We know there may be some start-up-cost consequences and we'll know so much more after a year than we know now that I think what we're really asking for, here, is just an understanding to be somewhat patient as this is implemented that we can pull in the real numbers, the real costs, not hypothesize too much here because we're not counting on massive revenues from this to be derived as a consequence of this because there's a difference between gross revenues and net revenues, and we cannot price the product to do anything much more than cost-recover because if we do, we price ourselves out of the market.

With every dollar rise in a gram of retail pot in a government store, the black market is happy and continues to thrive, and we don't get revenue from the sale of cannabis which will be safer, better—more clearly indicating the level of potency, probably better quality, more uniform product. We—you know, we're going to sell this. We want it to be safer for the consumer. The person who wants to use it should know what's in it; they should know what the strength of it is. So there's a benefit to a government-regulated private distribution system but we won't derive that benefit sufficiently if it's so pricey that the person buying—let's face it. People—most people are not going to be buying pot for the first time and they're going to have—they're going to purchase it without any benefit for purchasing it from the government. They'll purchase it from the person or people they've purchased it from in the past, and that would be an illegal distributor, before and after legalization. No change.

If there's no change then there's no revenue, but the costs will be the same as they were before, mostly, maybe higher for a time because of initial equipment purchases, for example, in some respects on the policing side. That's a possibility of training, but Danny Smyth, the chief of police in Winnipeg, says he doesn't anticipate additional costs. So he's a pretty knowledgeable guy, and I've talked to other senior police officials who say the same thing: Look, it's illegal now; it's illegal then; it's not that big a difference. So that's what police people are saying.

Municipal will want more money, for sure, and where that's demonstrable—and we'll have data in a few months to know, we want to be sure we're treating them fairly, but we also have to remember that we have to make sure the product is not so pricey that this is not going to work. So we want to get the black market out of this business, not create an opportunity for the black market to maintain its

business and its market share. That just—that wouldn't be useful.

I'll just finish off because—just a couple of points quickly that I know the member would be interested in. Colorado—okay, increased risk of testicular cancer; increased risk of prostate cancer; people who use cannabis regularly more likely to have symptoms of depression. Among older use—among older youth, I should say, in Colorado, cannabis use has actually increased significantly, though cigarette use has declined. High-school-age cannabis use has declined and among adults 26-plus in age, current cannabis use increased—and this is again in Colorado—from 5 per cent in 2006 to 12 per cent in 2014; a very significant increase.

So what Colorado's governor has said is get the data, keep getting the data, rigorous, ongoing data collection—and I'll finish in a minute. I can tell I'll get cut off now.

* (16:40)

Mr. Kinew: I think everyone in the committee was just distracted by the winds of change blowing through the committee room. So thank our colleague for closing the window there.

So I take the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) point that government is a price taker when it comes to cannabis, and you know, that price is going to be set, I guess, with input from StatsCan and other experts.

What I'm hearing about the notion of, you know, sharing revenue with municipalities from the Premier is basically that in the initial year at least, that it won't be a designated—that the Premier won't commit a designated percentage of revenue to be transferred to municipalities, that rather, in the initial year, that the Province will collect all the revenues and that, presumably, the municipalities would be asked to find resources from within existing transfers from the Province to deal with their own costs.

Again I'm laying out a scenario that is based on what I've heard the Premier say to date. But I'm asking, you know, generally for clarification on it. You know, is the Premier saying that in the initial year there won't be a dedicated share for municipalities, but again, that that would potentially be revisited after a year's time?

Cliffhanger.

Mr. Chairperson: A formal vote has been requested in another section of Committee of Supply. I am therefore recessing this section of Committee of

Supply in order for members to proceed to the Chamber for a formal vote.

If the bells continue past 5 o'clock, this section will consider—will be considered to have risen for the day.

Thank you.

HEALTH, SENIORS AND ACTIVE LIVING

* (14:40)

The Acting Chairperson (Colleen Mayer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume considerations of the Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living.

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

Could the minister and critic please introduce their staff in attendance.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I'd like to put on the record that our caucus staff, Emily Coutts, will be joining us very shortly and I'll put the same question on the record as I have. If the minister has any other undertakings from the other days of Health Estimates, this would be a great time to put those answers on the record.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): At this point, I don't have any staff here. I can assure the member this isn't a budget restraint issue. I think they're on the—oh, there they are; they're on the way.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk, Chairperson, in the Chair

And so we have joining us this afternoon the Deputy Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living, Karen Herd, the interim chief operating officer of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Réal Cloutier, and our grise éminence of finance, Mr. Skwarchuk, is with us as well.

Mr. Swan: I know that when the new Cabinet was sworn in two years ago, every minister was given a mandate letter.

Has the minister received a new mandate letter from the Premier?

Mr. Goertzen: I have not. I am still operating under the same mandate as I was when I was sworn in.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Well, miigwech to the minister for taking some of my questions.

Of course, one of my first questions would be where the department is situated in respect of fully funding the abortion pill in Manitoba.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question. That—the file, when it comes to women's reproductive health, she knows, is being led by the Minister responsible for the Status of Women (Ms. Squires). I'm sure she would be happy to provide her with an update in her Estimates process.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, since—I mean, I don't know—I think we're going on maybe 20 months, 22 months of asking this government the question about the abortion pill, and there seems to be—well, I seem to be kind of getting the runaround on who is actually the lead because actually, I would share with the Minister of Health that only a couple of days ago, two days ago, in Executive Council, I asked the same question to the Premier (Mr. Pallister), and the Premier very explicitly told me that I was to ask you.

So I can get my staff to get Hansard—the Hansard record of that. But that was what I was told. So I'm following up on the advice of the Premier of Manitoba and asking the Minister of Health: What is the—*[interjection]*—so what is the government's intention in respect of fully supporting and funding Mifegymiso in Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: I'm fine on behalf of—for this member's sake, I can seek an update from the Status of Women officials on behalf of the minister, and perhaps we can table for the member the response. But the Minister for the Status of Women, she'll know, is the lead file on it. But she's happy to ask the question here. We will endeavour to get an update from those officials.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I just don't understand, respectfully, why there seems to be such confusion on whose file this is. And I think that really, it's a little bit—or I would suggest it's a tad concerning that not even 48 hours ago, the Premier of Manitoba, when I asked this same question, told me that I should be talking to the Minister of Health. So—and now, when I ask the Minister of Health, the Minister of Health says that I have to go to the Status of Women.

So this is like a bad, like—you know when you're on the telephone call and you're trying to talk to somebody, and they tell you, press one, and you press one, and then they tell you you've got to press three. So it certainly seems that nobody in this government is willing to just give a straight answer in respect of what is the government, what is the Pallister government going to be doing in respect of Mifegymiso.

So, again, I mean, we can go—we can—we literally could sit here for hours, and I could ask you the same question over and over again. But I do want to point out that not more than 48 hours ago, the Premier of Manitoba, your leader—or the Minister of Health's leader, the leader of this province, told me that I should ask the Minister of Health what the government is doing in respect of Mifegymiso in respect of fully funding and supporting its accessibility to Manitoba women.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I'm happy to sit here for hours with the member and I think we're at hour 17 now, so happy to do that and more.

The member asked for a status update. I committed to getting her a status update from officials from the minister's—who is the lead on it. And so Premier suggested—according to her; I haven't seen the Hansard; I'll take her word for it—to ask the question here. We'll provide her with that status update.

* (14:50)

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I am tired today. I'm a little tired, so maybe I'm a little confused. That could very well be. But I don't understand how the Minister of Health in Estimates doesn't know what's going on in respect of the abortion pill in Manitoba and why the Minister of Health would have to get back to me on a status update, which isn't actually what I asked for.

What I asked for from the Minister of Health, who has the responsibility for women's health, of which the abortion pill and access to abortion falls under, should know. Certainly, if I was the Minister of Health, I would know what was going on in the province in respect of women's right and women's access to abortion, including the abortion pill. So I don't understand why the minister doesn't know what's going on in his department.

Mr. Goertzen: I sympathize with the member in her being tired. There's certainly really no reason to apologize for that. We all have difficult jobs, whatever our jobs are here as MLAs, and like many

Manitobans, we work long and hard hours and she should never, never apologize for that or the natural side effects physically that happen from long hours and difficult work, so I hope she doesn't feel that she should have to make any sort of excuses for that.

It's—is not a new issue. It's been known for a long, long time that the Minister for the Status of Women has taken the lead on issues of women's reproductive health. I don't pretend to know how the NDP caucus operates. On our side we have many very capable people, both inside and outside of Cabinet. I always like to say we have Cabinet ministers and future Cabinet ministers on this side, and so we have a strong team.

The Minister responsible for the Status of Women (Ms. Squires) is certainly a strong person on that team. She has taken a number of leading initiatives when it comes to the promotion of more women in the Legislature, more women in politics generally. We've heard her speak very passionately and very personally about some of her own experiences. If the member opposite doesn't feel that she's capable on that file, we'll just agree to disagree on that.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, certainly, I'm not apologizing for being tired; I'm trying to make sense of the little bit of confusion that I have in respect of why the Premier (Mr. Pallister) very definitively tells me to go to his Minister of Health when I ask him about the abortion pill, so something is amiss here. And so I was trying to be kind and gentle that maybe it was that I was tired, but clearly, as the minister just indicated in his answer, it's not because I'm tired and confused, it's because there doesn't seem to be a clear line in respect of what are the responsibilities for the Minister of Health, and I would suggest to you that women's reproductive health, which includes birthing, right—labour, breastfeeding, Caesareans—I mean, I can go on, you know, we can—vaginal infections—like, we can go on all day about what includes women's reproductive health. I would suggest to the Minister of Health that that is his responsibility as the Minister of Health.

And so I know that my colleague from Minto had just, as we just began, asked if there's been a new mandate letter, and I remember asking this question in QP about a year ago if there had been a new mandate letter to both the Minister of Health and the Minister of Status of Women indicating that the Status of Women Minister now has the administrative responsibility for women's

reproductive health in Manitoba, and I remember that there was no new mandate letter and you've just confirmed that there's not a new mandate letter.

So can the Minister of Health explain then, how birthing, Caesarians, breastfeeding, all of these different things have now transferred under the—his responsibility to the Minister for the Status of Women?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I—as I said before, I have great respect for the Minister for the Status of Women. My respect for her—I mean, I had great respect for her before I knew her—before she was elected into the position that she has. I think we go back as long as when she was a reporter at the Winnipeg Sun and would ask me difficult questions and sometimes write articles that were not glowing in terms of my comments.

And—but she was probably right in those articles. And since then I've had the opportunity to work on a couple of her election campaigns, going door to door. And I realized the great respect she has in her constituency, which has only grown, of course, since she's been elected to Assembly and taken on the various roles and ever-increasing roles that she has in her portfolio.

So the member will know this isn't a secret that she was assigned this particular role along with some others when it comes to women's reproductive health. If the member doesn't feel that she's up to the job, we'll certainly differ because I not only know that she's up to the job; I know she has a tremendous political career ahead of her and I look forward to watching it, maybe from near and afar if I'm not here as long as she is.

Ms. Fontaine: So can the Minister of Health, since he refuses to answer the question in respect to the abortion pill, and women's rights to accessing the abortion pill, and what this government is doing to ensure its accessibility for Manitoba women, can the minister—so if the abortion pill is off the table and that is now the sole responsibility for the Minister of Status of Women, I—which I'm sure that we will spend time then.

I will go from the Premier, to the Minister of Health, to the Status of Women, although somebody should maybe let the Premier know not to direct any questions on the abortion pill to the Minister of Health but rather to the Minister for Status of Women. So I'm sure that the Minister for Status of

Women will spend some—and I will spend some time talking about that.

But, if the mandate letter hasn't changed, can the Minister of Health then confirm that if the Minister for Status of Women is indeed kind of the lead now on women's reproductive health, is she the lead for fertility treatments in the province of Manitoba? And we're going to go through each of these wonderful things in respect of women's reproductive health one by one, so let's start with fertility.

Is the Minister for Status of Women now responsible for fertility treatments in Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: I know that the member, she discusses calling the—my colleague, the member—or the Minister responsible for the Status of Women (Ms. Squires), calling her into Estimates, and I think she might actually be behind me on the order when it comes to Estimates. So I would encourage her to do that. I would support her calling her into Estimates for those discussions.

When it comes to issue of women's—of health, certainly the Minister for the Status of Women has taken on some of the responsibility when it comes to the assessing and signing on to the formulary women's reproductive health medication and—but broader than that, I would give her a lot of credit for other things that she's done.

*(15:00)

I know that she's met with a number of different health providers that are specific to women; she's really reached out into the community in a lot of different ways.

Again, you know, we consider this to be a big team on this side—not just as Cabinet members, you know. There's no question that—in—of the members of Cabinet. We work together as a team. But it's broader than that. It's having discussions and taking in considerations that come from caucus members. I've been elected in this House for 15 years now, and I've never worked with a caucus that was as cohesive and as connected as this caucus.

And that doesn't mean that there's always agreement on every issue. I won't have to explain to the member or any of her colleagues, you know, that there are differences in a caucus, just like there can be differences in a family. But you're not measured by those differences, of course; you're measured about how the discussions are done and done in a respectful way. And I—working with this caucus has

been, for me, I think, one of the highlights of my political career because not only are the numbers greater, but I think in terms of cohesiveness and collegiality, it's probably the best caucus that I've ever had the—well, not probably, it is the best caucus I've ever had the opportunity to work with, and I consider it a great honour every day.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I'm sure that all those women that are waiting to access the abortion pill are so happy for the cohesiveness in your caucus. However, I would suggest to you that they'd be, probably, a little bit more happy if they were able to access the abortion pill here in Manitoba in the North and in rural areas.

But I certainly will probably tweet out that—how happy you guys all are on there while you guys are not making any decisions on the abortion pill. I'm sure lots of women are going to be happy about that.

So, back to my list here. So there's no answer on fertility treatments. So let's get down to the birthing centre, which is—I'm sure everyone in this Chamber can agree is extraordinary and does amazing work. And the midwives that work there, the staff, the nurses, everybody that works at the birthing centre, are just phenomenal. Just had a—somebody just have a baby out from there a little while ago. The rooms are extraordinary. Like, I wish I would have had those rooms when I was attempting to give birth to my babies, but that didn't work.

But—so now, does the birthing centre now fall under the administration of the minister for Status of Women and her department?

Mr. Goertzen: I—you know, I appreciate the member asking the question.

I know we had some of these discussions back—she was referring to quoting Hansard back in June of—June 20th of 2016. Boy, that feels just like yesterday, but it was, I guess, almost two years ago. And the member was asking questions around this very issue. And she said, so, one of the things that I had tried to do—or, was wanting to do for many years and, unfortunately, was just too busy with my file and hadn't been able to do it was to look at reproductive health for indigenous women.

So, you know, I appreciate that the member now wants to be critical of me or, perhaps, the Minister for the Status of Women when she acknowledged herself on the record that it wasn't a priority for her when she worked in government, and she wasn't able to find time because of the work on her other files.

You know, so there're a lot of different things that happen within the government. I know that our Minister for the Status of Women—not just on that file but on Sustainable Development—has done an incredible job. I'm sure the member and her colleagues will at some point want to ask her questions in Estimates, and she'll answer them capably and effectively, as she always does.

You know, the member talks about fertility treatment. It's an issue I think that's—it's near to my heart. I think I've spoken, I think with this member actually—may have even been in the 2016 Estimates when we had the opportunity to talk about the challenge that my wife and I had having children and a series of miscarriages that we had the misfortune of having. And, you know, it was a very trying time—trying time for the family, but in particular I would say for my wife. It was a real challenge, and emotionally and physically and in every other way. And being in a community that's very supportive—and the Steinbach community certainly is, but we're also very public figures, and our struggle wasn't a public struggle. But, at some point, we decided we had to make it a public struggle, because it was just difficult for myself, but particularly for Kim, to be asked the many questions, you know, about, you know, are we planning to have kids, or are you going to have a family? And it just was a real difficult time.

Now, we were blessed to have a child, our son, Malachi, who's now 11 years old. We actually during his—or during her pregnancy with Malachi, thought we had lost him during that time as well. But I will give tremendous credit to—she was a high-risk pregnancy, and Malachi was a high-risk birth. We had him at the Health Sciences Centre in the Women's Hospital. And a difficult two days for sure, particularly for Kim, obviously, but the outcome was something that we could only have dreamt about in terms of what a tremendous, tremendous son he is, and we can't imagine our life without him. But it got us to thinking a lot about the issue of fertility and how do you support people when they are struggling to have a family.

It also got us thinking a lot about the issue of adoption. And, over the time, we've had the opportunity to support individuals financially who were looking to adopt. It's something that Kim and I would have considered had we not, I suppose, been able to have Malachi—or we even considered even after that as well, but we've been pleased to help

others, you know, in our modest way, to be able to help them fulfill their dreams of having children.

So there's no question that the issue of fertility both in our department and within—in the caucus and with my own individual life is something that we often think about and have a great heart for those who are looking to have a family though might be struggling to.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I say miigwech to the minister for sharing that story. Certainly, all of us that have children realize and know how much we love our children. And I have two boys, and I absolutely adore them, so I know how much his son means to him, and that's beautiful, and that's wonderful, and I'm glad that everything worked out.

The minister does raise June 20th, 2016, that I was asking these questions, and I guess the salient point to take from that comment that the minister just made is that I'm still trying to get answers after two years to—almost two years to some of the same questions that the Minister for Health is so reluctant to answer. Again, the abortion pill—never had an answer on that. So, you know, I appreciate that the minister putting on the record, really, how long I've been asking these questions and how long he's refused to answer the questions. So I say miigwech. Thank you for that accountability; that's beautiful.

So birthing centre—no answer on that. So is the Minister for Status of Women—or—sorry—for the—minister for status of Health—I apologize—has that responsibility for birthing, for women who are birthing and labouring, has that responsibility now, for Manitoba women who are giving birth, who are labouring, who are birthing, who are going all through all of that stuff, has that now been transferred to the Minister for Status of Women and her department?

Mr. Goertzen: Oh, no. I appreciated the member asking the question. I think we have a different interpretation of what that quote symbolized. For her, it symbolized a couple of years of being involved in these Estimates. For me, it symbolized very much what the member had said, that during her time working in government, she just didn't make this issue a priority.

And so, I mean, I say that not as—not to try to antagonize the member, but, you know, when you try to assume or suggest that the government hasn't made something a priority when you acknowledge

that it wasn't a priority when you worked in government, that's a difficult line of discussion.

*(15:10)

You know, on the birthing centre, there are—and this has been a topic, I think, for many years about the underutilization of the birthing centre, and I say that—not that every birth that happens in the birthing centre isn't important or isn't valuable, but the original target numbers that the NDP, under—I think my friend, Theresa Oswald, who opened up the birthing centre—it never did reach, I think, anywhere as close, in terms of the number of births that were expected.

But certainly, I think that there is different programming that is happening. Not just births, but are—different programming that is happening out of the birthing centre. You know, I've heard different people at different times speak, you know, about—you know, are there different ways other than just midwives that could—we could provide births out of the birthing centre to get the numbers up in terms of its utilization.

I think there's been some, you know, discussions among different health providers about the possibility of that. You know, I don't want any—my friend Theresa Oswald is now with Doctors Manitoba. She might have some advice herself on that, and I'd certainly be open to hearing that.

But you know, the birthing centre continues to provide service for many Manitobans, but we'd like to see that number increase, for sure. And whether that involves the partnership with other health providers to help those numbers increase, I suppose is yet to be determined, but there certainly has been some discussions along that way to see if that would be a possibility.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, the answer that the minister just gave seems to kind of indicate that he's actually responsible for the birthing centre, because he didn't not say that it was transferred now to the Minister for Status of Women and he certainly had a lot of things to say in respect of the birthing centre. And so I'm—again, could be tired or just confused with the minister's answer, in respect of who is responsible for the birthing centre.

So no clear answer on the birthing centre. Certainly, in two years, no answer on the abortion pill, so that we know. No answer on the—on fertility treatments.

So let's move on to midwives—midwives and the use of midwives and doulas in the hospitals. Has that transferred from the Minister of Health's responsibility and department to the Minister for Status of Women and her department?

Mr. Goertzen: Just to be clear, Mr. Chairperson, just because the member opposite doesn't feel that she received an answer, or maybe didn't like the answer received, doesn't mean that one wasn't provided. You know, she of course is entitled to her own interpretations of the answers, and that's fine.

But you know, she asked me about the issue of fertility. We spoke about that. She asked me about the issue of the birthing centre, and we've spoken about that. So again, she may—she can characterize the answers however she likes, that's certainly within her democratic right to do so, but it doesn't mean that her characterization is the correct one.

You know, in terms of midwives, there's no question that different regions, the different regional health authorities use midwives, you know, in different ways. For many who are choosing a midwife, it is—it can be a lifestyle choice, in terms of how they want to give birth. For others, it's more out of a necessity.

I know in talking to those who have been involved in the health-care system much longer than I have, I know the original vision of midwives was to be able to provide birthing support in regions that were underserved in other ways. And so I think, I mean, that model has perhaps transitioned—clearly has transitioned a little bit, but I think that was—many years ago, was part of the original motivation for the midwife program.

I've had the opportunity to speak to a number of midwives, not just from the southern region in which I represent as the member of the Legislature, but also those in—working in other parts of Manitoba. We certainly value the work that they do, and I know that those who have the service of midwives value that work as well.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay. Well, moving along, because I don't think that there was an answer.

And I know that the minister is indicating that, you know, just because he spouts off some things, that he kind of thinks that's an answer, but it's not. What I—my answers are very clear in respect of whose responsibility is fertility treatments or the birthing centre or midwives or doulas? Generally

talking about the issue or whatever I've just asked but not providing an answer isn't an answer.

So we will attempt to go on to hysterectomies. So, typically, I would suggest to the Minister of Health that hysterectomies that many, many women go through in Manitoba would fall under the responsibility for the Minister of Health and the—his department. And so has this—has the responsibility and the administration for women's hysterectomies in Manitoba now been transferred to the Minister for Status of Women and her department?

Mr. Goertzen: I'm sorry for the misunderstanding by the member. You know, I'm speaking to these issues certainly because they are under the department. I referred her to the original line of questioning that she had to the member for—or the Minister of the Status of Women. But, in my responses to the last questions, I'm speaking about it, clearly, because those are within the department of—if she didn't like the quality of the answers, that's certainly okay. I'm not that easily offended anymore. I—and I know that our capable clerks who, I would say, that when it comes to points of order and those such things, they don't rule on the quality of the answer that is provided. So, if the member didn't like the quality of the answer, I've been here long enough that I'm not that offended by that.

You know, when it comes to the issue of midwives, there are 54 funded positions for midwifery services in the province. Currently, it's my understanding that in the northern regional health authority, there are five FTE positions that are funded. In the southern RHA, there 12 and a half FTE midwifery positions that are funded. In Prairie Mountain, in that RHA, there are seven FTE positions that are funded, and, in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, there are 29 and a half FTE positions that are funded.

So, I mean, we know that there continues to be a significant demand when it comes to midwifery in the province and in the different regional health authorities, and I hear that from the different regional health authorities at different times, of course. They have a great deal of responsibility in terms of their own staffing as well within those regional health authorities, and we entrust many of the decisions to them. But I do know, from speaking with those who accessed the services of a midwife, that it's a valuable service and one that is considered to be important. And I've had the opportunity to meet with

midwives and look forward to meeting with more to hear about the different things they do.

In fact, I think we've done some work when it comes to scope of practice on midwifery and looking at how to better utilize and to increase the scope of practice for those who are engaged in that practice. And that's certainly one of the issues, as the Minister of Health, that scope of practice is often a significant issue that comes up, whether we're dealing with pharmacists, who I know would like to see different scopes of practice; whether that's dealing with nursing, and we have changed the scope of practice when it comes to some areas of nursing; certainly, paramedics have often talked about having an increased scope of practice so they could do more things, perhaps in rural Manitoba, which are sometimes underserved areas of Manitoba.

So, when it comes to midwifery, we've had the opportunity to look at the expansion of their practice as well.

Ms. Fontaine: So can the Minister for Health clarify for me whether or not these 54 FTEs are—there's a full complement of—or is there any vacancies in respect of these?

* (15:20)

Mr. Goertzen: I'm certainly happy to provide that information for the member. Officials with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority are seeking that information. So if we—I don't want to use up too much of the member's time. So if we're not able to provide it before the end of this Estimates session, then we'll certainly provide it within the respected time of the rules of Estimates.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech to the Minister of Health. I appreciate getting those numbers back. I appreciate that.

So again, just to go back through women's reproductive health, which the minister had earlier indicated now was the responsibility for the Minister of Status of Women. So as we make our way down, so: abortion pill, Minister for Status of Women; birthing centre, not sure; fertility treatments, not sure; midwives, not sure. I didn't really get an answer in respect of hysterectomies.

But I will move on to women in Manitoba dealing with, and facing and fighting breast cancer, and ovarian cancer, and cervical cancer. And I know that the Minister of Health, like our caucus and

your caucus—or the PC caucus would have had the opportunity to meet with some women a little while ago. I don't know when that was. *[interjection]* Yes, a couple of months ago. Some phenomenal women that came to share with all of our respective caucuses in respect of cervical cancer.

So—and I would suggest that everyone in this Chamber would somewhat understand but fully appreciate how serious it is for women to be able to fight and to deal with these particular cancers. So I would ask the Minister for Status of Women, has the responsibility and administration for all of the funding and the drugs in dealing with, you know, breast cancer, and ovarian cancer, and cervical cancer, has that now transferred from his administration and responsibility and his department to the Minister for Status of Women and her department?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question again, and not to be repetitive, but since she repeated it in her last preamble to her question, well, as I've said, we've answered questions related to the birthing centre, and we've answered questions related to midwifery and we answered questions related to fertility. So, as I've indicated, we've answered those questions because they are certainly within the department. The member doesn't seem to want to accept that answer, and that's fine. She doesn't have to accept the answer. She can choose to take whatever she wants out of answers. But that doesn't mean that the answer isn't as it was given.

When it comes to the issue of cancer treatment, in particular, breast cancer and ovarian cancer and others, I want to say, and I think the member sort of mentioned this, I mean, there probably isn't a member in this House who hasn't been touched in some way, either by those specific cancers that she mentions individually or through a family member or cancer more generally. And so our support for cancer treatment continues to be not only significant but continues to increase year over year and is, of course, the—unfortunately the instances of cancer continue to grow in the province of Manitoba and in Canada more generally, Mr. Chairperson, and then—when we know that that pressure will only continue in the years ahead.

There have been some reports, of course, that Manitoba does quite well on certain benchmarks. Members like to quote CIHI sometimes, but only parts of CIHI. They'll know that the most recent CIHI report ranked Manitoba very high when it came

to radiation treatment for those who are dealing with cancer. So that is certainly significant.

When we look at the budgeting when it comes to cancer treatment in particular, when we look at the drug program, it's increased dramatically since 2012 to this year. And there's been an increase from, I think, 34—just under \$35 million in that year to just over \$50 million in this year. And that's on the drug side, of course. That doesn't necessarily include the provider side. Overall, this year, there'll be a provision of \$124 million—over \$124 million for those who are dealing with cancer. So, certainly, we recognize how great the issue is.

* (15:30)

When it comes to the Home Cancer Drug Program, there's also significant support, over \$13 million in this year's budget for the various drugs that are provided under the Home Cancer Drug Program. And I would remind the member, although in fairness to her, I don't believe it was her who said it during the election campaign, that the NDP, during the campaign, told Manitobans that if there was a change in government, the Home Cancer Drug Program would be cut.

You know, there are things that are said in politics, and I've heard a lot of things that are said in politics, and I'm sure that I've been accused at times of saying things that perhaps I shouldn't have. But among the things that I've ever heard politically, the political charge during a campaign to those who are facing cancer or to the families of those who are facing cancer that a changing of a government would put at risk their drugs, I'm not sure that I've ever heard anything worse in a political campaign. And I certainly hope that I never hear anything as bad as that in a political campaign again.

Now, again, in fairness to this member, I—it wasn't her that levelled the charge. But it was her party in that election who tried to tell cancer patients that their drugs would be in jeopardy as a—if they—if there was a change in government. Of course, that's not proven to be true. Our support for cancer treatment continues to go up. But I think it will be a long time before the memory of that fearful tactic is erased from the memory of many of us.

Ms. Fontaine: So, if I understand correctly, which I'm hoping that I do, the Minister of Health just kind of confirmed in the last answer that, in fact, all of the things that I've just mentioned like the fertility clinic, the birthing centre, midwives, hysterectomies, the—

breast cancer, ovarian cancer, cervical cancer, all of that still remains under the responsibility and administration of his department and that the only thing that does not remain, if ever, under his administration or his responsibility is the abortion pill.

So, when the Minister for Health says that the Minister for Status of Women is actually taking the lead on women's reproductive health, I'm sure that the Minister of Health can see that that's not accurate, because, in fact, as I've indicated, women's reproductive health includes, you know, some of these things that I said here, including, you know, teaching women and supporting women how to breastfeed, you know, all of the vaginal stuff that goes on. So there's so much that happens in respect of women's reproductive health, but, to be clear, and maybe the minister can be just definitively, definitively clear, that the only thing that does not remain under his responsibility and administration in—for the Health Department is actually the abortion pill.

Mr. Goertzen: No, that's not correct. There's been a variety of women reproductive health drugs, I think, that the Minister for—responsible for the Status of Women has taken the lead on. So the member is incorrect.

And she's also incorrect in her assertion that it was only in the last answer that she was able to determine—well, no, she might not be incorrect. Maybe it was only in the last answer that she was able to determine that certain areas were within the Department of Health, but that doesn't mean it wasn't answered before that. It was answered before that. But it may have only been in the last answer that she was able to determine that.

You know, I also want to speak to—to go back because I'd mentioned the issue of midwifery and the expanded role within midwifery, and there was a number of things that the government, our government, and I was pleased, as the Minister of Health, to oversee with the expanded—the list of laboratory and diagnostic tests that midwives may order for the mothers and newborns and enabled midwives to order laboratory tests for fathers and for current partners; expanded the lists of medications that midwives may independently prescribe and administer, including some medications that midwives can currently only administer on the direction of the physician. There was the change in terms of expanding the list of minor surgical and

invasive procedures a midwife may perform to include emergency manual removal of a placenta and other procedures as well.

So, you know, we've not only taken the issue of midwifery seriously—I know there's always a desire for more midwives, for certain, but expanding their scope of practice I know is something that they certainly supported and were appreciative of, Mr. Chairperson. And our government, of course, continues to look at the issue of scope of practice.

The member might want to know, and—because I don't know that she was here to hear it when I was speaking to the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) yesterday about the work of Shared Health Services, where they're looking from a provincial perspective on the scope of practice and looking at the overall provincial needs: what are the assessments, particularly when it comes to rural Manitoba, but not only to rural Manitoba, and are there gaps within that service that could be filled by expanding the scope of practice of certain providers in Manitoba. That is important work, and I don't think it's ever been done collectively in the way that Shared Health Services—or Shared Health is currently doing under the direction of Dr. Brock Wright. And so my hope is that, coming out of that exercise, that there may be an opportunity to use existing practitioners in a different way in areas of the province that might otherwise feel underserved in certain ways.

So, certainly, I—again, I've been pleased to answer the member's questions on a variety of different topics. She clearly doesn't like the answers; that's okay. I'm not offended by that. But because she doesn't like the answers doesn't mean they weren't provided.

Mr. Swan: Yesterday I think we had a pretty productive discussion on emergency medical services outside of the Perimeter. I'd like to carry on the same discussion inside the Perimeter.

The ambulance services within the city of Winnipeg—the minister can just confirm, is that paid directly by the Department of Health? Is it paid by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority? Or is it another government department that contributes to those costs?

Mr. Goertzen: Thank the member for the question.

The funding flows from the Department of Health to the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and then to the City of Winnipeg, and there's a

contribution part from the City of Winnipeg, but that's how the funding flows from our department.

Mr. Swan: Okay, I thank the minister for that.

In many other—many places in the Estimates books, we see comments about price and volume being a cost driver, which certainly I think I can agree upon. Yet the amount of money being provided to the City of Winnipeg for those ambulance services has been frozen for the past two years.

Can the minister explain why this is?

Mr. Goertzen: So, officials indicate to me that the funding year over year has been increasing. I'm not sure if that's an issue of, you know, adjustments at the end of the year when there are those annual adjustments based on what the City might come back and say are our actual real costs, which has been the matter of some public dispute over the last several months. But there's no question that we, as a province, want to ensure that the cost of the ambulance service and the ambulance service is certainly important, and the service—the integrated service that happens together with the Winnipeg fire service, we want to ensure that those costs are contained in a way that is both sustainable and predictable.

* (15:40)

They've been increasing at an unsustainable rate for the last few years and, you know, we've had, I think, some good discussions with the City of Winnipeg, particularly over the last few weeks to determine where we can contain some of those growing costs to ensure that the service is sustainable going forward.

So my understanding is there has been increases of funding year over year, but, if the member's making the point that there are cost controls that need to be in place, I would not disagree with him.

Mr. Swan: Yes, well, I think we were all concerned when the—when civic politicians and others said that the money had been frozen. So perhaps to get to the bottom of that, the minister could undertake to ask the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and provide the amount that was transferred to the City of Winnipeg for ambulance services for the fiscal years 2016-17, for 2017-18, and then give us the amount budgeted for the current fiscal year. That would be very helpful.

Mr. Goertzen: I think the issue might be, the way I understand it, is that a certain amount is budgeted in

a year as a base amount for the funding, and then, at the end of the year, there's always a degree of negotiation on whether or not there were additional costs and then—and, seemingly, every year there have been, and so that's been added to the base. And then that cumulative amount becomes the base for the next year. And so I think what the member is speaking about is—for the last year, we certainly have said to the city that the base from the previous year, which was the original amount plus the reconciled amount at the end of the year, that they were looking to essentially hold within that amount and—because the increase, year over year, simply wasn't sustainable.

And, you know, I think the discussions that have happened with the city over the last few weeks have been productive. I think they've been helpful. I think we've been able to clear up a number of different things. There were some issues around some past outstanding amounts that existed. I think we've been able to clear up all of those. There's still a bit of a negotiation in terms of this particular year, and then what going forward looks like in terms of cost containments.

So I'm not concerned that anybody's turning the keys back tomorrow nor do I think that Mayor Brian Bowman is that kind of a mayor, that he would do that. In fact, he has said publicly, if there was ever a transition to the province, it would be a two- or three-year process, and I think that that's probably right.

Having said that, I'm also not adverse to looking at the issue of whether or not having the province provide the service more directly. It might—I don't think we should be afraid to look at that, and then what the funding model that would come out of that is—I don't know—money—a lot of provinces do it differently.

So, in Ontario, I understand that municipalities of a certain size pay the entire amount of the ambulance costs. The provincial health department in Ontario essentially sets the standards, but it is the role and responsibility and the cost of municipalities of a certain size who actually pay the costs.

And then there's provinces where the province pays the entire cost for the municipalities regardless of size, and then there's variations in between. Manitoba would be one of those variations in between.

So I'm not adverse to looking at a different model when it comes to delivery. That would be a longer-term look, of course. I wouldn't want to suggest what the funding model might look like. That would be quite far down the road.

But, having said all of that, I think the negotiations and discussions over the last few weeks with the City have been quite positive, and I think that that might continue.

Mr. Swan: –minister to undertake to provide the specific information. The minister, in the first minute of his five-minute answer, said that there is a base amount set at the start of the year, which is reasonable, and the minister just put on the record that then there's an actual amount after adjustments are made, which also seems reasonable.

Would the minister, then, undertake to provide, for each of the 2016-17 year, the 2017 and '18 year, provide the base amount as well as the final amount after all adjustments were made, and will the minister also undertake to provide the base amount set for the 2018-19 fiscal year that's just begun?

Mr. Goertzen: We'll do our best to provide the most recent information we can provide the member, over the last, let's say, three years. The challenge can be is that in terms of providing the most up-to-date information for the most recent year, the member's asking is that the City does their books on a calendar year, and the Province does it on the fiscal year. And so there's a time lag sometimes because we're not doing our books on the same calendar—on the same 12 months. But we'll get the most recent three years that we have.

Mr. Swan: Thank the minister for that undertaking.

So I know that there had been some strong statements by the City of Winnipeg, but the minister is telling us that there's been—there have been some productive discussions. I guess the minister can confirm there has been no formal notice given by the City of Winnipeg that they intend to transfer ambulance services to the Province or the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

Mr. Goertzen: There has not.

Mr. Swan: And what is the, I suppose, the preference of the minister of the government. Are—is the government ambivalent as to what the City does? Does the Province favour the City of Winnipeg remaining the entity that provides the ambulance

service, or do they favour it being handled, perhaps by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority?

Mr. Goertzen: As with most things in life, I'm quite open-minded on this issue. I think I saw the member give a side glance there, but I, on this issue, I don't think that there's been a lot of discussion about what an alternative system would look like. And so my view has been we need to ensure that we do our best to settle out the issues as they exist right now. We've taken—we've settled out the issues for the previous three years that related to, I think, some money that was considered to be owing. There still is a discussion about the funding for this year, although I think those negotiations have proceeded well, although we haven't quite landed the plane yet.

But I do want to engage the City, because I know they undertook a study through, I think it was EPC, in terms of what an alternative system would look like that had the Province more involved, maybe both operationally and in other ways. And I think that that's still a worthwhile discussion because right now I think we're dealing with a bit of a lack of an understanding of what, you know, quote, unquote, devolving the system to the Province would look like. I think there's been lots of notional discussion about that over the last many years, and there's been some threatening of returning the keys and those sorts of things. But I don't know that either the City or the Province have really done an analysis of what would that look like? What would it do for sustainability? What would it do for service?

So we're dealing with the issues as they exist now to ensure that the system continues to operate the way it currently does. And, again, if there was ever a transition, it would take years for that transition to happen. But I think both the City and the Province are actually really discussing about what is that service look like. What are the benefits of the current system? How can it be improved? Could it be done differently? Could the Province have a greater involvement? Nothing may ever come of those sort of discussions. But it's at least valuable to have them because in the past, there's been an unwillingness to even think about what the system would look like in a different way, and then when you get into a situation where certain levels of government are saying, well, we might just walk away from it, you're dealing with a complete absence of an understanding of what that means.

* (15:50)

So we're—I think we're in a much better place in terms of understanding each other financially. We're working towards dealing with those issues. I think they'll come to a satisfactory conclusion in the immediate term. And, you know, we'll continue to have discussions to see if there's ways to deliver the service better and in a more sustainable way, but that type of outcome is not going to be in a fiscal year. As the mayor said, any sort of devolution of the system would be at least two years, and I suspect it might even be longer.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that answer.

So these discussions, have these just been happening at the staff level? Has the minister been involved in those discussions? Has it been—I'm almost scared to ask this, but has it been the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and the mayor having those discussions? What level is this at right now?

Mr. Goertzen: I mean, I have spoken with the mayor regarding the financial issues that existed. I think we spoke twice on it and were able to resolve, with the work of officials after those discussions, some of the outstanding issues. I think it was publicly reported that the Premier and the mayor had a meeting last week, and I think that this was one of the topics that was discussed, according to what I understand.

But largely it's been officials at the City and the Province who've been having the discussion on the financial end. So there has been some check-in with the mayor and I and then I guess last week with the Premier and the mayor, but largely it's been happening at the officials' level.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister.

Now, I'm—just to begin, I'm not in any way blaming the minister or anyone in his government for this. The minister's aware that just a couple of weeks ago there was, I think, an unfortunate statement that maybe wasn't supposed to be for public consumption suggesting that hundreds of paramedics could lose their employment with the City of Winnipeg. Again, I know that was not—that's not the minister that caused that, but are there any words of comfort that the minister can put on the record for paramedics employed by the City of Winnipeg?

Mr. Goertzen: I remember the story, anyway. I think it was an official with the City of Winnipeg that said that. We have—I have no basis to believe that that's true, and certainly there hasn't been any

kind of discussion with the City about anything of that nature at all.

Mr. Swan: All right. Now, we know that a couple of years ago, the City of Winnipeg started a system of effectively fining the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority if ambulances were waiting beyond a certain amount of time. Could the minister ask the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority to tell us the total amount of fines that were assessed for the last fiscal year?

Mr. Goertzen: Officials will get those numbers. I understand that's an arrangement that was made under the previous government in terms of those fundings. But the—stroke off the list of things that I owe answers to for the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), the funding for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority to the Winnipeg—to WFPS in 2015-16 was \$17,000,796—sorry—\$17,796,764. In 2016-17, it was \$20,212,350, and in '17-18, it was \$22,969,501. So that expresses the increase that is both real and potentially unsustainable, and that's where the discussions are that we're—that's what we give the WRHA, who then provide that to WFPS.

Mr. Swan: So, just to make that clear, those are the amounts after those adjustments that the minister had talked about have been calculated, and can we then say that for the current fiscal year, then, the amount that has been budgeted is \$22,964,501, which was the actual from last year?

Mr. Goertzen: So the answers to those questions are yes and no. Yes, those—the numbers I provided on the first two years were the actuals after the adjustments. On the last year, I think that's still an issue of negotiation.

Mr. Swan: All right. So what is the amount then budgeted for the current fiscal year for ambulance services in Winnipeg?

Mr. Goertzen: As—the WRHA indicates that that's an issue of negotiation, and I guess it's like buying a car; you don't want to sort of say what your budget is yet, so.

Mr. Swan: All right. That's kind of a strange way to go, but we'll keep pressing on this afternoon.

So we had talked about the arrangement of the City of Winnipeg and the funds of the health authority and the minister has undertaken to provide that. Can the minister tell us—there's a new protocol regarding waiting times that either just has or is just about to go into effect? Can the minister just confirm

what date is that and can the minister explain what that new protocol is going to look like?

Mr. Goertzen: Just for clarity, is the member asking about the new transfer time protocol?

Mr. Swan: That's correct.

Mr. Goertzen: So my understanding in talking to officials, just to confirm some of the numbers with the new transfer time—so the transfer from paramedic care to the triage nurse within an emergency room is going down to 45 minutes. Officials within the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority indicate that they are meeting that transfer time about 85 per cent of the time now, and they're expecting a continued improvement. And they also note that there has been significant or continued improvement over the last couple of years as well.

Mr. Swan: Okay. So that 45-minute time, how, then, is that waiting time calculated?

Mr. Goertzen: Officials indicate from the time the paramedic or the paramedics arrive at the ER 'til the time that transfer has been made to the triage nurse.

Mr. Swan: We can agree that trying to get patients off-loaded from ambulances and into the hospital is a good thing. We have heard concerns that can put more pressure on those working in emergency rooms. Had there been more positions added at the various emergency rooms in Winnipeg when this new protocol was brought into effect?

* (16:00)

Mr. Goertzen: Officials indicate that the—certainly with phase 1 consolidation that there have been some staffing changes. Officials also indicate that the reduction in the wait times in the emergency rooms in the—in our emergency rooms has helped in terms of the offloading time. And there's—there simply is some good teamwork happening as a recognition that those times need to be reduced so that paramedics can be back in service to respond to calls.

Mr. Swan: So I take it the answer is no, no additional staff were added.

What date did that new protocol take effect?

Mr. Goertzen: The protocol, I understand, went into place on April 11th to—on April 11th.

Mr. Blair Yakimoski, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

To answer the—another question, I wouldn't want to leave the member—he indicated there was

no additional staff in certain places because of consolidation. So no, there would have been additional staff moved into certain locations. That's the whole idea around a consolidation is to better collect your resources in fewer places to have better results, not unlike the St. Boniface cardiac unit where they've consolidated resources from around the city to go into St. Boniface.

So, certainly, in some locations, there—I understand from officials there would have been additional staff.

Mr. Swan: Hello, Mr. Acting Deputy Chairperson.

So, just so I'm clear on this, the time that's running stops as soon as the paramedics are able to have the person present to a triage nurse, but I take it that doesn't mean the paramedics are out the door. The paramedics will stay after the triage nurse has met the patient until there's an opportunity to transfer the person to the care of the hospital. Is that correct?

Mr. Goertzen: No, that's correct. The paramedics don't just leave when the 45 minutes has hit the buzzer. They don't just drop the patient off on the doorstep and drive away.

Mr. Swan: Yes, no, and just to make that doubly clear, whether they see the triage nurse within half an hour or 45 minutes or an hour, or whatever the case may be, the paramedics may remain with that patient for an indefinite period of time after, until there can be a safe and appropriate transfer of care.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, the—my understanding, from the WRHA is, of course, I think, intuitively, staff have to accept a patient before a paramedic leaves. If there's greater detail we can provide on the transfer protocol, I'm happy to provide that for the member.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Swan: Well, I thank the minister for that and, look, that makes obvious sense. No one is suggesting that paramedics would simply leave. I guess the question I have, though, is if we have a protocol of seeing a triage nurse within 45 minutes, simply seeing the triage nurse doesn't mean that the patient is treated any sooner, and it doesn't mean the paramedics are there any less.

Does the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority also track the time from the ambulance arriving at the hospital to the paramedics actually being able to complete that transfer protocol, and being able then to go back to their ambulance and deal with other calls?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes.

Mr. Swan: So can the minister provide average times for the hospitals in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority? I guess, to get a baseline for the previous fiscal year, because the new protocol happened close enough to that date, it would have set a good baseline.

Mr. Goertzen: Officials will undertake to get that information in the allocated time, as our rules outline. The information, I understand, is available because that time is the basis for the calculation of the money that's paid when the targets aren't met.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that. The minister was good enough to provide some details the other day about the number of nursing vacancies—or the percentage of nursing vacancies, to be correct, in the various hospitals.

Could the minister undertake to provide us with the total percentage of nursing vacancies in all areas of each of the hospitals in Winnipeg?

Mr. Goertzen: My understanding, from officials, is they don't collate that information. They have it when it comes to the emergency rooms at the main hospitals. I think I read for the member, because this became some issue of public debate in the media, and I know that the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) was in something of a dispute with the president of the Manitoba Nurses Union, where the Leader of the Opposition was saying that the vacancy rate was at the level that it was because the Province simply wasn't willing to fill those positions. And the president of MNU took exception with those comments and publicly took exception with them in—contrary to the comments by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

* (16:10)

I—when we look back historically at some of the vacancy rates—and this is probably what's—was the basis of some of the comments from MNU—if you look at March 31st, 2016—so that was a couple of weeks before our government assumed office—the vacancy rate at the Victoria hospital for nurses was 17 per cent; the vacancy rate at Seven Oaks was 15 per cent; vacancy at St. Boniface general hospital was 15 per cent; HSC was 15 per cent. That's for the adult emergency room. The Grace Hospital was 25 per cent, so a quarter of the positions were vacant. And it was 15 per cent at Concordia.

So, by the Leader of the Official Opposition's own rationale that he put into the media yesterday,

that would mean that the former government right at the end of its time in government was purposefully not filling nursing positions at those facilities. In fact, if the member doesn't like those statistics, and I can see why he wouldn't, if he went back one year even previous to that, March 31st of 2015, the vacancy rate for nurses at the Grace was 20 per cent; the vacancy rate for nurses at health sciences—or HSC adult ER was 19 and a half per cent; and the vacancy rate at the Vic was 22 per cent. So I'm sure that all Manitobans will have been shocked to learn that the former NDP government was purposefully not filling those positions.

That's not my accusation; that would be the accusation of the Leader of the Official Opposition, based on his rationale in his dispute with the Manitoba Nurses Union yesterday. And that's troubling, if that's the case.

Mr. Swan: Sorry, in all that, I missed whether the minister had given an undertaking to provide the nursing vacancies by percentage for each Winnipeg hospital as of April 1st, 2018.

Mr. Goertzen: My understanding is that the vacancy rates for nursing exists, certainly, within the EDs of the WRHA. We're not certain if it's—if it exists for the hospital generally, but we have to confirm back to the member on that.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that.

Now, when the Misericordia Urgent Care Centre was closed last year, one of the statements made at that time was that there would be an I.V. clinic that would operating in Misericordia.

Is that clinic operating now?

Mr. Goertzen: The—that certainly is still the plan. It was delayed, obviously, as the member knows. But it is still the intention to have that clinic located within Misericordia. Officials with the WRHA indicate they're optimistic that that will still be the case, although not on the original timeline that was provided.

Mr. Swan: Yes, I understand that the area where that was intended to go is still empty.

Can the minister give us some idea when we expect that I.V. clinic to be open and serving patients?

Mr. Goertzen: So just for clarity, the I.V. clinic is still open. It's just still open at its previous location or

at its existing location. The RHA officials indicate that it's their expectation that the transition to the Misericordia would happen in the fall, but the clinic does still remain open and accessible for those who need it.

Mr. Swan: And just so there's no mistaking, that's the fall of 2018 the minister's talking about?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes. I appreciate the member's lawyerly accuracy on that—on this. Yes, fall of 2018.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that clarity.

We've become aware of a situation where a lifesaving drug for patients with a fairly rare disease called cystinosis, the drug has now changed, and the costs for that drug have now gone up by a tremendous amount, by more than 30 times. I've been made aware of a Manitoba family that is now faced with this situation. The former drug is called Cystagon—C-y-s-t-a-g-o-n, which costs about \$10,000 a year and which is covered by Manitoba's Pharmacare program. But the manufacturer of that drug now has told families that they will no longer provide that drug and instead they'll substitute a drug called PROCYSBI—P-R-O-C-Y-S-B-I, which has a cost of \$320,000 per year.

This is in no way the fault of the Minister of Health nor the department or anyone else in Manitoba. But, obviously, as the minister can appreciate, because this new drug is so expensive and because it's not yet covered by the Pharmacare program, this is going to create a huge hardship for families in Manitoba who require this drug. Can the minister provide a status on where this is at? I expect that the department or even Health ministers have discussed this rather stunning increase in the price of this important drug, and I'm wondering if the minister can let us know so we can report back to families who are concerned about this.

Mr. Goertzen: We—we'll provide—we'll look to provide some specifics to the member on that perhaps in tomorrow's Estimates session. But, certainly, you know, we try to remain consistent on a pan-Canadian basis when it comes to the drugs that are negotiated and that ultimately find their way on to the formularies for the provinces. I mean, that negotiation generally involves a group of three provinces who undertake those negotiations, and then it has been a discussion more generally on the issue of how do we ensure that high-cost drugs are both covered where they need to be but also how can we provide other alternatives to the high costs of

drugs that are often being looked at for the treatment of certain diseases. So that is a—generally, that's a—certainly a concern, but we'll endeavour to provide some specific information to the member as we seek it from our Provincial Drug Program.

Mr. Swan: I appreciate the minister taking the time to do that because obviously, it puts families who are concerned about this in a terrible position where they're unable to access the drug that they had been using. They're now faced with an incredible expense for a new drug. And, of course, provincial pharmacare plans haven't yet covered it. So I do appreciate the minister's promise to take a look at that.

* (16:20)

Could the minister tell us, who are the political staff working in his office?

Mr. Goertzen: Currently, the political staff working in the office are Rob Pankhurst, exceptional young man who does tremendously hard and difficult hours in the position that he's in and that I've grown to respect greatly over the last many years of working together; and then Nathan Clark, who I haven't known as long but I think who also has a long and rewarding career in whatever he chooses to do ahead of him based on the time and experience I've had working with him.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that, and I know Mr. Pankhurst is quite exceptional, as he's put up with the minister now for some time, which speaks volumes.

Now, he—I take it Mr. Pankhurst would be described as the special assistant, and is Mr. Clark, then, the executive assistant?

Mr. Goertzen: I would describe Mr. Pankhurst as very—the very special assistant, given the time he's spent working with me, but yes, I think his official title would be special assistant, and I believe that Mr. Clark's official title would be executive assistant.

Mr. Swan: So does the minister have any other special advisers or anybody working politically out of his office?

Mr. Goertzen: So there's one vacancy that's quite recent. Delaney Hoepfner had been working as an executive assistant in the office until, I think, last week, and so that position is open. We are being provided with some support on that position from priorities and planning.

Mr. Swan: And does the minister have an issues manager?

Mr. Goertzen: Unless you would describe my deputy minister as an issues manager—I think she deals with about a thousand issues a day—but not in the way that I think the member is defining it, not as a political staff person, no.

Mr. Swan: And how many non-political staff, appointment secretaries, correspondence secretaries, does the minister have working in his office?

Mr. Goertzen: I hope this is heading into the position that the member—oh, no, it was actually the former Health minister who was advocating for me to have more staff in the office. So the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) may not do that, but there are four non-political staff.

Mr. Swan: Well, actually, I was going to ask—I will ask the question. Given the amount of telephone calls and letters and emails that I know are coming into the minister's office, I will ask the minister: Does he think that's enough support to be able to respond to Manitobans in a timely way?

Mr. Goertzen: We certainly do the best that we can with the staff that we have. I think the Premier (Mr. Pallister) was—made it clear that there was a tone at the top that was being looked at when it came to government generally, and that tone at the top, you know, meant that we needed to ensure that we were doing things in the most efficient way possible.

So I believe—I've got great confidence in the staff that we have. I think that they do an exceptional job for Manitobans, but I wouldn't want to suggest that they don't work very long hours; they do work very long hours. And I wouldn't want to suggest that they don't, you know, deserve lots of accolades, because they do. But, certainly, I believe we're doing a good service with the people that we have.

Mr. Swan: So, when somebody calls in—and of course, having been a Cabinet minister myself, I'm aware this would happen—who takes the call from someone who phones in unhappy about their own care or unhappy about the care that a loved one is receiving? Who would generally speak with them and try to find them information or get a response for them?

Mr. Goertzen: So, there's not just unhappy people who phone Health. We certainly have people who phone who are very happy and want to pass on their satisfaction with the health-care system as well. So, whether they're happy or unhappy or just have

phoned the wrong number, they would first get either our correspondence secretary or the administrative secretary, and then one of those two individuals would determine the appropriate routing for the call based on the nature of the call.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that.

You know, we've spent a lot of time together, and I do have many, many more questions, but I'm told that I should give someone else, some other departments, an opportunity to answer questions, so we're prepared to move ahead to consideration of the motion.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion? Okay, so we'll go through some of the resolutions first before we go on to the minister's salary.

Resolution 21.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$14,824,000 for Health, Seniors and Active Living, Provincial Policy and Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

Next resolution is Resolution 21.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,484,000 for Health, Seniors and Active Living for Health Workforce Secretariat, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

Next resolution is Resolution 21.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$46,952,000 for Health, Seniors and Active Living, Active Living, Indigenous Relations, Population and Public Health, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

Go on to Resolution 21.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$15,300,000 for Health, Seniors and Active Living, Regional Policy and Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

Next resolution is 21.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$43,083,000 for Health, Seniors and Active Living, Mental Health and Addictions, Primary Health Care and Seniors, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

* (16:30)

Next is Resolution 21.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,815,158,000 for Health, Seniors and Active Living, Health Services Insurance Fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

Next resolution is 21.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$198,187,000 for Health, Seniors and Active Living, Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

So next resolution is 21.9: RESOLVED that her—that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,347,000 for Health and Seniors and Active Living, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

The next resolution is 21.10: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,495,000 for Health and Seniors and Active Living, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

Now, we'll go on to the last item that can be considered on the Estimates for the department, and this item is 21.1.(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 21.1.

At this point, I request that the ministerial and opposition staff leave the Chamber for the consideration for this last item.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Swan: Well, actually, thank you, Mr. Chairperson. I have a motion that I would like to move.

I move that line item 21.1.(a) be amended so that the minister's salary be reduced to \$33,600.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been moved by the honourable member for Minto (Mr. Swan) that line item 21.1.(a) be amended so that the minister's salary be reduced to \$33,600.

The honourable member for—oh. Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

And the motion is in order.

Mr. Swan: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. We've spent, I guess, 18 hours plus together in these Estimates and, you know, as—I think as both of us put on the record at the start of these Estimates, the minister and I have a lengthy history. We seem to have always managed to be on opposite sides of issues, sometimes playing opposite roles now since the election.

And in these Estimates, I think we had some good discussions, and there was some good information. As I said, there wouldn't be many surprises, and what wasn't surprising is every time we got to an area where there was something that was difficult for this minister to answer, instead of simply getting us the answer, we got on to a litany of excuses and evasions.

So we didn't get the answer from the minister, but we know whenever he did that that there's more to look for, so that will guide us as we go ahead. I expect his department will be getting a few more freedom of information requests. And, of course, we'll continue to talk to the many, many health-care professionals across Manitoba who are giving us their concerns.

The reason why I've moved the minister's salary be reduced to \$33,600, frankly, it's not because I don't think this minister isn't working hard. I know he is working hard. He's been given a very, very difficult—some might say impossible—job by the Premier (Mr. Pallister). And the Premier, of course, will tell anybody who will listen he wants all hands on deck, but perhaps he means his pool deck in Costa Rica because all hands on deck clearly doesn't mean the Premier's Cabinet ministers.

What we've heard, and what I know the minister himself would agree, is that no one is faulting the individuals who work in the health-care system. And wherever we go in the province of Manitoba, wherever we go in the city of Winnipeg, my colleagues and I see health-care workers who are doing—and health-care professionals who are doing the very, very best they can in a very difficult time. The Minister of Health and his colleagues have rewarded these individuals with their hard work by freezing their salaries, freezing their salaries without a negotiation, without any opportunity to even negotiate what that would look like shortly after they gave themselves a 20 per cent salary increase.

So the purposes of this motion is to maybe let the Minister of Health show some solidarity with the

people who work in our health-care system so that he can say he didn't wind up grabbing a 20 per cent pay increase while they're expected to take zero.

We've heard loud and clear that Manitobans are concerned about this government's plan, the way the plan is being rolled out, the failure to consult with front-line workers, the failure to listen to front-line workers and, frankly, the impact this is having on the people who provide health care to our families and us. I've heard stories, for example, of employees who were deleted and then forced to go into the basement of the Health Sciences Centre, based on their seniority, to go on the big board and place their name on the job they wanted, knowing full well they were bumping or taking the job of their family, their friends, their co-workers. We've heard from nurses who are increasingly frustrated with the workload that they've been given, with shortages, whether through positions being deleted or simply positions not being filled, nurses who are so frustrated with not being able to provide the kind of care they want.

So I'm hoping that the minister and his colleagues will support this amendment—it still gives him a Cabinet salary, which was apparently fine up until two years ago—so he can show just a little bit of solidarity with the health-care workers, and I'm sure they'll be interested to have his support.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm reluctant to speak about my own salary. I won't speak about the quantity of it. I'll say to the member opposite, we have been on opposite sides for many years it seems, some of the great frustrations, I understand, from clients sometimes in the legal field is that, you know, their lawyers will—they'll battle it out in court and then they'll see the lawyers go for coffee after, and the clients sometimes feel that isn't appropriate, but it's sort of the nature of the profession. And while the member and I have had many legendary disagreements in this House, I think we've always maintained a respect for each other, and I continue to even after this process. And so I—he has an important role as an opposition member. I did that role for a number of years, and I appreciate that he has a role to do, and I think he does it admirably in this Estimates process.

I have acknowledged the front-line staff earlier, but I would certainly re-emphasize the great number of people working within our system. I want to thank my deputy in particular, and

Mr. Skwarchuk, and certainly other staff who've joined us, including Réal Cloutier, during this process and, in particular, my Deputy Minister of Health, who I think's one of the longest-serving deputy ministers of Health in the country. I rely on her greatly, and she's a tremendously hard worker, and I really have nothing but admiration for her and the people who work within the department generally. I—it's been an honour to work with them and to learn from them.

I'd be remiss if I didn't say at this moment I think having served—third longest serving Health Minister in Canada, maybe longer than five over the past seven in Manitoba, to thank my wife Kim, who's incredibly patient and really fills in a lot of the gaps at home when I'm not there for our son Malachi, who I spoke about earlier, who we're tremendously proud of and also the great support I have from extended family, both my mother and our mother-in-law and father-in-law and my stepfather. We're lucky to have them all alive because they fill in a lot in terms of helping Malachi as well—*[interjection]* It is true, my dog is still with me. He's 12 years old. We recently had to put him on anti-anxiety medication—

* (16:40)

An Honourable Member: You or the dog?

Mr. Goertzen: The dog. Apparently at 12 years old you start getting anxiety again. So whether he's still with me or not he hasn't said, but I'm glad he doesn't bark when I come home.

So, but I think for all Cabinet ministers and really for all of us as MLAs, we rely so much on our families to do this job, and I would say that that's not just as Health Minister, that's true for any portfolio in opposition or in government. We are all reliant on our families and our great constituencies. So I appreciate all of those individuals and many more, including my sister and my niece, and I could go on.

But again, I thank the member for this process and I guess we'll see how the salary vote goes and whether or not there'll have to be—whether or not I'll have to have some explaining to my wife when I get home later today.

Mr. Chairperson: I want to thank both the member and the minister for their ending comments, and so the—is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear noes.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Recorded Vote

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): A recorded vote, please.

Mr. Chairperson: A recorded vote has been requested. Call in the members.

All sections in Chamber for recorded vote.

Report

Mr. Chairperson: In the section of Committee of Supply meeting in the Chamber, considering the

Estimates for Health, Seniors and Active Living, the honourable member for Minto (Mr. Swan) moved that the line item 21.1.(a) be amended so that the minister's salary be reduced to \$33,600.

This motion was defeated on a voice vote, and, subsequent, two members requested a formal vote on this matter.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Chairperson: The question before the committee, then, is the motion of the honourable member for Minto (Mr. Swan).

A COUNT-OUT VOTE was taken, the result being as follows: Yeas 12, Nays 37.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Pivniuk): The hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 25, 2018

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Introduction of Bills		Roquette Pea Processing Plant	
		Lamoureux	1801
		Pallister	1801
Bill 226–The Vital Statistics Amendment Act		Climate Atlas of Canada	
Kinew	1791	Michaleski	1802
Committee Reports		Squires	1802
Standing Committee on Private Bills		Vale Canada Layoff Notices	
First Report		Lindsey	1802
Nesbitt	1791	Pedersen	1802
Members' Statements		Increased Class Sizes	
Raiders Junior Hockey Club		Wiebe	1803
Curry	1792	Wishart	1803
Bureau de l'éducation française–ADM Position		Replacement Bridge on PTH 2	
Kinew	1793	Johnson	1804
Bonnie Ash		Schuler	1804
Mayer	1794	Petitions	
Northern Health Professional Shortage		Tina Fontaine–Public Inquiry	
Lindsey	1794	B. Smith	1804
National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness		Fontaine	1805
Week		Twinning Leila Avenue	
Helwer	1795	Saran	1805
Oral Questions			
Changes to Health-Care Services			
Kinew	1796		
Pallister	1796		
Government Issued Identification			
Kinew	1797		
Pallister	1797		
Personal-Care-Home Beds			
Swan	1798		
Goertzen	1798		
Poverty Reduction			
B. Smith	1799		
Fielding	1799		
Seven Oaks Hospital ER			
T. Marcelino	1800		
Goertzen	1800		
Pallister	1801		
		ORDERS OF THE DAY	
		GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
		Committee of Supply	
		(Concurrent Sections)	
		Finance	
		Wiebe	1806
		Friesen	1806
		T. Marcelino	1813
		Fletcher	1816
		Executive Council	
		Kinew	1822
		Pallister	1822
		Health, Seniors and Active Living	
		Swan	1840
		Goertzen	1840
		Fontaine	1841

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