

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, May 16, 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 29—The Wildlife Amendment Act (Safe Hunting and Shared Management)

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): I move, seconded by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler), that Bill 29, The Wildlife Amendment Act (Safe Hunting and Shared Management); Loi modifiant la Loi sur la conservation de la faune (pratiques de chasse sécuritaires et gestion intégrée de la faune), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Squires: It gives me great pleasure to introduce Bill 29, The Wildlife Amendment Act. The bill addresses concerns regarding unsafe and unsustainable night hunting practices while respecting indigenous rights. It also enables the creation of shared management committees to address management and conservation of wildlife in certain areas of the province.

The bill makes all night hunting illegal in Manitoba except where specifically authorized for indigenous peoples. The proposed legislation will allow indigenous hunters to exercise their right to hunt at night in designated areas by obtaining a night hunting permit.

Permits provide for night hunting on specified public lands determined through discussion with local landowners, municipalities and indigenous communities and where night hunting can

sustainably be practised without impacting public safety.

I look forward to unanimous support from all members in passing this important bill in the current legislative session in order for it to take effect in time for next hunting season.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Third Report

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

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

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on the following occasions in the Legislative Building:

- May 9, 2018 at 6:00 p.m.
- May 14, 2018 at 6:00 p.m.
- May 15, 2018 at 6:00 p.m.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 19) – The Planning Amendment Act (Improving Efficiency in Planning) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire (efficacité accrue)**

Committee Membership

Committee Membership for the May 9, 2018 meeting:

- Mr. ALLUM
- Hon. Mr. EICHLER
- Hon. Mr. GERRARD

- Mr. LAGASSÉ
- Mr. LINDSEY
- Ms. MARCELINO
- Mr. MARTIN
- Mr. MICKLEFIELD
- Mr. MICHALESKI
- Mr. SMOOK (Chairperson)
- Hon. Mr. WHARTON

Your Committee elected Mr. MICKLEFIELD as the Vice-Chairperson at the May 9, 2018 meeting.

Committee Membership for the May 14, 2018 meeting:

- Mr. ALLUM
- Hon. Mr. EICHLER
- Ms. FONTAINE
- Ms. KLASSEN
- Mr. LAGIMODIERE
- Mr. LINDSEY
- Mr. PIWNIUK
- Mr. SMOOK (Chairperson)
- Mr. TEITSMA
- Hon. Mr. WHARTON
- Hon. Mr. WISHART

Your Committee elected Mr. TEITSMA as the Vice-Chairperson at the May 14, 2018 meeting.

Committee Membership for the May 15, 2018 meeting:

- Hon. Ms. CLARKE
- Hon. Mr. EICHLER
- Mr. EWASKO
- Hon. Mr. GERRARD
- Mr. ISLEIFSON
- Mr. LAGASSÉ
- Mr. LINDSEY
- Mrs. SMITH (Point Douglas)
- Mr. SMOOK (Chairperson)
- Mr. SWAN
- Hon. Mr. WHARTON

Your Committee elected Mr. ISLEIFSON as the Vice-Chairperson at the May 15, 2018 meeting.

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following 29 presentations on **Bill (No. 19) – The Planning Amendment Act (Improving Efficiency in Planning)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire (efficacité accrue)**:

May 9, 2018

Chris Goertzen, Association of Manitoba Municipalities
 Kim MacAulay, Manitoba Community Newspapers Association
 Chris Lorenc, Manitoba Heavy Construction Association
 Charles Chappell, Private Citizen
 Christine Waddell & Ken Waddell (by leave), Private Citizen
 Jill Verwey, Keystone Agricultural Producers
 Brent Wright, Private Citizen
 Mark Buss, Clipper Publishing
 John Kendle, Canstar Community News
 Jim Mihaly, Brandon Sun
 Jay Struth, The Killarney Guide

May 14, 2018,

Bob Cox, Winnipeg Free Press
 Will Reimer, Private Citizen
 Laurie Finley, Steinbach Carillon

May 15, 2018,

Ruth Pryzner, Private Citizen
 Joe Dolecki, Private Citizen
 Mike Teillet, Private Citizen
 George Matheson, Manitoba Pork Council
 Andrew Dickson, Private Citizen
 Elisabeth Saftiuk, Manitoba Professional Planners Institute
 Accalia Robertson, Private Citizen
 Lindy Clubb, Mixedwood Forest Society
 Bill Massey, Private Citizen
 David Nickarz, Green Party
 Evan Rodgers, Maple Leaf Foods
 Frances Smee, R.M. of Rosser
 Matt Reimer, HyLife
 Catherine King, Private Citizen
 Vicki Burns, Hog Watch Manitoba

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following 22 written submissions on **Bill (No. 19) – The Planning Amendment Act (Improving Efficiency in Planning)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire (efficacité accrue)**:

Don Pielt and Brenda Pielt, Southeast Journal
 Harold Froese and Cory Rybuck, Manitoba Egg Farmers
 Nancy Johnson, Melita Era
 John Fefchak, Private Citizen
 Lynn Taylor, Thompson Citizen
 Gail Halldorson, Private Citizen
 Darryl Holyk, Minnedosa Tribune

Andrea Geary, Private Citizen
Shirley Hiebert, Private Citizen
Sheldon Birnie, Private Citizen
Betty Turner, Private Citizen
Darren Ridgley, Private Citizen
Ligia Braidotti, Times Newspaper
Wilma J. Struth, Private Citizen
Brian Gilroy, Swan Valley Star and Times
Gail H. Fisher, Private Citizen
Ben Fox, Manitoba Beef Producers
J Brodt, Private Citizen
Danielle Da Silva, Private Citizen
Vicki Wallace, Southern Manitoba Review
Simon Fuller, Private Citizen
Curtis Struth, Private Citizen

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 19) – The Planning Amendment Act (Improving Efficiency in Planning) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire (efficacité accrue)**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill, with one amendment, on a recorded vote of yeas six, nays four.

THAT Clause 32(2) of the Bill be amended by striking out "Sections 18, 20 and 26" and substituting "Section 18, subsection 19(2) and sections 20, 25 and 26".

Mr. Smook: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to table the Pineland Forest Nursery 2016-17 Annual Report.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage, and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Ramadan

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to extend a very warm Ramadan

Mubarak to our Muslim community here in Manitoba.

Today, Ramadan begins, and as the new crescent moon appears devout Muslims all over the world will reflect on their lives and focus on spiritual renewal, almsgiving, strengthening community relations, their families and peace.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and the period during which the Quran is believed to have been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Ramadan is the holiest month for Muslims and is one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from negative thoughts; they abstain from food from sunrise to sunset and conclude each night in gratitude through prayers. Their observance is a time of profound worship and deep spirituality.

In this month of sacrifice and giving, the Muslim community extends assistance to those experiencing conflict, hunger, poverty and disease through charitable donations called zakat, regardless of differences in faith, culture or ethnic background.

And, Madam Speaker, for all Manitobans this month provides a wonderful opportunity for all of us to reach out to our Muslim friends, neighbours and colleagues and learn more about the Islam faith and this very important holy month.

The Manitoba Muslim community has more than doubled in the last decade. We are fortunate that over 20,000 Muslims from 28 different cultural and ethnic backgrounds call Manitoba their home.

Opportunities to recognize cultural heritage provide important occasions for dialogue, education and awareness, and these celebrations and observances also serve to highlight the diversity and complexities within traditions and faiths that contribute to our multicultural mosaic and social unity. I commend the members of our local Muslim community for their dedication to community service.

Canadian Muslims have made important contributions in the business sector, to the arts and at the professional level. Your commitment is evidence of our very, very, very many similarities despite our varied experiences and backgrounds.

Madam Speaker, I encourage all Manitobans and members of the House to join me in wishing all

Muslims in Manitoba a peaceful and happy Ramadan. Ramadan Mubarak.

Thank you.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Logan): I thank the minister for her statement.

I rise today to wish Ramadan Mubarak to all of the Manitobans throughout our province who are taking part in the fast of Ramadan.

Ramadan is the holiest time in the Islamic faith, as followers commemorate the revelation of the Quran to Prophet Muhammad. The fast throughout Ramadan is meant to bring Muslims and the faithful closer to God while also reminding them of the suffering of the less fortunate. Even for non-Muslim Manitobans, the values of Ramadan are worth celebrating. It's a time for detaching oneself from material things and worldly possessions. It is a time for people to step back in reflection, give charitably to those with less, come together with family and promote good works.

*(13:40)

Ramadan is observed by nearly 2 billion people around the world each year. The acts of preparing for the fasts and breaking the fasts are a time of celebration within families and communities, as fellow worshippers come together to pray and eat during those holy times.

Manitoba is the proud home to many Muslim families and the vibrant communities that use this time to make important contributions to our province. We wish our Muslim brothers and sisters peace as they embark on this month-long religious journey.

Thank you.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to speak in response to the minister's statement.

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

Ms. Lamoureux: Today marks the beginning of Ramadan for Muslims in Manitoba, across the country and around the world.

During this time, family and friends will gather all over the world to observe this holy month as they fast and pray.

Madam Speaker, prayer and spiritual contemplation is a focus during this holy time. Members

of the community focus on compassion, as well as giving generously to others and appreciating one's blessings through gratitude.

Let's use this opportunity to celebrate Muslim communities in Manitoba and across the world as we recognize the important contributions and wish those participating in this holy month a blessed and peaceful Ramadan.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Richard Halliday

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): Today I'd like to honour a man who was taken from us far too early. Richard Halliday, the president and CEO of Assiniboine chamber of commerce, sadly and suddenly passed away on May 5th.

Richard was a highly respected individual. He was an extremely ambitious and motivated man. Prior to being president and CEO of Assiniboine chamber of commerce, Richard held positions in marketing and sales manager at Skyward Aviation. He was also sales and marketing manager for Manitoba Lotteries and recently a business development manager for the North End community rehabilitation corporation—or renewal corporation.

Richard was extremely intelligent and clearly had very lofty career aspirations, and yet he always had a time for—to listen to what was going in your life, individuals, as opposed to talking about himself or things that were going on in his life.

And I tell you that he's someone that would listen, and would truly listen. He was the type of person that remembered, sometimes months later, any conversations you may have had. It's a trait that I truly find impressive, and I always admired Richard for his quality and the type of services and support that he provided to everyone around him.

Not only was Richard successful in business and the community, but he was also a loving husband for his wife Helen and a proud father to his two sons, Austin, Douglas, who are here in our crowd here today.

I can tell you of my understanding that Richard was also extremely talented chef, a dancer, a singer, avid art collector and a self-proclaimed handyman. He and his family also own a summer home in Eagle Bay in Kenora—near Kenora, approximately, called, or what they used to call as Halliday Inn, which

represented for friends and family—was truly opening to everyone.

Losing someone is never easy, and losing someone who has a productive and impact on our society in our local area is something that is truly profound and something that I want to recognize in the Manitoba Legislature.

So on behalf of the member for St. James (Mr. Johnston) and myself, I truly—condolences to the family, and they are here. I'd like to recognize them for his life's work.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. James—or the honourable Minister of Families.

Mr. Fielding: I'd ask to have leave—thank you, Madam Speaker, I'd like to ask for leave to have the names of the family members read into the record.

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

Family members of Richard Halliday: Helen, Austin, Douglas

Faceless Doll Project

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Twice this past March, I had the great privilege of visiting Lord Selkirk regional comprehensive school as students embarked on a Faceless Doll Project in honour of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls under the guidance of Shawna Whiteside and Mindy Brooker, elders, and indigenous community leadership.

In 2012, the Native Women's Association of Canada launched the Faceless Doll Project, a collection of faceless dolls, lovingly made by community, meant to symbolically represent MMIWG across the country.

The member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) and I both had the honour of participating in two of NWAC's community engagements, lovingly making our own faceless dolls, adding to their collection.

NWAC's Faceless Doll Project travelled extensively throughout Canada, as an art installation, including both National Roundtables on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

As an act of reconciliation and as a means of public education, Lord Selkirk students commenced their own face—doll project intent on creating 1,500 felt dolls, which I am pleased to

report have been successfully made. Students attached all 1,500 dolls to standing boards, providing a beautiful expression of acknowledgement, honour and love for MMIWG and their families.

I am always so proud when our youth take an active role on the issue of MMIWG, and these students, alongside their educational mentors, choose art as a means of agency and healing. Art is increasingly being used as a vehicle to draw attention to MMIWG and as a means of highlighting communities' support for families' trauma and struggles in pursuing justice for their loved ones.

Miigwech to Shawna, Mindy and all Lord Selkirk students who participated in this beautiful project: an act of love on behalf of MMIWG.

I ask my colleagues to help recognize our guests in the House today.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns.

Ms. Fontaine: I ask for leave to have all of the names of our guests and all of the students included in Hansard, please.

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

Faceless Doll Project participants and guests: Stephanie Atkin, Jacquie Bercier, Julia Courchene, Malcolm Disbrowe, Tyler Doyle, Carrie Hart, Leah Isfeld, Jared Laberge, Paige Mason, William Miller, Alvina Redeagle, Jessica Robert, Subrena Sawanash, Shawna Whiteside.

Jazmin Boisclair

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Madam Speaker, I would like to introduce a remarkable young Manitoban, Jazmin Boisclair. Jazmin has won multiple awards. She has recently received the Nellie McClung Trailblazer Scholarship for her writing, activism and humanitarian activities.

Jazmin has faced challenges, such as in 2009, when a flood destroyed her family's home. Because of this, she has experienced homelessness and poverty. Shortly after the flood, her father was diagnosed with lung cancer, and, in 2016, was found to have terminal brain cancer.

Along with her mother, Jazmin participates as a part-time caregiver for her father. Jazmin herself has overcome physical and mental challenges and she—that she copes with every day.

I am certain these challenges have helped to influence Jazmin's interest in medical and scientific research. She plans to be enrolled in the University of Manitoba before applying to medical school and then specializing in medical research.

What is noteworthy about Jazmin is not just her struggles and goals but her outstanding character. At the age of 17, Jazmin is mature, resilient and ambitious. She is committed to community and school volunteer work, while also active in sports. Her team coaches have recognized her for her teamwork and leadership efforts. Throughout her school life, she has given an appropriate priority to education and has achieved honours-level grades.

A true—as a true trailblazer, Jazmin demonstrates the core values and vision of Nellie McClung. She describes her experience winning this scholarship, among her many others, as a blessing that will help her achieve her dreams to become a scientist, health-care professional and humanitarian.

Jazmin Boisclair is here with us in the gallery today, along with her mother, Sandy Finkel. Please join me in recognizing the achievements and bright future of another Dawson Trail hero, Jazmin Boisclair.

North East Winnipeg Historical Society

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Northeast Winnipeg is one of the oldest areas to be settled in Manitoba, but its place in history has often been overlooked. The North East Winnipeg Historical Society works to change that by preserving and recording the rich histories of North Kildonan, East Kildonan and Elmwood for all.

* (13:50)

Led by historian Jim Smith, this volunteer group of dedicated locals work to educate the public on northeast Winnipeg's history with their series of historical walking tours, guest lectures and other events throughout the year. They have had large successes with their efforts, with walks attracting more than 150 people at a time and publishing a successful area history book which is now in its fourth printing.

The North East Winnipeg Historical Society relies only on small grants, along with funds raised from their \$10 memberships, to support their efforts. They also invest a lot of their own time and resources into gathering and maintaining one of the largest online archival compilations, available for all

to access on their website, along with physical binders full of news clippings, historical maps, photos and items.

The group has also been successful in building their collection that they are now looking at the next step in their growth: a permanent museum to preserve their history. Many areas in Winnipeg that used to be rural municipalities have museums to house their history, but not northeast Winnipeg. The group has demonstrated through their commitment and drive over the last eight years that they are ready for this step and have identified locations to house the museum. They are now seeking provincial support to make that dream a reality.

The group was encouraged by the support of myself and their local councillor, and also by this government's recent announcement of a Heritage Trust Program for small- and medium-sized museums and archives. It would be incredible, Madam Speaker, to see this money put towards this important initiative.

Preserving our history needs to be a priority as we map out our future. I believe supporting groups like North East Winnipeg Historical Society shows a commitment to that principle, and supporting their efforts for a permanent museum would help us preserve our history for generations to come.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Carbon Tax and Hydro Inquiry

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Again, I'd like to thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister) for allowing me the opportunity to represent the people of Assiniboia as a Conservative.

My remarks will be simple. Axe the carbon tax, including the made-in-Manitoba carbon tax, hold a Hydro inquiry and let's encourage freedom of the press. Public notifications should be in public publications like the press.

And we live in the best country, best time in human history to be alive. I'm very fortunate to have the opportunity to represent the best constituency in the best country.

And I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my family: Dave, Joanne, my parents; and my brother and sister, Gordon and Julia, and their spouses and kids for all their support in—during this last year.

Madam Speaker, thank you.

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): Madam Speaker, on Monday I was very proud to join the minister—

Madam Speaker: Excuse me. We've already had our quota of member statements today.

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Madam Speaker: The member's asking for leave to do another statement.

Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been granted. The honourable—*[interjection]*—oh, did I hear a no?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Oh, leave has been denied. *[interjection]* Oh, there may be a change.

Is there leave to allow the member to do a private member's statement? *[Agreed]*

Selkirk Team for At Risk Teens

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

On Monday I was very proud to join the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) to announce our government's commitment of \$50,000 in financial support for the Selkirk Team for At Risk Teens, otherwise known as START. The funding demonstrates our government's commitment to working with community agencies to support at-risk youth across Manitoba. START is a very special team who work together to help at-risk teens transition successfully into adulthood. At-risk individuals face challenges which can lead to feelings of isolation and estrangement. This can decrease their chances of developing to their full potentials and lead to behaviours that are self destructive.

I would like to share one of many START client success stories. Samuel was referred to the program at age of 17 after an abrupt change in behaviour which culminated in a three-week crime spree and 12 charges including assault, harassment, uttering threats and weapons offences.

Agencies in the START program worked with Samuel using addictions stabilization and mental health supports. With help, Samuel opened up to addressing the issues that led to his behaviour changes. Samuel's team consisted of members from

the school division, the RCMP, the Addictions Foundation, community and youth corrections.

Samuel and his family accepted the necessary supports to help him get off drugs, attend school regularly and address his mental health issues. Samuel has now graduated from high school and is working in his community.

I want to thank our Minister of Justice and our government for its commitment to helping support these groups who work together to give the youth in our communities the best opportunities possible for success.

I ask my Chamber colleagues to please recognize our START program co-ordinator, Tammy Thompson; our START vice-chair, Wanda Delaronde, and START client, Andrea Pitracchi.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests in the gallery.

We have, seated in the public gallery from St. Adolphe School 25 grade 5 to 8 students under the direction of Caleb Reimer, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Dawson Trail. (Mr. Lagassé).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Concordia and Seven Oaks Hospitals Request to Stop ER Closures

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I want to begin, Madam Speaker, by just saying Ramadan Kareem to the umma here in Manitoba, and may everyone who's observing the fast have a sacred and generous Ramadan.

We know that the Premier's cuts to the health-care system and the closure—the planned closures of emergency rooms in Concordia and Seven Oaks hospitals is going to have a big impact on the communities surrounding those care centres, but it also is going to have a big impact on the St. Boniface Hospital.

Tens of thousands of patients who are currently being served by Concordia and Seven Oaks each and every year will have to go to St. Boniface if the government does proceed with their plan to bring in these closures.

We also know that the shuttering of the QuickCare clinic in St. Boniface added further pressure to the community, and the Premier has so far refused to listen.

So I would ask the Premier: Will he back off his misguided plan to close emergency rooms in Winnipeg and commit to real supports for St. Boniface Hospital?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, after the NDP had 17 years to fix things, we had the longest wait times in emergency rooms in the country of Canada. Four of the five longest waits in hospitals from coast to coast were in the city of Winnipeg, so I'd say backing off would be the wrong thing to do. I'd say moving ahead to shorten wait times would be the right thing to do, and that's what we're going to do.

We're going to do that by focusing our resources appropriately to make sure that when people go to an emergency room, they get the care they need and they get it sooner. That's what we're after; that's what we're going to stay after.

Madam Speaker, they broke it; we'll fix it.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, wait times have been increasing every month since the Premier and his Minister of Health have started closing emergency rooms and urgent-care centres in the city of Winnipeg, and those are the facts.

We know that the Premier's own—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew:—hand-picked experts have actually told them to slow down, to back off their plan to close Concordia and to close Seven Oaks emergency centres.

And one of the concerns that they also outline is that the government's current plan for St. Boniface Hospital is not enough. It will be not enough to help that hospital keep pace with the influx of patients over the coming years.

Now, combined with the other closures that we've seen for QuickCare clinics like the one in St. Boniface, but also affecting other areas of the city as well, we know that our health-care system is under strain.

Will the Premier stop his plan to close emergency rooms in the city of Winnipeg?

* (14:00)

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, what—there's nothing new over there. This is the same position that the previous government demonstrated when they failed to address the concerns about wait times that Manitobans have been communicating for some time—for years, in fact.

The member's position is, and the NDP's position is, that we should slow down and wait, and that's exactly what they've been telling Manitobans to do in emergency rooms for the last number of years: wait—wait for six and a half hours for emergency care, Madam Speaker.

That's just wrong. That's just wrong. It's painful. It creates fear. The people in the—record numbers of people were walking out of emergency rooms without any care at all, just giving up in frustration. That's not a system that we should be defending in this House. I'm surprised the member tries to defend it.

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

Westman and Parkland Region Ambulance Station Closures

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, we know that this Premier has a problem with listening, listening to his Hydro board, listening to the experts, listening to the opposition. We're never surprised when he doesn't listen to us, but it is a concern when he doesn't listen to people who have supported him for years and years and years.

So many people in Westman were surprised to hear that this government plans to close ambulance stations in their communities, communities like Oak Lake, communities like—in the Parkland region, Grandview.

Now, residents in these communities are not only upset that the government has announced plans to close ambulance stations where they live, but insult was added to injury when they find that the Premier and the Minister of Health will not even meet to listen to their concerns.

So I'd ask: Will the Premier revisit his plan to close ambulance stations across Westman and in the

Parkland region and begin with a commitment to sitting down with, meeting with people and communities like Oak Lake?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): My Health Minister has been aggressive in his meeting schedule, as recently as last week meeting with people from Boissevain, Madam Speaker. That's a false attack.

The member asks us to listen to him. I have listened to him. Here's what he's done just today, just this afternoon: he's said we're cutting health care—our budget this year is half a billion dollars higher than it ever was under the NDP. That's a myth. He says wait times are getting longer. He wishes they would get longer, Madam Speaker, but they're getting shorter.

They're 18 per cent shorter than last year at this time. And I've heard loud and clear what he said today and what he repeats. He wants Manitobans to wait longer for emergency care, but they're going to get care sooner with this government.

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

VIRGO Report Recommendations Implementation Commitment

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): We know that this Premier has a real credibility problem. That was on display all week so far when it came to the—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —brutal mishandling of the rollout to their own VIRGO report.

First, they've been saying for months and months and months now, wait for the VIRGO report to come. But then when it gets released, it turns out that they have been deleting recommendations that they do not agree with.

Now we hear that they're not even prepared to tell us which recommendations they are going to act on, but why not? If you already deleted the recommendations in the report that you don't like, why is the government not prepared to tell us the remaining recommendations that we'll see action on?

When will the Premier make the investments that are needed? Will he commit to implementing all the remaining recommendations in the VIRGO report?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I find it sad, Madam Speaker, that the member would choose to attack my integrity in this Chamber.

But I find it even sadder that he would try to attack the integrity of the report's author, Dr. Brian Rush, who says he wrote the report and takes ownership of it. The member opposite chooses to attack someone who has an international record of renown, a 62-page CV, who has worked almost four decades as a substance-use mental health researcher, who has incredible expertise, because, Madam Speaker, the author of the report made 130 recommendations that we here are very interested in reviewing, and didn't make one recommendation that the member wanted him to make. That kind of petulance doesn't speak well to anyone, and attacking the integrity of the report's author is not on. I don't accept it. I think the member should apologize to Dr. Brian Rush. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

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

Mr. Kinew: Just to be clear, I'm criticizing this Premier's brutal handling of the mental health and addictions file to date, and the Premier's mismanagement continues.

We hear today from journalists that the Minister of Health will not be answering questions about the VIRGO report that they have been promising for months and months and months.

So, again, they've only been responding to questions over the past two days. There are many more questions, but they haven't answered any substantive questions yet because they've been so preoccupied with their own version-control challenges and their own bungled rollout of this VIRGO report.

Now, we're used to, in the House, to this government not answering our questions during—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —question period, Madam Speaker, but why won't the Minister of Health answer the questions of the people of Manitoba or answer the questions that the media has? I'm sure many people would like to know which of the recommendations that this government has already vetted will see action.

So I'd ask the Premier: First of all, which recommendations will he implement? Second of all, will he commit to answering questions before the media this afternoon?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member proposes to launch an integrity fight for which he is unarmed, Madam Speaker, because he tells us that we bungled a report which is critically important and deals with a critically important issue, which the NDP never did. They never commissioned a report for 17 years. While the problem worsened they failed to address it.

They backed off, did nothing, and now he criticizes the report only because it doesn't contain one little recommendation he doesn't like to see not in the report.

Madam Speaker, 130 recommendations worth considering and one extra recommendation not there, all of a sudden integrity attacks on the author of the report, on the Health Minister and on myself. The member shouldn't throw stones from a glass house.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, there are many important recommendations in this report: recommendations for them to invest in housing—*[interjection]*—there are recommendations for them to invest in housing; there are recommendations for them to invest in supports for children and youth; there are recommendations for them to add more money to the amount that is provided to front-line services, to primary care that serves those with addictions and mental health issues.

However, to date, so far this week, this government has not answered any of the questions from us, from the public, from the media or otherwise as to which recommendations in the report they are prepared to act on.

The contradiction in their position is this: we already know that they have vetted the recommendations. They have already filtered out the recommendations that they do not agree with.

Why, then, can they not tell us which of the remaining recommendations will they act on?

Mr. Pallister: Well, there it is again. The Leader of the Opposition likes to cast aspersions, Madam Speaker; he likes to impugn the character of others. He says we should act on 130 recommendations, but at the same time he disparages the character of the

author of the report—can't have it both ways, can't have it both ways.

A 30—a four-decade career by this gentleman, Dr. Brian Rush; he has already stated publicly and repeatedly that he is the author of the report without influence or undue consideration of the views of this government. He has said that repeatedly, yet the member repeats charges against Dr. Rush's character.

That is inappropriate behaviour, Madam Speaker. That is inappropriate behaviour. It's unfair to the author of the report; it's unfair to this Health Minister; it's unfair to the people of Manitoba.

We'll deal with an issue that was ignored by the NDP for years and we will do so because, while they broke it, we are going to fix it. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mental Health and Addictions Social Housing Units

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Access to safe, affordable housing is a human right and a moral responsibility. One of the items that slipped past the Premier's political editors of the doctored VIRGO report was a call for increasing the amount of social housing for people dealing with mental health issues and addictions, Madam Speaker.

* (14:10)

Despite this, we're finding out today the Premier (Mr. Pallister) approved the sale of a building with more than 300 units that are sitting empty.

Will the Premier commit all proceeds from the sale toward social housing and for Manitobans dealing with mental health issues and addictions?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): I can tell you, the member is just completely wrong on these issues.

What's happening here, Madam Speaker, is either, clearly, one of two things: either the NDP and the member is completely wrong on the issue, or No. 2, they're trying to gin up the numbers to fit some sort of broken political 'narrative' that they cooked up.

What—let me address the real facts. The real facts are this government has created over 487 new units of affordable housing here across Manitoba; 42 per cent of those units are social housing. We think that's important. This government has created—over 3,000 more people are supported under the

Rent Assist program. By year end there'll be over 3,300 more people supported. That's something going to have impact on poverty. That's going to have something impact on mental health.

We're very proud of that record, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. John's, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: The minister says he has, and I quote, big plans, end quote, for money—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —from the sale of 185 Smith Street, but, apparently, Madam Speaker, the only thing bigger than those plans is the secrecy around them. I would have thought the goal for the minister would be—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —to have more social housing for Manitobans, which is recommended in the VIRGO report. Again, it's important to recognize, the VIRGO report makes it clear that people dealing with mental health issues and addictions need more social housing, not less.

Can the minister tell us exactly how many new units of housing the money from the sale of 185 Smith Street will create?

Mr. Fielding: This is another example of NDP, not just mismanagement, because the building that was in question needed about \$20 million of maintenance that the NDP, of course, forgot to do; the shining example of the management that the NDP did in terms of housing.

The revenues that are associated with this will help us support and did support, last year as well as this year, over 1,200 more people on the Rent Assist program. That's providing a portable shelter benefit that we think is important. That's some of the reasons why we think that the number of people, the children, the child poverty rate has gone from 10th to fifth best here in the province of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. John's, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Fontaine: The Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his minister have shown over and over again that they don't believe in social housing. For all the Premier's spin and rhetoric, the simple fact is that he would

rather sell off buildings than invest in social housing units that would actually go to help Manitobans.

Manitoba is in need of—massive need of—social and affordable housing to help our most vulnerable and marginalized.

Again, how many new social and affordable housing units will the Premier direct his minister to build this year?

Mr. Fielding: We're not done yet in terms of building affordable and social housing for Manitobans. In fact, we've got over 140 units being constructed right now. Over 30 per cent will be social housing. What I always hear from the opposition is somehow that we haven't built a unit at all of social housing.

What I will table here, Madam Speaker, is a picture of myself—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: —building, with Jimmy Carter, affordable housing. That's important to St. James, Madam Speaker. I also table a picture of a ground breaking that I had with the member—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: —for Thompson (Mr. Bindle) to build affordable housing in Thompson, which we think is important. I will also table a picture of myself at the Austin commons complex, that's there, building social and affordable housing for the province of Manitoba. And I will also table a picture of the Province of Manitoba investing in the Downtown Commons.

We think that's a progress. Get on board with our plan for housing. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Safe Injection Site Request for Facility

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, we know the Minister of Health received the VIRGO report at the end of March and we know that the report he received contained a recommendation for a safe injection site. But the minister let that report sit in his desk while he continued to deny and belittle calls inside and outside this Legislature for that very thing. And while intravenous drug use has continued to devastate Manitoba's families, the minister instead stage-managed a fight with his own consultant about a recommendation for those sites.

This minister stood in this House and denied there was evidence to support safe injection sites, knowing full well he had a report from his own expert recommending it. But it's not too late.

Will the minister review the deleted recommendations and commit to opening a safe injection site?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): The member is demanding that I alter the VIRGO report now, Madam Speaker.

I understand why he's attacking Dr. Brian Rush. I don't agree with it, but I understand it, because the VIRGO report is many things. It's a thoughtful report. It's a thorough report. But it's also an indictment of the 17 years that the NDP were in government, Madam Speaker. It speaks to the fact that the NDP didn't put proper investments into mental health and addictions. It speaks to the fact that they didn't properly align the system. It speaks to the fact that there were long wait times.

Of course they're going to attack the author, because that report is a clear indication that the NDP failed on this file when they were in government.

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

Mr. Swan: Well, Madam Speaker, I'm not attacking the author, I'm attacking a minister who had a report on his desk—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Swan: —calling for safe injection sites and refused to acknowledge that, even as he was being asked questions in this House about that very issue.

Dr. M.J. Milloy is a national expert in safe injection sites and infectious diseases, and he says there's no question that Winnipeg needs—now needs a safe injection site.

The only question is if this minister will put aside his government's ideological beliefs and do the right thing for Manitobans struggling with addictions. It's abundantly clear to everyone, except perhaps the members over there, that the minister interfered in Dr. Rush's report.

Will he now acknowledge the evidence suggests that safe injection sites is the best practice?

Mr. Goertzen: The member for Minto, not only in that question, referred to Dr. Rush as being

untruthful, but he also wants me now to ignore the VIRGO report, Madam Speaker. And I know why he wants me to ignore the report, because the report lays out very clearly that over 17 years that the NDP were in government, young people, youth, and people that the Leader of the Opposition referred to in his question, waited. They didn't have access to treatment.

Now, we've already, of course, taken some action with the RAAM clinics; didn't happen under the NDP.

Of course, they don't like the report. Why would they like the VIRGO report? It puts out in very clear understanding, in writing, in illustration, that the NDP didn't care about this file, failed on this file. I'm sure they're going to try to do everything they can to discredit the report because the report discredits them, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Swan: Madam Speaker, we're calling on this minister to follow the VIRGO report that he received on March 31st before he decided that he didn't like the recommendations in that report.

The minister's hand-picked consultant knew the truth about safe injection sites because there's national evidence that they work. Dr. Rush knew that Manitoba families have been calling for harm reduction supports because he consulted with them.

The only thing Dr. Rush told us he didn't know was that there was an application to build a safe injection site in the works. How could he possibly not have known that if he was the expert and was given the necessary information from Manitoba Health? It's because this Minister of Health refused to be open and transparent in dealing with this drug crisis.

Will the minister now commit to moving ahead with a safe injection site?

* (14:20)

Mr. Goertzen: Well, there he goes again, Madam Speaker, wants me to ignore the VIRGO report, wants to criticize the author, the—he says the hand-picked author. Of course, there was a tender that went out. He wouldn't understand that because he wouldn't know what a tender is—and we can talk about Tiger Dams at another time—but there was a tender and he was selected because he's an eminent expert in this field—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: –40 years of experience, a 62-page CV, Madam Speaker, and the member for Minto says that he is being untruthful.

Well, I know why he wants to discredit the report. That report was clear: under the NDP, under 17 years they failed. They failed young people. They failed others who were dealing with addictions. They failed many people who were dealing with mental health. They failed. The report lays that out.

We won't fail them. We'll follow the report, unlike them, Madam Speaker.

Inclusion Support Funding Inquiry

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Children with disabilities or emotional and behaviour needs should not have to wait to get the supports they need. When the minister was asked in Estimates if there is an internal wait-list for children receiving inclusion support funding, he said there isn't, per se.

Families need clarity. Will the minister tell the House today if there is a wait-list or not?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): Our government is very proud in the investments we made with the federal government in terms of supports for child care, over a \$47-million commitment. That, of course, never happened under the NDP government.

We are very proud of the fact that we're investing over \$10.3 million to fix the broken inclusion support system that we are left under the NDP government that was underfunded for many years.

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

Mrs. Smith: According to FIPPA documents, staff did compile a working list for internal tracking purposes. This sounds like a wait-list. This means some children may not be getting the supports that they need.

Will the minister confirm that every child who qualifies, for the inclusion supports that they need that they get the funding?

Mr. Fielding: We are, as a Province, investing more money in child care than any time in this history, and that's largely to do with the commitment that our government has made in terms of investments in

child care. We know that hundreds of spaces have been created, something you didn't see under the NDP administration.

What we did with inclusion support, we put it under review. We made some—we made importance investments in there. We established a partnership agreement with the federal government, and we've invested over \$10.3 million over the next three years to streamline the system and make it more efficient and effective for families.

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

Mrs. Smith: Federal agreements won't help parents if their children are stuck on an internal wait-list. Families need to get supports now when they need it, not later. This is about—more about helping children be successful in—about—this is more about helping kids be successful in daycare. This is about protecting the rights of Manitobans with disabilities.

Will the minister be clear: Will every child who needs inclusion supports get the funding that they need?

Mr. Fielding: It's always important to listen to the experts on wait times. We know what the NDP did in terms of wait times for things like health care, for things like a number of other things, including parents that are waiting for child-care supports, something that we inherited—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: –from the NDP government.

The member also talks about immediate supports. The \$10.6 million is allocated for this year and next year. That's something that I call immediate support for families that need the support.

This program was underfunded. It was capped, since 2012 alone. Our budget process will have over \$5 million for the next two years to invest in important programs and streamlining it, make it more efficient and effective. That's something we heard from the child-care sector. That's exactly what we did, Madam Speaker.

Workplace Death Case Concern Whistleblower Protection

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, with respect to the death of Todd Maytwayashing, on the May the 7th the Premier said that he's taken this issue on personally and seriously. The family and I appreciate the Premier's personal

interest and, indeed, his visit to the family home a month ago today.

There is, indeed, an area where the Premier can help. I understand that there are others, including in the gallery today, who are ready to come forward to talk about the situation, but are reluctant to do so for fear of losing their jobs.

Can the Premier tell the family members who are here today that he will make a statement or take action which would protect such individuals so that they feel comfortable in coming forward?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I would give assurance to anyone who has information that they would like to bring forward in the process of investigating this tragedy, to bring that forward without fear of repercussions of any kind. They deserve to feel entirely confident and safe in doing so and I think all of us here share a desire to make sure that the information that the family is desiring to receive is received by them as soon as possible.

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

Whistleblower Protection Legislation Coverage for Contract Employees

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I thank the Premier for that assurance. It's really all about making sure that all the information possible on the circumstances is available.

Now, we know that employees of Manitoba Hydro are protected under the whistle-blower protection act, but as I understand it, employees of a private contractor like the Forbes Bros. would not be protected even though the company is doing contract work for Manitoba Hydro.

Would the Premier consider an amendment to the whistleblower protection act to include coverage for employees of companies working under contract to the government or to a Crown corporation like Manitoba Hydro?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, I don't wish to be harsh with the member but I would say it would be with great reluctance that I would enter into a policy discussion centered around and using as its focal point the tragic death of a worker in our province, and so I would reserve comment in respect to his suggestion.

With all due respect, I'd ask him to use the channels available to all of us here as members in

order to effect change. If he believes that change to be one he wishes to advocate, I encourage him to do so.

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

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the Premier and I appreciate his circumstances.

I suggest there is an opportunity, potentially, to work together to address the situation and improve worker safety. Currently, Bill 5, an amendment to the whistleblower protection act, is before the Legislature. With all-party agreement, it would be possible to expand the coverage of the whistleblower protection act to include coverage for employees of companies working under contract to the government or under contract to a Crown corporation like Manitoba Hydro. This would be desirable for a number of reasons.

I wonder: If we brought it forward, would the Premier consider the possibility of an all-party agreement for such an amendment?

Mr. Pallister: Again, feeling deeply, as I think we all do, the tragedy this family is going through and has experienced, I will repeat nothing, Madam Speaker. I believe I've addressed the member's concerns with my second response.

Selkirk Team for At Risk Teens Program Funding Support Announcement

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): Madam Speaker, during my private member's statement today, I stated that the Minister of Justice was in Selkirk on Monday and made an exciting funding 'announcement'—announcement for our START program.

Can the member—or, the minister let members of the House know how this funding support will help at-risk youth and make our communities safer?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I was proud to join my colleague, the member for Selkirk, along with RCMP Assistant Commissioner Scott Kolody as well as 'co-ordinaty'—co-ordinator Tammy Thompson, who's here with us today, to announce our government's \$50,000 investment in the Selkirk Team for At Risk Teens, or the START program. START, Madam Speaker, is a community mobilization initiative that provides at-risk youth with supports they need to prevent cycles of crime in their lives.

Andrea, in fact, who's here with us in the gallery today, is a prime example of why we're investing more in organizations like START. She should be commended for all the accomplishments that she has made in her life, and I want to congratulate her today.

Madam Speaker, our government will never give up on people like Andrea. We will never give up on our youth and we will continue to do so while we're protecting the health and safety of all Manitobans.

* (14:30)

Planning Amendment Act Public Notices and Appeals Process

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, over the last week, Manitobans have voiced their opposition to Bill 19, The Planning Amendment Act. Many presenters pointed out that the act allows developers and only developers to appeal a decision to the Municipal Board. This provision was opposed by many presenters, including the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and the reeve of the RM of Rosser.

Of greatest concern to us is that, under this legislation, only those advocating for a development are afforded the right to appeal.

Why is it one set of rules for this government's well-connected friends, and a different, lesser set of rules for everyone else?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Municipal Relations): I just wanted to, again, thank all the presenters that took place in—over the three days, here at the Legislature. It was a great opportunity to see democracy at work. I know that we heard a lot of very interesting comments, and, of course, input towards Bill 19, and, certainly, Madam Speaker, we are listening.

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

Mr. Lindsey: Many presenters opposed the government's arbitrary requirements about public hearings. Even the Manitoba professional planners were concerned. This is the first time the professional planners have taken action by presenting at a committee.

Ms. Saftiuk raised concerns about the arbitrary threshold to hold a public hearing. She asked the minister, and I quote: Shouldn't the concerns of

immediately abutting property owners carry more weight? End quote.

So I ask the minister: Why isn't he listening to the public or to professional planners or anyone else who are worried that the minister's making it harder for the public to voice their concerns?

Mr. Wharton: I'm glad the member opposite brought up the issue of listening, because it's very apparent that the NDP weren't listening during the three days of committee. I have a quote here from an individual I'll just quickly read into the record: I can remember seeing a large number of people present at the committee tonight that I have spoke to for several years, Madam Speaker, and they were not listening, let alone hearing. And I applaud the fact that the members present tonight appear to be good, not only at listening, but engaging us in the process.

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

Mr. Lindsey: Clearly, they weren't listening. We heard, repeatedly, from the presenters about the erosion of public notice provisions. The minister, last night, made an amendment that would allow him to pass the bill, well, and then proclaim those provisions about public announcements at some point in the future.

John Kendle, from the Community Newspapers Association, told us that the minister promised that he would preserve community notices. Instead, the minister broke his word and passed the bill, allowing him to revoke community notices, at his pleasure, any time in the future.

Why has the minister broken his word? Why is he trying to limit public participation? Why is he not listening?

Mr. Wharton: Again, I'd like to commend the member for mentioning listening, because, again, I know that he wasn't paying attention over the last few nights, Madam Speaker, because Mr. Kendle did, quote, that section 25 of Bill 19 be amended. He was requesting an amendment to the bill. We listened to Mr. Kendle. We have made it clear that the bill will be amended. We are listening; unlike members opposite.

Planning Amendment Act Health and Environmental Concerns

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Well, this storyline just gets more and more bizarre with each so-called answer from this minister, so let's continue.

The irony is fully on display that the concerns raised by many at committee hearings recently relate to odour concerns in rural Manitoba, declining quality of life, declining property values of nearby properties close to new agricultural developments and, of course, water pollution.

This minister's the MLA for Gimli. How is he standing up for water in Manitoba, while still pushing through legislation which undermines democracy and increases threats to Lake Winnipeg? Will he answer that question today?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Municipal Relations): Madam Speaker, 17 years under the NDP did nothing to help Lake Winnipeg, Madam Speaker. I know, because I do live on the shores of Lake Winnipeg. This government is very concerned about our waterways. Nothing in Bill 19 changes any environmental process moving forward. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Wolseley, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altemeyer: All right, let's practice our active listening skills.

There's nothing in Bill 19 that changes any environmental provision, except maybe—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Altemeyer: —except for an entire section of the legislation. Other than that little detail, we may have something here.

So this is a minister that is now going to go to his constituents and every other rural constituent and say, you no longer have the right to appeal a decision that has been made about a development project when that development project could very well have a negative impact on the very air that you breathe, the very water that you try to draw to use for your family from your well.

How on earth can the minister stand by that faulty reasoning? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I appreciate a question about fairness, and this theme, I guess, today, Madam Speaker, is one of transparency.

We understand there was a rebellion on the other side that was caused by—allegedly—by the awarding, repeatedly, of untendered contracts to a party donor, and these contracts were arranged by Steve Ashton to be given to his friend, and there were a series—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —of them and they total \$15 million.

And so we asked for a report, Madam Speaker. We asked for a report to give substance to the usefulness of these orange plastic bags that the minister kept buying from his buddy at Pony Corral.

And we got a report back, but it took seven years. And the report had a title page—and I know I can't use displays so I won't hold up the report because that would be wrong; I can only say that every page was blacked out—every page, eight years later.

So when these members opposite attack us for putting out a report, Madam Speaker, and claim we did it erroneously, they need to remember that they, eight years later, had a report put out which was blacked out apart from the title page—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

The First Minister is correct in that exhibits aren't allowed, and I would remind everybody that that is a rule that we take seriously here, that exhibits are not to be displayed at any time.

The time for oral questions has expired.

Madam Speaker: Petitions?

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Madam Speaker: Question period's over.

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

The honourable—order. Order.

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a point of order.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Again, you just provided guidance to the House that displays are not used, props are not to be used in the House. The Premier is currently showing props, a display before the House. So I'd ask you to call him to order and ask him to apologize. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order, please.

As it was pointed out to me by several of the members in the Chamber, that is a point of order, that exhibits are not to be used in the House. And I will concur that that is not to be allowed, that it would be a point of order when members hold up exhibits, and that is a clear rule of this House. So the member would have a point of order.

* (14:40)

I would indicate, also, that there was a point where I did indicate that oral questions had expired and did call for petitions, so with the timing—and I guess I would need some clarity from my staff as to whether that rule does extend past question period. And I—it has—it is being indicated to me that that rule does extend past question period, that it is for all sittings in the House, so that would be a point of order.

* * *

Madam Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired, I had indicated.

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 the petition:

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 the 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 justice—the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry.

We petition the legislative 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 the 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 the public—of a public inquiry be developed jointly with the caregivers of Tina Fontaine and/or the agent appointed by them.

Signed by Jason Harper, Guy Ducharme, Colleen Whela 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.

Vimy Arena

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The residents of St. James and other areas of Manitoba are concerned with the intention expressed by the provincial government to use the Vimy Arena site as a Manitoba Housing project.

(2) The Vimy Arena site is in the middle of a residential area near many schools, churches, community clubs and senior homes, and neither the provincial government nor the City of Winnipeg considered better suited locations in rural, semi-rural or industrial locations such as the St. Boniface industrial park, the 200,000 acres at CentrePort or existing properties such as the Shriners Hospital or the old Children's Hospital on Wellington Crescent.

(3) The provincial government is exempt from any zoning requirements that would have existed if the land had been owned by the City. This exemption bypasses community input and due diligence and ignores better uses for the land which would be consistent with a residential area.

(4) There are no standards that one would expect for a treatment centre. The Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living has stated that the department of Health had no role to play in the land

acquisition for this Manitoba Housing project for use as a drug addiction facility.

(5) The Manitoba Housing project initiated by the provincial government changes the fundamental nature of the community, including park and recreation uses. Concerns with the residents of St. James and others regarding public safety, property values and their way of life are not being properly addressed.

(6) The concerns of the residents of St. James are being ignored while obvious other locations in wealthier neighbourhoods, such as Tuxedo or River Heights, have not been considered for this Manitoba Housing project, even though there are hundreds of acres of land available for development at Kapyong Barracks or parks like Heubach Park that share the same zoning as the Vimy Arena site.

(7) The Manitoba Housing project and the operation of a drug treatment centre fall outside the statutory mandate of Manitoba Housing renewal corporation.

(8) The provincial government does not have a co-ordinated plan for addiction treatment in Manitoba, as it currently underfunds treatment centres which are running far under capacity and potential.

(9) The community has been misled regarding the true intention of Manitoba Housing, and the land is being transferred for a 50-bed facility even though the project is clearly outside of Manitoba Housing responsibility.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

(1) To urge the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Vimy Arena site is not used for an addiction treatment facility.

(2) To urge the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure the preservation of public land along Sturgeon Creek for the purposes of park land and recreational activities for public use, including being an important component of the Sturgeon Creek Greenway Trail and the Sturgeon Creek ecosystem under the current designation of PR2 for the 255 Hamilton Ave. location at the Vimy Arena site, and to maintain the land to continue to be designated for parks and recreation active neighbourhoods and communities.

This petition has been signed by Antonia [phonetic] Russo, Gerald [phonetic] Russo, Doug Demenier [phonetic] and many others.

Madam Speaker: The petition was not read as printed. Is there leave to accept the petition as printed? [Agreed]

TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA:

The background to this petition is as follows:

1. The residents of St. James and other areas of Manitoba are concerned with the intention expressed by the the Provincial Government to use the Vimy Arena site as a Manitoba Housing project.

2. The Vimy Arena site is in the middle of a residential area near many schools, churches, community clubs and senior homes and neither the Provincial Government nor the City of Winnipeg considered better suited locations in rural, semi-rural or industrial locations such as: the St. Boniface industrial park, the 20,000 acres at Centre Port or existing properties such as the Shriner's Hospital or the old Children's Hospital on Wellington Crescent.

3. The Provincial Government is exempt from any zoning requirements that would have existed if the land was owned by the City of Winnipeg. This exemption bypasses community input and due diligence and ignores better uses for the land which would be consistent with a residential area.

4. There are no standards that one would expect for a treatment centre. The Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living has stated that the department of Health had no role to play in the land acquisition for this Manitoba Housing project for use as a drug addiction facility.

5. The Manitoba Housing project initiated by the Provincial Government changes the fundamental nature of the community. Including park and recreation uses, concerns of the residents of St. James and others regarding public safety, property values, and their way of life are not being properly addressed.

6. The concerns of the residents of St. James are being ignored while obvious other locations in wealthier other neighbourhoods, such as Tuxedo and River Heights, have not been considered for this Manitoba Housing project even though there are hundreds of acres of land available for development at Kapyong Barracks or parks like Heubach Park that share the same zoning as the Vimy Arena site.

7. *The Manitoba Housing project and the operation of a drug treatment centre fall outside the statutory mandate of the Manitoba Housing Renewal Corporation.*

8. *The Provincial Government does not have a coordinated plan for addiction treatment in Manitoba, as it currently underfunds treatment centres which are running far under capacity and potential.*

9. *The community has been misled regarding the true intention of Manitoba Housing, as land is being transferred for a 50 bed facility even though the project is clearly outside of Manitoba Housing's responsibility.*

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

1. *To urge the Provincial Government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Vimy Arena site is not used for an addiction treatment facility.*

2. *To urge the Provincial Government to take the necessary steps to ensure the preservation of public land along Sturgeon Creek for the purposes of park land and recreational activities for public use (including being an important component of the Sturgeon Creek Greenway Trail and the Sturgeon Creek ecosystem) under the current designation of PR2 for the 255 Hamilton Avenue location at the Vimy Arena site, and to maintain the land to continue to be designated for Parks and Recreation Active Neighbourhood/Community.*

Tina Fontaine—Public Inquiry

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 and protect the lives of indigenous peoples and children, including the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry.

* (14:50)

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 many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, 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)

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN RELATIONS

* (15:00)

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

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Good afternoon and thanks, everyone, for being here again, today.

A couple of questions. In April of 2017 the Department of Indigenous and Municipal Relations included \$1.5 million in funding for the Metis Economic Development Fund. That budget was passed and approved by this Legislature. However, the Metis Economic Development Fund was told it would only receive \$450,000 in funding, and the rest was denied. If the government had planned to provide this amount of funding in its budget, why did it break that promise?

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): I thank the member opposite for taking time today to come and engage again and talk about indigenous relations in our government.

It's been two years of really getting to know our First Nations as well as the Manitoba Metis Federation, and during that time we've had extensive consultations on a lot of different issues. And I have to acknowledge at this time—and I have to thank Grand Chief Jerry Daniels, grand chief Sheila Wilson and—as well as our Grand Chief Arlen Dumas and the Northern Affairs communities, all the leadership there for respectful engagement and taking the time to—not only to myself, but to my staff—some of them being new—and talking about the past and also giving us—pardon me—their vision of the future and where they would like to go.

And, you know, we spent extensive time talking about what hadn't worked in the past and what types of issues that were concerning them and, you know, tried to acknowledge what could be different going forward.

And, of course, they bring forward issues that go back in a—and I think treaty land entitlement, of course, was one of them where the previous government in three years had done absolutely nothing. And we were very pleased at the end of 2017 to have transferred over 43 different parcels of land throughout the province for treaty land entitlement. This showed faith in our government and helped to fulfill their expectations.

When they came forward in their meetings and felt disrespected—and there was certainly a lack of trust—that concerned me. I've spent a lifetime

working with people and trying to better people's lives, so to see that our First Nations—and even the Metis Federation, when President Chartrand indicated that there'd been absolutely no meetings between him and the Aboriginal minister for 10 years, and just the fact that we can sit down and have a conversation, and more than willing to talk about the past.

But I really wanted to hear from our individual leaderships across the province, where they wanted to go in the future, and I was very straightforward with them. We had lots of requests for funding during those meetings for various events and various projects, and I took the time to explain to them the financial position that our government had been left in.

And we talked about that extensively because they also indicated many of them too had had financial struggles in the past. Some of them were still in that position, being in third-party management. And they spoke about their desire to be self-sufficient and to be able to handle their own affairs financially. They wanted to do better within their respective communities. They wanted to be able to provide a good lifestyle for their youth and their children going forward and leave them a legacy. And I think that's where we all agreed. We were all working towards the same goals and we very quickly acknowledged that.

And it was interesting that, as our meetings progressed and we met for second and third times, whichever, that it was soon that we weren't talking about the finances at all, we were talking about how we could better our relationships and who our partners had to be going forward in that fact so that we could better serve—they could better serve their communities and the people in it and how we as a government could serve them and meet their challenges better.

And, you know, after two short years, we've come a long ways and we look forward to partnering with our First Nations going forward and ensuring that, as well as the Manitoba Metis Federation, in ensuring that we have a solid working relationship so that we can do more projects and be more successful in the future.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, that was quite the answer to the question.

In April of 2017, the Department of Indigenous and Municipal Relations, that's this government,

that's you, this minister, you've included \$1.5 million in funding for the Metis Economic Development Fund. That budget was passed and approved by the Legislature. However, after that, the government told the Metis Economic Development Fund that, no, you're not getting \$1.5 million that we previously agreed to. You're only getting \$450,000.

If that was the case, why did this government agree to the \$1.5 million to start with if they had no intention of actually delivering on that?

Ms. Clarke: Well—and I thank the member opposite for the question—and, in fact, I think you've been hearing extensively over the past months that we're a government that is analyzing a lot of the funding that was taking place in the past, and that was also a part of those conversations that I spoke to in my first response.

Looking at the different funding that had been in place and funding that should go forward—and I would like to acknowledge that the initial amount that was funded to the Manitoba Metis Federation was, in fact, for their operating costs, which, you know, they would be expecting, and that certainly was put forward towards them.

And I think the member opposite also knows that we have acknowledged, on more than one occasion, that we are completely re-evaluating all economic development across the province. And that continues. We know that economic development, whether it's on our First Nations or municipalities all across the province, that there is—there's an abundance of opportunity, but we want to make sure that we make the best decisions and that we get value for money in regards to economic development.

*(15:10)

I know that the member opposite is aware of Look North and the opportunities up there. We've had announcements in northern Manitoba looking and working with—membership on that committee for Look North was from many different communities. It was indigenous and non-indigenous as well. We've got mayors and Reeves that were involved and also chiefs of our First Nations looking towards partnerships and working together so that we can have the best outcomes.

We realize that the province of Manitoba provides a lot of opportunity, and the event that was held—it was hosted, actually, by the southern chiefs in Manitoba along with municipalities, and it was exactly working towards this. And these partnerships

that have been formed with First Nations and municipalities, as well as other partnerships—businesses that are included as well in our chambers of commerce—is really building on a strong Manitoba going forward. And I think we're going to be seeing some great incomes.

The event that I attended was—like, it was actually intended for networking, also learning and sharing experiences, both from our First Nations and our municipalities. And we're seeing so many new relationships, and that's really exciting. And I think what we've come to realize right from day one is that our First Nations leaders as well as our municipal leaders were not accustomed to working together, and that was new. And they kind of had to get to know each other.

And I have to thank our First Nations for taking the leadership in this—in some cases. Grand Chief Jerry Daniels arranged a meeting last year in 2017, specifically for the reason of getting to know all the membership within the Capital Region group that we have. And that was a historical event because it was just getting to know each other. They discussed who each of them were, what their roles were and what their responsibilities. And then I believe there was a short discussion on shared services and shared projects, and that's already happening. And they are really hoping to build on that.

And the event that was held most recently was well attended, and from all intents, I think the response that I've had from our First Nations chiefs and council members that were in attendance—they were listening. They brought in speakers from other provinces where this is already happening. So Gladstone—or—pardon me—Manitoba's really happy to be going down that journey with our First Nations and municipalities, and we look forward to really strong economic development in our province.

Mr. Lindsey: So, in relation to this funding that was to be supplied to the Metis Economic Development Fund, and it was approved in April 2017, and the government informed them at that time that they would—no, the government waited until March of 2018 to inform the Metis Economic Development Fund that it wouldn't be receiving the funds that had previously been approved.

So why did the Province then wait until the end of the fiscal year to inform the Metis Economic Development Fund that it wouldn't receive the funds that it previously had agreed to provide?

Ms. Clarke: Well, I don't know if the member opposite has had the opportunity to sit down with the Manitoba Metis Federation and President Chartrand, as well as all the ministers, but I've enjoyed many meetings with them as a group or individually. We have probably had more meetings with the Manitoba Metis Federation than most, and they've been very cordial meetings.

And I have to acknowledge the Manitoba Metis Federation. They are a very efficient run group, and they have done some great things in regards to economic development, but they also—they have a strong membership. And I would suggest, if you get the opportunity to attend one of their annual general assemblies, that you do.

They are—well, there was housing announced just this week in Selkirk with the Manitoba Metis Federation and the Province of Manitoba, and that just goes to speak about the partnerships that are happening. And we will continue working with them in regards to economic development.

They are a partner in going forward and I know that our government is very optimistic about economic development throughout the province of Manitoba, and we'll continue working with all these different groups that we are currently involved with and, you know, we'll continue that partnership.

Mr. Lindsey: So the question was about, why wait the full year when the money was approved in 2017 April. They get told in March of 2018 that oh, yes, by the way, you're not getting the funding that we previously said you were getting. So what reason is there for waiting that full period until the end of the fiscal year before telling them that they're not getting the money that they obviously had to budget for?

Ms. Clarke: The member opposite implies that the Manitoba Metis economic development was not aware of this. In fact, our staff was in ongoing conversations with them. So this—I don't believe this came as a surprise as you've indicated. There was conversations ongoing and, you know, we try and be very transparent with them. We haven't—we have a very good relationship with the Metis Federation.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, I might question how good your relationship—not the minister personally, but how good this government's relationship is with the Manitoba Metis Federation when you're on your way to court because of disputes with that very same organization.

So did the decision to not fulfill the commitment to the Metis Economic Development Fund, did it have any relationship to the ongoing discussions regarding the Metis relationship agreement with Manitoba Hydro?

Ms. Clarke: Well, the implications that the member opposite implies are totally not true. And that's what I appreciate, probably, about President Chartrand the most is he is very, very adamant about keeping individual issues individual, and he stays focused as to where he takes an issue and where he doesn't.

And, as you could see, as I already indicated, he did a great announcement this week with our minister of housing. I have had meetings with President Chartrand. I have had meetings with some of his ministers in regards to Metis friendship centres and other issues, and there is absolutely a cordial and respectful relationship that continues.

There will always be issues that we deal with as a government and we do not—you know, if we have one issue that is not going down the right track for either partner, we don't dwell on that. We've got a job to do and we stay respectful and professional.

Mr. Lindsey: That is, in fact, all the questions I have for this minister.

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Okay. Thank you very much.

Seeing no further questions, we'll now deal with the resolutions.

So the first resolution is Resolution 19.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$30,276,000 for Indigenous and Northern Relations, Indigenous and Northern Relations, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 19.3: Be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$96,000 for Indigenous and Northern Relations, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for Estimates of this department is item 19.1.(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 19.1.

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

* (15:20)

So the floor is now open for questions. We have any questions?

Mr. Lindsey: I move that line item 19.1.(a) be amended so that the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations' salary be reduced to \$33,600.

Motion presented.

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): The motion is in order. Are there any questions or comments on this motion?

Okay, hearing none, is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Okay, I hear a no.

Voice Vote

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

An Honourable Member: Aye.

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): It is my opinion that the Nays have it.

* * *

The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Okay, we have here Resolution 19.1: Be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$904,000 for Indigenous and Northern Relations, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the department of 'inigeous' and northern relations.

This also concludes our consideration of the Estimates in this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in room 254.

I would like to thank the ministers, the critics and all honourable members for their hard work and dedication during this process.

Committee will recess until 5 p.m.

FAMILIES

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I'll continue on where my colleague from—MLA from St. Johns left off. I believe she was talking about inclusion supports, which we've been raising in the House for the last few days. So the question I have for the minister: Have there been any policy changes to the inclusion support program since the summer of 2017?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): Yes, so, as—you know, we spoke a little bit about this in the House, but I'll reiterate. So, essentially, we did have the program under review. I think that was well documented in the media, and so there's been no changes to the criteria of the program whatsoever.

We did review it to see how other jurisdictions are doing it and the amount of funding is in place. We did find that the funding wasn't adequate and so we've really kind of moved and we'll making kind of the details public when they're finalized with the federal government.

So we are investing about 10 point—I believe—\$6 million of the \$47-million investment to enhancements of the inclusion support and, really, they revolve around—you know, although we haven't announced the overall details of any changes, but—essentially it will be a dual stream. So there's children with autism, there's kind of higher-needs children, so it will be kind of two streams and—so they'll get more services and support.

I will say part of this dual stream, they'll be able to be supported a little bit better depending on, you know, which stream they'll go into. So it's an 'emphansis' to streamline that that hasn't been announced, that will be announced soon, but we have given kind of some global indications of where we think the program needs to go.

Mrs. Smith: Does the minister have a timeline on when this—when exactly this \$10.7 million will be in place to support these families?

Mr. Fielding: Well, we committed the 10-point—I'll say 10 and change—I believe the exact number is 10.6. So that will be implement—it's a three-year program so that will be implemented, you know, over the next two years and the details will be announced, you know, in the near-distant future.

Mrs. Smith: So is it the near future, or distant future?

Mr. Fielding: I got in trouble when I said in the coming days versus the coming weeks, so I'll say in the coming weeks.

Mrs. Smith: In the past two fiscal years the actual expenditures for inclusion support services have gone beyond what the minister has seemed to budget for 2018-19. Will the minister commit to going beyond his budget if the number of children requiring inclusion support service exceeds the budget?

Mr. Fielding: Well, we think with the program it should support upwards of 700 children or more. It's—there isn't any parameters if—you know, there isn't a capping of the program, I guess I'll say, so if you hit the criteria of the program, then it is supported.

Mrs. Smith: So is that a, yes, that those—you'll go beyond the budget to support the families that need the extra support?

Mr. Fielding: Right, yes. There isn't any plans to cap it. Like, there's not a certain global dollar figure that we anticipate. So, No. 1—and, again, we will be announcing details. I can't get into that because I—you know, I want to—there—you know, we're going through the fine-tooth cones of the actual detail component.

What I can say is that if you hit the criteria, right now you will get—you know, you will get the services and support, and so we don't anticipate that changing.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Point—or, sorry, the member—yes, from—member Point Douglas.

Mrs. Smith: Has there been any changes to the criteria?

Mr. Fielding: I just do want—do—correct the record. So there is 1,600 children that are supported, but with the bilateral agreement, the 10.6 some-odd million dollars—we anticipate, you know, there'll be 700—what I'll say families are supported because families are part of the children that are there.

I think the question was related to criteria of the program. No, we don't anticipate any major changes to the criteria of the program, although, you know, again, the structure of that and creating kind of more of a dual stream.

You know, we have heard that there is too much—a bit too much red tape and bureaucracy that were there, and so that's why we wanted to do a review to see what other jurisdictions are doing. And so there was an opportunity to partner with the federal government to enhance the program. Part of some of the federal government investments not just for, you know, for this—the—you know, the inclusion support portions of things.

* (15:10)

But, anyways, we prioritized it based on what the needs of the federal program or the—what I'll say the criteria the federal program, the bilateral agreement was in place. So we don't anticipate any major changes with the criteria, but there, again, will be kind of a dual stream to kind of, I don't want to say sort things out, but allow for more focused support in these particular areas.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister tell us which line in the budget that the 10.6-odd million dollars is in?

Mr. Fielding: Okay, I'll refer you to page 83 of the Supplementary Information on Legislative Review for Families. So it's within the budget line, right, the \$178,977; it is incorporated in there.

And, again, I think I quoted the exact numbers yesterday, but it was roughly around \$12 million, you know, and I don't have the exact number in front of me right now, but \$12 million, and it's gone up to, I think over \$17 million. I can get the exact numbers but I did quote that yesterday or the—or rather the last day that we had Estimates, which was, I guess, on—it's getting late—I guess two days ago.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister tell us how he interprets the child-care acts' regulation 62-68, specifically, sections 5(a), and its accompanying policy, which says, licensed facilities can establish their own inclusion policies.

Have there been any changes to this policy?

Mr. Fielding: If I could get—you quoted the—you know, you might—I don't carry this around in my back pocket, so if you could just quote what subsections you're talking about. I don't believe you—there was any changes to that at all. But if you—if I could get you to quote that again and I can just make sure, you know, I have the right information from our officials to verify.

Mrs. Smith: Mr. Chair, 62-slash-68, sections 5(a) deal specifically with child-care centres opening up and having to have an inclusion policy so that if applications come in that that's included.

Mr. Fielding: Well, I answer that in two parts, and I actually try and answer the question on this.

Number 1, there hasn't been any changes because we haven't, really, you know, we haven't introduced, kind of, the details of the program. But we don't anticipate there'll be any change to that subsection of the regulations that you're referring to as we go forward.

Mrs. Smith: So the minister talked about—I asked a question earlier about inclusion supports and often going over budget; you referenced \$10 million. Does that mean—is that an indication that the minister will no longer be increasing funding to cover all applications?

Mr. Fielding: Right, so the program is, you know, kind of what I refer to as a mandated program, which basically means we pay out on what, you know, kind of, the applications that we get, essentially, and they meet—if you meet the criteria, then you'll get the services and support.

So whether there is—and, again, we will be making, kind of, some announcements later on, the finer tuned details of it. But, no, we don't anticipate any changes. If you are—if you hit the criteria for the program, then we will support that.

Mrs. Smith: So that means you will go over budget if there is a need for families that require these supports. That's great to hear.

The regulation 5(a) 62-68 says that the program or the department policy is that licensed facilities can

create their own policy. Has the minister directed licensed facilities to change their inclusive-inclusion policies at all?

Mr. Fielding: Right. So that regulation really speaks to the nature to saying, you know, that child-care centres, you know, have to have, essentially, a policy and have to—they can't exclude children that would need what I'll say, higher needs, or, you know, maybe children with autism or anything else that are there. So it just speaks to the universal nature of the program in and itself.

Mrs. Smith: So I get that centres need to have—like, they're regulated to have inclusion policies, but what I'm asking is if the minister directed centres to change their policy at all around inclusion supports.

Mr. Fielding: Right. I guess what I'll say is, you know, for a centre to open up, to get a licence and/or to have a licence renewal, they essentially need to agree to this parameter, which is—again, it more speaks to ensuring that they will accept children that may meet the criteria of the program, so it ensures that.

To date, at least from our officials' point of view, we haven't heard of any cases that the centres don't agree to this. But if that was the case, in so many different ways there's—you know, we would be able to, you know, work with the centres to ensure that they do meet those criteria.

I would also say, you know, if that is a part of the criteria or one of the elements of the criteria of licensing, that would become a factor when you either decide to create a licence or when you decide to renew a licence. So I hope that clarifies the situation.

Mrs. Smith: Does a department review these inclusion policies that come in from these licensed facilities, and do they need to submit them to the department?

Mr. Fielding: Right. So, as part of the licensing process, whether you're establishing a new licence or you're renewing licences, the co-ordinator would review that.

That's—we need to ensure that centres, as they, you know, create a new centre or they get renewed, that they have, you know, agreed to these policies that are in place. So, to answer your question is yes.

Mrs. Smith: Is there feedback provided on these policies?

* (15:20)

Mr. Fielding: Well, what I will say is, yes. Part of the review we—and I have regular dialogue with the Child Care Association and other providers, so for sure there was dialogue happening on any changes that we were making and there is dialogue on this section as well, right? There was fairly extensive—and I think the Child Care Association identified that last year as one of their priority items to address, to make some changes to. So we try to follow what the Child Care Association does have in place.

And, again, there is that dialogue with the co-ordinators and the service providers, the licensing process that would allow that dialogue to happen. I can tell you, you know, again, just that we haven't had a case where someone who's applying for a licence and/or trying for a renewal does not agree with the policy as, you know, what they're looking to attain in the regulations.

So we haven't come across that. We did consult and we're basing the new policy that we're establishing with the federal government toward the dual stream based on some feedback that we heard from child-care sector, so.

Mrs. Smith: How are the facilities governed?

Mr. Fielding: Right, okay, so the vast majority of these centres are governed by boards. There's a—there, I believe, is a requirement to have some sort of parent on that board. The enforcement side of that, of course, with—is done through—obviously through licensing process, and that is administered through our branch.

Mrs. Smith: Have you received any submissions from facilities since undertaking the review and, if so, which ones?

Mr. Fielding: Right, so we did receive a letter from the Manitoba Child Care Association. We also have had, you know, for the most part in terms of our practices we are meeting with the Child Care Association on a fairly regular basis. This issue has been—in fact, I think we've met with them—whether Pat Wege or the new executive director will be coming up fairly soon.

Discussions have been had and it has been fairly open in their circular, right? They've got a, kind of a newsletter and kind of an active social media elements and things, and so I think their desire for us to enhance, streamline the program has been pretty

well documented and we have had some extensive conversations.

And to be fair, when we did our review we did consult with the associations, I'll say, about the changes, and I think for the most part the association—Manitoba Child Care Association, based on Pat Wedge's comments, when we did, you know, kind of, release the whole bilateral agreement with the federal government was well embraced.

Mrs. Smith: So have there been any submissions for renewal of licences or new licences?

Mr. Fielding: Yes, so, with the review process—so the licences, obviously, are issued. We have, based off a independent officer's recommendations—I think it was in 2014; I'll have to get back to you, if that's the exact date—said that we should be focused in on, like, with the child-care sector, there are some that are—that do a very good job. They've got a very good track record that are there, and some that need a little bit more support.

So be able to move, based on what, and I believe it was the Auditor General or it was the—what's the other? [*interjection*] Ombudsman. I'll have to get back to you—is one of that.

But an independent report that basically came back and said, you should move towards more of an area where you're going to give more supports to people that need them, centres that may need them. The ones that are doing really well are compliant, there's no issues, then they would still be granted an—kind of a licence on an annual basis. But the supports would go more towards the ones that need more supports.

So we pilot that out, and we announce that—I guess it was last March, I believe—last year. I'll say last year. And so we think that's gone well, and that's based off an independent officer's recommendations of moving towards it. And I think that is been very well supported by the Manitoba Child Care Association.

Mrs. Smith: So is there no new centres that have put in applications to open?

Mr. Fielding: Well, you're—you know, again would need to get licensed again, right, so that's, you know, for the most part, on an annual basis. So, to answer your question, is yes, everyone's applied for a new—you know, everyone has applied for a new licence, there has been new centres that have opened, as

you'll always have. What I'm saying, that's kind of an annual basis for, really, all centres.

Mrs. Smith: So what I'm—I realize that there's new spaces that open every year, that there's centres that, you know, get renewed. What I'm asking, though, is if—what—where are the new centres that have opened, if you could provide those, which areas, where in Manitoba?

Mr. Fielding: Right, well, I guess, I'll put on the record last March we announced, I believe it was—well, say, I don't have an exact number of centres that opened up, but there was hundreds of new spaces that were created. If you're asking from last year, '17 or '18, I do have a listing of the centres.

It was over 607 different spaces that were created in areas like the YMCA, YWCA, Great-West Life—that was 100, at places like Building Blocks on Balmoral. By the way, I'll just emphasize, that is a beautiful—if any of you get a chance to go to that centre, it's a beautiful centre, kind of a model of what—kind of a public-private partnership with centres can happen.

* (15:30)

Ryerson school opened 48 spots; Kids In Day Care Are Super Inc. and École in—kind of south—the South Pointe area, 23 spots got to not, you know, announce some of these names right, but I'll just go through a little bit more of a laundry list. Laugh 'N' Learn early learning child-care centre in Donwood School, 74; Harrow Co-operative Children's Centre at Harrow School, 74; Sage Creek Rainbow Day Nursery, which is 144 spots; Little Saints Learning Centre, for 48 spots; Little Voyageurs Learning Centre at Marion School, 24 spots and areas like Thompson Children's World—so, yes.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister provide that list to me? I'd appreciate it.

And can you also provide the department policy on inclusion supports?

Mr. Fielding: Right, we will be able to provide that listing in the time frames that's allotted through the Estimates process.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister say how he interprets regulation 62-86, subsection 37(3.1), (3.2)? Same as a sector.

Mr. Fielding: Well, I think the member—and again, you're throwing numbers at me, so if you're talking about inclusion support 37.31 or 37.32, I want to

clarify if that is the case. You know, I mean, I can read this verbatim what it says in the act. I don't know what your definition of interpret that really means. So maybe just—like, what are you asking? I don't quite understand.

Mrs. Smith: So there seems to be a discrepancy in how the minister perceives it and how the staff are perceiving it. I have a House note here, it says, the sector has interpreted Manitoba child-care regulation 62-86, subsection 37(3.1), (3.2) as a staffing grant should be based on actual costs incurred by the facility or extra staffing.

However, the regulation specifies that ELCC program director must be satisfied that the cost of the grant for extra staffing is reasonable and provides appropriate for the child's needs. The sector's interpretation has limited budget reduction strategies.

And then the next line's blacked out.

Mr. Fielding: Well, as minister of the department, I'll say that we do follow all regulations that are within the act and within regulations, so, you know, there—just to be clear, there's total consistency with anything the department says and the minister says. I can tell you that staff and grants amount are based on the centre's salary scale for newly hired staff at the child-care centre assistance level.

The number of hours for additional staffing is based on the needs of a child's hours, of a child's attendance and the centre's capacity to meet those needs within the regular or enhanced staff-to-child ratios. It is stipulated that the director must be satisfied that the cost of extra staffing is reasonable and support provided to the child is appropriate for his or her needs. The child's individual program plan is reviewed at least annually and support hours may be adjusted based on the child's current needs and/or the centre's capacity.

Mrs. Smith: So we were talking about policy earlier and daycare facilities. Is there—has the department initiated any programs to ensure that they're complying with the policies as written?

Mr. Fielding: Right, well, I guess what I'll say is there is regular contact with the co-ordinators with the child-care sector and the child-care centres, but to answer your question, really, that's done through the licensing process.

Mrs. Smith: So just to go back to this regulation. So can the minister tell me how he interprets this regulation: regulation 62-86 subsection 37, 3.1, 3.2?

Mr. Fielding: Well, respectfully, I'm not really into the got-you types of questions. I do want to answer your question, so I'll say I interpret it the way it's written on the paper in the regulations.

Mrs. Smith: So is that different from what a director would interpret it or, you know, is the minister interpreting different?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I'd say that we have talented staff that do their job. They co-ordinate this process. The regulations are in place to be followed. We would anticipate that the regulations that are in place are followed and, you know, that is the role as administrators—and, you know, just to give them a compliment, I think they do a fabulous job at their work and co-ordinating a number of the child-care rules, regulations that we think will make a big difference not just to help establish child cares, but also have them renewed, but also provide supports and services really to the ones that need it.

And I think what you'll find in the child-care sector, because a lot of the boards are administered and I know, just in our personal life, although I've never been on a child-care board and we've done a number of different types of child care over the course of our lives, they're very busy people, right, and so sometimes some centres may need a little bit more help than others.

So that's really what our staff is there for. They're there to help co-ordinate and the approach that we've taken follows upon what the Auditor General had recommended us to do and so that's the policy changes that we made. But, again, you know, I'll interpret the regulation exactly the way it's written in the book.

Mrs. Smith: So does that mean if a director comes forward and says that a child needs more support which requires more staff that that actually would—that they actually would get their request granted?

Mr. Fielding: Well, the process, obviously people would—that's an application-based process and so there is a criteria around that so the staff will work with the parents, work with the centres on appropriate care process that's in place. But, again, that is something that there's a criteria that's set out. That's a process they work with the centres to develop an appropriate level of care for those centres.

Again, we have taken great priority in terms of re-profiling in the inclusion support program. You know, we had a choice, I guess, when we worked

with the federal government on the bilateral agreement of \$47 million, and we decided to make some important investments in that area and had an opportune time to streamline the program and make it more efficient and effective. Again, what we heard, clearly, from people that had children in the program, that it needed to be streamlined, needed to be more efficient and effective and more responsive, essentially, to parents and the child that met the criteria of the program to be developed.

Mrs. Smith: So, in this House book note, it says reasonable request. What does it mean request to be reasonable?

* (15:40)

Mr. Fielding: Right. So there, you know, again—so there's an application-based process, and there's a criteria that you have to meet. Once someone does apply through the application process, the branch will work with the centre, No. 1, to ensure that the plan that they have forward is going to meet the child's best needs. That's something that the branch and, you know, and the centre work together, to ensure that there's appropriate services and support for the child.

Mrs. Smith: So I think that child-care centres are interpreting this differently than the minister is. So the child-care centres are under the guise that if a child in their centre or coming into their centre needs extra supports and it's beyond the budget of this department, that those supports will be granted regardless of whether there's funds to support it or not.

Mr. Fielding: Well, there's no question that the program needed to be reviewed and needed to be made more efficient and effective. That's something that we heard clearly from the child-care sector. So that's something that we endeavour to do. We decided to make it a priority, and we—you know, we looked at all the areas.

When there's an opportunity to work with the federal government to create more child-care spaces under the parameters of the bilateral agreement, you've got to make some choices. And so we made a choice to provide additional support and streamline the process to make it more user-friendly, supportive of children, supportive of families and supportive of the sector.

I'm sure the member wouldn't just agree—or probably would agree that there needs to be a process in government, right, where a plan is developed and

there needs to be agreed upon from the centres as well as the branch to make sure that dollars are spending more efficiently. Because if you don't have a system where dollars aren't spent more efficiently, you know, that potentially could be less money in a whole bunch of different ways or less resources for children that need it best inside the window of, you know, the fact that it's a mandated program.

So that is a normal process for, really, any program that's in place. There's a plan that the centre, the families, work with, with the branch, to ensure that the services and supports are there. And, quite clearly, we've heard from the child-care sector that changes needed to be made, and we did that review, and we invested close to \$10.6 million over two years to streamline the program to make it more efficient and effective.

Mrs. Smith: So that's great to hear that the minister's saying that he'll approve every single application for every single child that comes into these centres that needs it beyond budgetary restraints. Will he—he talked about streamlining the program earlier. Could he give us details about the changes that the department has made to the inclusion support program?

Mr. Fielding: Just want to make sure that correct information is being put on the record. So the program is in place. There is criteria that we, you know, anticipate or we would expect centres as well as the branch to follow.

So, you know, criteria is put in place to make sure supports and services are there. So that is something that we would like to follow on an annual basis.

I think, to be fair with you, we haven't announced the greater details on the program. We have announced what funding will be in place. We've given general sense that we think that there should be a dual stream, some that handle higher-needs children, some that handle, maybe, children with disabilities or autism.

So I'm not at the point where I can give you the exact details because we haven't announced that. We haven't had final sign-off and working with the federal government and other sector people that we think is important to make sure we're getting it done right. So I can't give you any more details than what we've really announced in the global package of \$47 million. But I will tell you to stay tuned because it will be coming in the coming weeks.

Mrs. Smith: So I'll take that as a no, that children that are needing those supports won't receive supports beyond the \$10 million.

Moving on, why do children who change daycare centres have to reapply for inclusion supports if they previously qualified at a different daycare centre?

Mr. Fielding: No, just to your point, that isn't what I said. I don't want to, you know, have words put in my mouth. What I clearly said is that there is criteria for the program. I have clearly said on the record that there wasn't any changes to the criteria of the program. I also have said that we know that the budgetary process since 2012 has been around \$12 million, and I did also mention the fact that with the federal government partnership we've been able to put over six—rather, \$10.6 million more towards the support. And I also did say that we are listening to the child-care sector that had said that we needed to renew the program that's in place.

To answer your further question, why would they have to renew? Well, each centre's going to be different, right? There could be some staff maybe moved to a certain—maybe your staff in your current location is very trained on that; they've gone through training, extensive training that can provide the service. Maybe the new centre doesn't have that training. So the care plan may be different if you move centres. Maybe the new place that you move toward have more services and support. It could be a bigger centre. You could have a centre that's 144 people that have a whole bunch of trained staff, and maybe the centre they're coming from is a smaller centre that doesn't have the resources and concerns and that sort.

So it is appropriate to measure the service supports and needs that someone—you know, an individual child would have. It's not a cookie-cutter approach, because different centres are going to be trained and have different aspects. So that's really why they have to reapply, to make sure they're getting the right services and supports that the child needs.

Mrs. Smith: So just to be clear, like, the needs of the child wouldn't change, but the staffing would change in the centre. So we talk about, you know, reducing red tape and making it more accessible for a parent to access these extra supports that children need, but this seems to me like putting more barriers in place for families that already have, you know, limited supports in place. I just don't understand why a

family that moved from one centre to another would have to reapply when their needs are the same. You know, you're going from one centre to another. There's new staff, and if every centre has a policy around inclusion, then there would be the staff there to support it and, if not, then, I guess, new staff would be brought in.

So my question is—and I'm going to go back again to, will every child that needs inclusion supports be supported beyond the budgetary constraints of the \$10.6 million?

Mr. Fielding: Well, clearly, when we came to office what I heard from child-care sectors and the Child Care Association—they're very vocal about that—is that changes need to happen from the inclusion support program.

So to do that, what we did—and I think, rightly so—we called a review to find out what's been working, what hasn't, how can be more efficient, and that's exactly what we did, and we also made this a priority in terms of the federal partnership for child care, where there's more budgetary money that's put into the process. To be fair, there was a lot of red tape and processes that parents and child-care sectors had identified prior to us coming into government.

So, you know, I don't know, beyond calling a review and investing a whole bunch more money in that area and, you know, announcing—and, again, the details will be coming out later—but essentially announcing the fact that we think there should be more a robust process where there's—more services and supports can be had. You know, I don't know how you can suggest that that isn't a way to streamline as important and it was something that wasn't in place.

The latter part that you're saying, again, is that we look at the individual child and their needs. And, you know, maybe I'll just refer you back to my previous answer because I think it really covered it off quite well, where if you're moving from one centre to another.

* (15:50)

You know, again, and the services and support may be different in the centres, but also you have progression of children's needs, right? So children as you—I mean, you've got children. I have them. They don't stay the same. There's progression and there's a whole bunch of things that maybe needs and services and supports may or may not change.

So I think having a process when you do move a facility—maybe you're moving from a huge facility that has a lot of services and support to a smaller one, or vice versa, does make some sense. But to be fair, we haven't announced, you know, the finer tuned details.

So I—maybe I'll ask you to stay, you know, a bit patient until we're—we release all the details, because I think once we release all the details of the program, beyond the fact that we are investing a whole bunch more money in streamlining the program, the—you know, we'll be able to fill the details in that's in the needs of parents and children.

Mrs. Smith: So would these children's applications be expedited?

Mr. Fielding: Are you talking about the current process, or are you talking about the future process?

Mrs. Smith: If children are moving from one centre to another, they're having to do another application in a new centre. Will those applications be expedited?

Mr. Fielding: So it is a streamlined process if you are moving. Really, the essence of, kind of, that process that it has to go through is to assess where the current location will be, right, the facility. Do they have the services and support? Is the plan that's in place effective for that child?

So, to answer your question, yes, they are streamlined. That is a process that goes in, and, you know, to be fair, you know, we have identified through a review the changes need to be happen. We've identified the funding, we've identified the high-level items that we think we'll—we know we'll be moving towards, but the finer details of that and, you know, will be announced in the coming weeks.

Mrs. Smith: So why can't these care plans just be transferred over to the new centre? Why do they have to reapply?

Mr. Fielding: Respectfully, I've answered the question three times now. I mean, if you do move from a different centre—I mean, logically, I mean, I know you've got a child, I can't—I think she was nine or, I don't know if it's a boy or girl but, 10—you know—but again, if you're moving child-care centres, right, if you're moving—like, I'll give you an example.

In St. James, for instance, right, kind of my neck of the woods, you know, the Discovery Children's Centre is, I think, the biggest child-care centre in the province, right? They have, I don't know, well over 100 children. I think it might be

closer to 150 or 200 children that they support in a whole bunch of different ways.

The service and support and expertise that they may have at centre might be quite different from a service and support somewhere else. If you transfer your child three blocks down the road to some other smaller centre, you can imagine that it's not the same staff that's going to be taking care.

It's not the same facility. So there is a bit of a difference. So to ensure that children are supported most effectively, you can appreciate the fact that they do need to, you know, look at the facility and the services and support that are currently there, and make sure that the child is getting the right services and support.

Mrs. Smith: So, as you know, I was an educator and administrator and saw many children go through my classroom with complex needs, and went on to another classroom, and their plans moved with them into different classrooms, different schools.

Their needs definitely, you know, changed, absolutely. I see that children's needs change, but the plans and the services and the supports that they need don't change from centre to centre. So all you're doing is transferring the supports that they had in one centre to the next centre.

And, if every centre has a policy around inclusion, then those supports should be given wherever the child goes. And it's unfair for a family, you know, that has a child with support needs for them to have to reapply, be put on a list, go through the whole system again and have to possibly be put on a waiting list if they move from, let's say, Winnipeg to Brandon or to Portage la Prairie or to Gimli, for that matter. That doesn't follow them, and who knows how long those families are going to be waiting for supports. So you know, that's where I'm trying to get at.

I have people that come into my office asking about these supports, whether it's in education or daycare. We talk about from cradle to death as being, you know, education, so I think along those same lines. When a child's born, you know, they start their educational path right away, and we provide the supports that they need, regardless of budgetary constraints.

So I'll ask the minister again why we're putting up this—these barriers to families moving from one centre to another.

Mr. Fielding: You know, I'm not sure there's much more I can really—I mean, I've answered the question four times. You know, to be fair, you can ask the question a different way, but the answer's going to be—remain the same. So, you know, we can continue back and forth on this, but, you know, that is—the answer is the answer is the answer.

I guess, what I would respectfully say is that, you know, the program was not where we wanted it to be when we came into office, and so, clearly, what do we do? You know, we heard from the child-care sector saying what changes need to be happening in inclusion support.

We did a review on that. We looked—I think we did our homework in terms of what other jurisdictions are doing. We did a review to see how we can, you know, streamline the program in a more effective and efficient way.

We prioritized this when we negotiated with the federal government on additional funds that would come into the child-care sector and we partnered with them to put another \$10.6 million in there. You know, to be fair, I've announced the global strokes of the program, that we want to streamline it and we want to make it a dual stream.

We haven't announced, you know, the final details of it, so, I guess, maybe what I would recommend to the—respectfully recommend to the member is maybe wait 'til we've announced the finer tuned details of the program.

But I can't clearly tell you before we announce and we finalize all plans for it, you know, what could be there. If you're asking should the program be more efficient than it was currently running, I'll say absolutely, and that's really why we've done all this background work and investments and work to make it more efficient and effective and I think, for the most part, the initial response from the child-care sector has been favourable to that. So, you know, again, it's hard for me to give you all the finer details when we clearly have not—at that point where we have announced the finer details of it.

So, you know, again, if you want to ask the same question, you know, that's kind of the same answer I'm going to give from now 'til 5 o'clock, right.

Mrs. Smith: Has the minister informed the daycare centres of this dual streamline?

Mr. Fielding: So we announced the \$47 million and then we announced to individuals kind of the project

stream, the inclusion support stream. We also talked in the plan—what we thought is important—enhancements to ECEs. I think you're going to be hearing about that relatively soon from our government in terms of plans going forward. We also thought that having a northern strategy is extremely important—northern and rural strategy.

That is something that we, on high level, announced the funding with the federal government, and to be fair, you know, again, here's my answer, but we haven't announced the finer details of that. I can tell you we've invested the money, we prioritized it with the federal government.

We've said that we—it needs to be streamlined. We haven't changed the criteria in the program, but we do think it needs to be more efficient and effective.

So, beyond the fact that we haven't announced that element of the program, I, you know, I can't give you the details because we haven't announced the finer details of the program, but what we do see happening is it being more efficient, more effective, more streamlined and more friendly to, not just families, but children and to centres. That's clearly what we've heard from them and so we've tried to deliver that and I think you're going to like what you see once we do announce the finer details of it.

* (16:00)

Mrs. Smith: So, if the criteria is the same, what is the red tape that the minister found in his review?

Mr. Fielding: But what I will say is on—it is publicly on our website right now is the Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. If you look on page 36—I mean, I can read this—like, it's—the high level is there.

So I mean, I can read it word for word. I'm not going to pain you through, you know, reading it from word for word, but, you know, again, if you do want to ask any more questions, we've kind of identified in a fairly effective way what we're looking to do in the co-ordination process.

So, you know, to be fair it is a public document. It is out there for everyone to see. We've been totally transparent, we announced it. So, you know, I guess, I'll refer you to this document and, you know, if there's any other questions on the future of it, I guess what I'll do is maybe just read it word for word. But I don't want to pain you through that process

because I know there's important questions you want to ask beyond what's written on our website.

Mrs. Smith: So I think we'll move on from inclusion supports into poverty and the government's poverty plan. So my first question is: The minister has committed to developing a poverty-reduction strategy. He's had several consultations. Can he give us an update on where the plan's at?

Mr. Fielding: There's much-needed work to be done to address chronic rates of poverty. In 2008 there were 11—one hundred—one thousand and—111,000 Manitobans living in low income. By 2015, the number had increased to 146,000, approximately a 21 per cent increase.

Our government is interested in hearing from Manitobans about what works and what doesn't work to help lift Manitobans out of poverty. Consultations have focused on the demographic profiles of those highest risk and poverty, including persons with disabilities, indigenous individuals or people and vulnerable youth. A variety of experiences related to poverty and local challenges reflected in the location chosen for in-person consultations such as Winnipeg, Selkirk, Brandon, Thompson, Flin Flon, The Pas, Dauphin. Participation results on data are community conversations 'faciled' by a community organizer.

The number of sessions—there was 13. Number of participants, there was about 200. In terms of the locations, the resource centre for youth, Block by Block, Thunderbird House, Brandon Friendship Centre, a whole litany of places where we've gone to. I can go into great detail if you like, probably—you probably don't want to hear that. Not that you don't want to hear it, but it's a long list.

Community workshops 'facilitated' by a government, we've had 11 sessions.

There's about 178 people that participated in Brandon, Thompson, Flin Flon, The Pas, Dauphin and Brandon. Targeted demographics, you know, are a whole bunch of communities: disabled, focus, indigenous supports.

Call for written submissions. We have—the number of submissions, there was 45. There was 100 from groups like Make Poverty History in Manitoba, Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba. There was over 'twohunderdy'. Total written submissions are about 425.

We had about 713 online surveys that were answered for a total of close to—I believe, around

1,500 people, all total, have responded in one way or the other to make sure that we have a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

Mrs. Smith: So consultations are complete, I'm assuming. I'm wondering what the timeline for completion of the strategy is.

Mr. Fielding: Well, clearly, there's been a lot of consultation in the communities, and we do anticipate that they'll be, you know—we're assembling the data. I can't tell you exact date of when that will be released. But we do anticipate that happening in the near distant future.

Mrs. Smith: So I actually took part in a couple of the consultations. I was invited by community members to come and listen to some of the dialogue and take part as someone who's grown up in poverty and has many family members who are still living in poverty and live and work in a constituency that, you know, is faced with poverty every day.

I think it's important to be able to tell Manitobans when they can expect this poverty strategy to come out. And I don't think I'm asking too much. And I don't think Manitobans are asking too much when we're asking for a timeline. Is it going to be, you know, six weeks, six months?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I'll say that we have been working on poverty since being elected government, you know, in a whole bunch of different ways. I'll go through kind of a litany of the areas that we think are hopefully helping with some of the issues dealt with poverty.

Number 1, you know, we thought that having a robust consultation process is important. To be fair, and this isn't a partisan thing, but, you know, under the former NDP government's plan, there wasn't any consultation done at all. So we think this is the first—at least first of its kind in a long period of time, to make sure that we're talking to real Manitobans in terms of what their experience is with poverty to make sure we get it right.

I would say that we've really made a focus on getting people back to work. We think that's important. We know that areas like the Jobs on Market, which is a new and innovative—what I'll say centre, and it's a rapid response to get people in the work area.

We've seen close to, I believe it's 1,500 people that go through and upwards of 700 people that have been able to re-enter the work world based on things

like Jobs on Market which we think can get people in the work world.

We know that we have got one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, which we think—I think everyone can agree is an important thing. We also know that having social enterprise is kind of a key focal point. Manitoba Housing has taken a big role in social enterprise. We think it's very important.

We also think—and this is an important piece—we made some changes to the Rent Assist program, and I think these are important, so I'm going to highlight them. We—and it was clearly stated, I think, in the media, that we did a review of the Rent Assist program. Now, we could have done what Saskatchewan did, where we said, okay, we're not going to take any new applicants for the Rent Assist program.

But what we decided to do is make further investments, and it has been highlighted that yes, there was some minor changes to deductibility. That was based on what other provinces like BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan were basing your low-income rates, like how much you should spend on housing, and so we moved from 28 to 25 to 28 to 30 in terms of that affordable level that CMHC sets.

But what that has done, it's been able to allow close to, you know, by the end of this budgetary year, upwards—and we budgeted for about 3,300 more people will be supported than when we first came to office. And so, some people say, well, how big is 3,300 people? And it's a lot of people—it's a lot of people. You could probably fit, you know, the Winnipeg theatre centre, right? You could fit the amount of people twice over in that facility. Or you could go to the Convention Centre and fill one of the rooms almost three times over in terms of the amount of more people that have been supported under the Rent Assist program.

*(16:10)

We also know that we've really made some good progress, we think, in terms of housing. You know, we're—we—chronic—we talked about that today in the House. But upwards of 487 new units have been either opened or have been supported through operating and/or rent-geared-to-income types of initiatives, and close to about 140 are under construction. What's important about that is it's not just affordable, but it's also social housing which is important element to that.

Another big thing that our government has really been working on hard is in terms of making sure people have the amount of money in their pockets. So we've increased the basic personal exemption. In fact, in 2020 it will be upwards of 2,020 more dollars in people's pockets that they'll have.

There's also been some changes in terms of the CCB which we think is important. But that doesn't just impact Manitoba; it goes nationwide, and we could have made—and one of the first decisions I had when I was minister was, should we, you know, essentially not allow that to be considered as income, a part of some of the rates. And so we made the decision not to make any changes to that which allowed more money to be in the pockets.

So I guess what I'd say is those are seven really important parts that we think—you know, and there're some others, but I won't get into detail with them—that we think where we've made some good progress.

And, you know, the national index—there was an index survey that came out in terms of our approach, and what it showed is that we've actually gone from child-poverty rates, the highest in the country, to about the fifth. So we're about middle of the pack. So it's a real improvement, so we're happy about that.

Mrs. Smith: So I'll ask again, timeline for the poverty plan? Manitobans want to know. He rip—riff off all of these things that the government is doing. People in my community are poorer now under this government than they were under our government, and you have no strategy to help my constituents and Manitobans get out of poverty.

You talk about all of these great things, housing. Well, you haven't been—built one single housing unit. You delivered some pictures today of you at a Habitat for Humanity house? Shame. That wasn't built under your government. That was under people putting their own sweat, blood and tears into that.

Like, it's not about you. It's about people who are living in poverty. It's a non-partisan issue. People deserve to know when you're going to have a poverty plan.

An Honourable Member: Point of order, mister—

Mr. Chairperson: Order here.

Any comments that are made, I would appreciate them being done through the Chair. When it goes back and forth between the committee members it gets a little bit personal, and I would appreciate things done through the Chair.

Thank you.

Mrs. Smith: So, again I'll ask: Poverty plan, when is that going to be released? I'd appreciate a straight answer. Whether it's going to be six months, four months, two months, Manitobans deserve to know.

Mr. Fielding: Well, to be fair, I need to correct the record. And you say you need—you know, you want clear answers. Well, No. 1, you need to provide clear information. That's—and what you're providing is not—sorry, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: I would like—appreciate all comments through the Chair.

Mr. Fielding: So, you know, it's easy for politicians in a room to, you know, point fingers back and forth that, you know, you're at fault or you're at fault. But maybe we should take a look what places like Stats Canada, who actually have the real numbers, let's see what they have to say.

And, as of March 13th, 2018, Stats Canada released data from the 2016 Canada—Canadian Income Survey measuring low income rates across the province.

Manitoba—and this is really important. Manitoba experienced significant decreases in the percentage of persons living in low income from 2015 to '16. What it said was that Manitoba is no longer—this is important. It's no longer the child poverty capital of Canada.

Manitoba registered the biggest—it registered the biggest improvements of any across Canada in the child-low-income rates, falling substantially from 11.9 per cent in 2016 to 16.4 per cent, 2015.

In terms of the percentage of children living in low income, Manitoba improved from being the 10th-ranked, worst, in 2015 to the fifth, so about middle of the pack. Most improved, I think we like to say sometimes.

Using the MBM, the child low-income rates in Manitoba fell substantially from 16.4 per cent to 11.9 per cent, the biggest improvement nationwide.

So that's an important piece. It's the biggest improvement nationwide. I know the member of Thompson likes to hear that because that's important to his constituents.

Manitoba registered the biggest improvement in low-income rates among the provinces in 2016, falling substantially from 12 per cent in 2015 to 9.4 per cent in 2016. Manitoba's—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Assiniboia, on a point of order.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Mr. Chair, reading out of a document is not answering the question. If there's a—if a document is being read, it should just simply be tabled and referred to, please.

Mr. Chairperson: There's no—I—there's no point of order. What it is—it's been a long-standing practice in this House for people to read from their different books. It's not a private letter or something that would have to be tabled. It's been a long-standing—the member has no point of order.

* * *

Mr. Fielding: Manitoba's child low-income rates improved from 22.4 per cent to 17.1 per cent, and using a number of indexes we showed improvement.

So what does that mean for Manitoba? It means Manitoba's improved—Manitoba's improvement on low income was better than Canada overall, which, we think, is important. The data from Statistics Canada really provides encouraging signs that the progress is being made in the lives of Manitobans.

We've taken a whole bunch of policies that I can go over again, but I can tell you we're developing a comprehensive plan. We've done the consultation, we anticipate that we'll be announcing it soon and we want to make sure we get it done right. The former government did not, Mr. Chair, do any consultations at all before they introduced it, and so we want to do it right. And so that's what we're doing. We're consulting with Manitobans; we've done a number of policies, the work on poverty does not stop. We're making some good progress right here and we want to continue that work.

Mrs. Smith: Well, we're very proud of those statistics because they came out under our government, so you know, it's sad to see that this government is taking credit for something that our government has done. So I'll take it as the minister doesn't have a timeline on when a poverty plan will be introduced.

It's coming up to almost three years that this government has been in government and, you know—

An Honourable Member: It seems like nine.

Mrs. Smith: Yes, it feels like that. I've been here a year and I have barely seen, you know, any supports put into place for reducing poverty in this province.

So I'd ask the minister: When this poverty plan is brought forward, are—is he also bringing forward legislation amendments as part of his poverty plan?

Mr. Fielding: You know, I can say that I don't think anyone, any side of the political spectrum, are happy the fact that under the NDP's watch child poverty rates—we were the child poverty capital of the nation, and I don't think anyone in the Chamber would say it's a bad thing if we're moving to the middle of the pack. I think that is some improvement. I think the fact that the PST increase is something that, I think, most advocates have suggested hurts low-income individuals the worst, is something that we think, you know, happened under the former government and we are not going to make those mistakes. In fact, we've committed to reducing the PST, which we think will have a dramatic impact on poverty. We also think that under the previous government, food bank use spiked in Manitoba under the former NDP government's watch. So we had some concerns about that.

We also know that, you know, essentially, the policies that were in place have led to some really poor stats that we seem to be turning the corner on, which I think is a positive trend. So again, not looking to oversell this, but there has been significant work done in terms of things that are poverty—and you may disagree with it, but an independent Stats Canada report has come out that clearly indicates that there is some progress made. So I think we can all cheer for that. I think that's a good thing.

*(16:20)

We know that the report—there was no consultation that was done in the previous government's work, so we didn't want to make that same mistake because we know the results that were in place didn't bear fruit, right? It—you know, when you're last in the country in child poverty, it—it's—it doesn't seem like it was an effective strategy. So we want to make sure we're doing it right. That's why we consulted with real Manitobans. And I can go through where we've gone and who we've talked to again. But that is on the record. And so we're going to ensure we get it done right as opposed to rush something through where we're not doing any consultation.

If you're asking me some of the indicators that I had some concerns with, I don't know if measuring the amount of people that go through an ACCESS centre doorway is something that you can really measure true poverty on. I mean, my question to the member is, if that is the measurement that was in place, what—like, how do you count that? If I go through—let's say I forget my wallet in my car and I go through that door once, but then I have to go back and get my wallet and come back. Does that count for two or three? Does that mean that there's less poverty in our community?

So my—I'm—my point with this example is, I think that there was too many broad indicators that are there. We need to narrow that. And we need to look at areas that we think will make a difference.

And so, going out to the community, having that consultation process with some of the—mixed in with some of the policies that we think have made a bit of a difference, we think is the right direction to do. So we're going to do that. We—I indicated that the report will be coming out soon. And we're excited for a new process going forward.

Mrs. Smith: Will there be any other legislative amendments as part of the poverty plan?

Mr. Fielding: Well, we need to make sure, and that's why we went out to Manitobans, right? So we want to make sure we're getting it done right. So I don't want to prejudge the work that the committee has done before we're able to announce it. So it's difficult to say that we haven't announced it.

And so when we announce that, you know, we'll be making changes to any things going forward in terms of producing a poverty plan that we think will make some results for real Manitobans.

Mrs. Smith: I just want to point out that the federal government has provided more support to families, which, I think, has made the biggest difference in reducing poverty for families in Manitoba today under this government that seems to be, you know, decreasing supports to families.

I want to ask the minister if he would consider the level or rate of the 'mimum' wage as part of his poverty plan.

Mr. Fielding: Well, I do want to address the fact of the CCB. You're absolutely right. I think it has been an important factor. But—and I'll ask the member maybe to consider this and maybe you can respond back—the fact of the matter is, the CCB went across

the country. This wasn't just something that was exclusively in Manitoba. Manitoba made the decisions that we're not going to consider that as income, which allowed more money to stay in pockets of individuals. But it clearly—the CCB had an impact across the country. It does not explain why the numbers have dramatically gone up from being last in the nation in terms of child poverty to the middle of the pack being one of the most—in fact, the most improved of individuals.

So, my point is, you're right; CCB made a difference, but it certainly didn't point to the only reason why Manitoba—like, why would Manitoba have gone from last to the middle of the pack and have the—you know, so, I don't know if you want to comment on why you think it has gone up, but, clearly, the CCB is an important factor nationwide, but it's certainly not something that you can identify as the reasons why Manitoba took such an improvement.

Mrs. Smith: So the minister can ask those questions in two years when I'm sitting in that chair, but will he be bringing—considering the level or rate of the 'mimum' wage as part of his poverty plan?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I can tell you that has been an issue that has—I believe the minister may be in the room now—an issue that has been talked a lot about in terms of the minimum wage.

And so, maybe, I'll leave it further to that. That might be probably a question best directed to the minister responsible. I know he's a dedicated individual that not just looks at those indicators but looks at a whole bunch of indicators to get people in the work world, which we think is important.

And, you know, a part of a good strategy to get people out of poverty is making sure that they have jobs. And so we think we've made some gains and largely to do—not largely to do—I think largely to do with Manitobans and creating business, but I think having the right business environment, and I know the minister has taken the lead on that, and so I congratulate him on his great work in that area.

And so we encourage more of that to happen and, you know, I guess we're saying with a low unemployment rate and getting more people back into the work world is a positive thing. So that's not the only answer to it—a number of the other programs and issues that I had spoken of, we think, contribute to that.

But all these things need to be incorporated in a comprehensive policy directive, in terms of addressing poverty as a whole.

Mr. Chairperson: Before I recognize the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), I'd just like to comment a bit on the rules about the mentioning of the absence or presence of a member. It's one of those rules that we're not allowed to speak about, so.

Mrs. Smith: Will the minister be considering or consider access to health care as part of his poverty plan?

Mr. Fielding: Well, again, I don't want to prejudge the work that the committee has done. They've talked to Manitobans and, you know, I think there is a number of parameters when you do look at health that do show, you know, kind of the nation—how healthy the nation is, per se. You know, as a government, we have taken quite an extensive reform plan of the health-care system. We're cautiously optimistic. We know that the numbers in terms of wait times have gone down quite a bit. I think it's somewhere between 16, 18 per cent if I understand the data correctly in terms of the wait times. So we think we made some good progress.

You know, I'm—I can tell you as a member from Kirkfield Park, the Grace Hospital is right in the heart of my ward. Something that I campaigned when I was a candidate—very forcefully—saying that we need to ensure that we have—you know, you're able to enhance the Grace Hospital. I know the Grace Hospital, the ER there is somewhere around 7,000 square feet. I believe that will be almost, what—actually, I think it's about five times. It's going to be upwards of 35, 37 thousand square feet. And I had the fortune of taking a tour of the Grace Hospital fairly recently with another—some other of the members. And I can tell you it's beautiful, state of the art.

And not only is the Grace Hospital something that will be kind of the state of the art in terms of emergency care, but the utilization of the space is just so more effective.

If anyone has had a child that has gone—or a parent or relative that have gone to the emergency room, you know the intake process where you're explaining what the issues are to individuals—you know, everyone in the waiting room can hear what those are. Those are personal items. And so that's just one example how they're using space better. There's actually individualized rooms.

So we think health is an—important. And that's why we've taken this issue on head on. And I commend the Minister of Health for taking that role on. It's not an easy job, being the Minister of Health and making changes, but I can tell you the initial essence of these things will help the process, streamline the process and we truly think will make a difference to streamline some of the long wait times that we had with these hospitals.

I, you know, again, I—from—the area where Grace Hospital is is right in the heart of my ward, and I can tell you I had some major concerns when I was considering running for office because the Grace Hospital had been identified as the longest wait times in the country. And that wasn't our data, that was national data that came out that said there was some of the longest wait times.

So there's been some improvements in the Grace, largely to do with the great work that they're doing in a system, Oculys, that kind of deals with the patient flow with it.

But we're really excited to stand with the Minister of Health and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) in the coming days to expand and to see the Grace Hospital come online. It's something that I can tell you my community is very much looking forward to.

And, you know, we think that—to answer your question, the determinants of health will really be dictated by some of the reforms that we're able to do so people get services and supports they can move forward with.

Mrs. Smith: I'll ask one last question about poverty because clearly we're not getting anywhere with talking about a plan. The minister refers to wait 'til it comes out, you know, isn't giving any details about any plan—not even sure if he's seen—if he's read the consultation report yet.

So does the minister think that the government should scrap the All Aboard strategy, as the member from Point Douglas—or, from Portage la Prairie once noted?

* (16:30)

Mr. Fielding: Well, I don't want to prejudge the work of the committee. They've been out—you know, I respect them too much, you know, what they've been doing in the community to, kind of, find out from Manitobans the way forward with a variety of the consultations. And you know, again, I'm not going to say where they went and, you know, but

clearly they've been across the province. They've had impacts. They've had people with real life living experience in poverty. So I don't want to prejudge the hard work that they've done.

Again, we know that that work, a consultation process to develop a child—not just a child poverty reduction strategy, wasn't done last time. And you know, to be frank, some of the results that StatsCan and others, you know, showed that we led the nation in child poverty—and, again, we're showing some positive signs in that, so that's a very positive thing. But I can tell you that I don't want to prejudge that work that the committee is doing.

All I know is that whether they're, you know, when the committee comes out with a report, the work of addressing poverty is not something this government has been standstill on. They've done things like making jobs a priority here in the province of Manitoba. They've made things like extending supports to the amount of people that are supported through Rent Assist program. They—you know, we've tried to make investments in housing solutions a big priority for our government.

We've also tried to make tax relief, you know, through the basic personal exemption, moving that up by over 20—\$2,020 by 2020, is something that will give more people more money. In fact, there's about 31,000 more people that actually will not—be off the tax rolls altogether. And what is important about that is those are low-income individuals that, you know, won't have to pay taxes.

And so that's a large amount—31,000—you could fit almost, on a good day, that amount of people in the, you know, in the Investors Group Field, right? So there's a lot of people that are, you know, off the tax rolls altogether, and this isn't something that just impacts low-income individuals, but everyone will be paying, essentially, less tax because of the improvements in basic personal exemption.

So I'm proud of that, and those are components of it, that we continue to do the work of addressing poverty so many different ways, and we're waiting to have the report analyzed and put forth some strong indicators to make sure we're measuring effectively.

That's another piece that I think is important to address, and what we heard from poverty advocates quite—what they told us, that there wasn't any teeth in the actual poverty reduction strategy, right, through the indicators. There wasn't any measurement. So I

have committed to measuring more effectively, and so that's a big part of our plan going forward.

Mrs. Smith: So I'm going to leave it there, but I must say that, you know, Manitobans deserve more. You are the Minister of Families. You haven't answered any of the questions—

An Honourable Member: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield), on a point of order.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Acting Government House Leader): I just believe I heard the member speaking, again, directly to the minister, which I think is a breach not only of the rules, but of your recent admonitions not to do so. Just—that's my point of order.

Mr. Chairperson: The member does have a point of order and, yes, I have warned the committee, but I will again warn the committee to please try to address everything through me. That way it doesn't get personal, because when it does get personal, people get excited. So we'd just like to continue on a sound—

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Point Douglas.

Mrs. Smith: I apologize for that. I get super passionate about this because it does affect, you know, people, and when I see these changes, you know, negatively impacting people across Manitoba, it frustrates me that we can't give Manitobans the answers that they want, that they're asking for.

They're asking for a poverty reduction plan. They're asking about their children and inclusive supports, and we didn't get very far in answering the questions. So I have to go back to my constituents and to Manitobans, people that aren't even in my constituency that come to me because I'm the Families critic, and I have no answer for them.

So, you know, I will be waiting for this poverty reduction plan to come out. I do hope that the minister did hear about some of the barriers that families are facing, that perhaps he would think about making some changes to decrease those barriers for families that need inclusion supports and that every child that needs those supports will have access to them and that we all want people to not live in poverty and that, you know, we've been waiting for a plan for over two years.

And, you know, we recognize it's a new government and there are some changes that they want to make. But we have to do that in a 'expediated' amount of time so that we are ensuring that Manitobans can get out of poverty, that there actually is indeed, a plan to help move Manitobans that need support and that need to get back into the job force, that they have access to those types of supports.

And, right now, there's not a lot of support for families. We see, you know, cut after cut after cut. And I tell you, constituents are concerned. It's getting harder and harder for Manitobans to make ends meet. And it's concerning for me because I represent Manitobans, and I have to be the voice for people, and I have to account for questions that they're asking me. But, if I can't get the answers to give them, then you know I'm doing a disservice. And it's frustrating.

So I'm going to hand the rest of my time after the minister responds to the member from Assiniboia.

Mr. Fielding: I'm going to respectfully answer to this.

And what I do find frustrating as a politician, and—so I'm—and I'm going to—probably going to speak for all the members on our side of the aisle. I can guarantee you that we care for vulnerable people just as much as you do. And sometimes there's a difference in terms of the policies that we're doing, Mr. Chair.

But, clearly, you may disagree with them, but the reasons—and I take my job very seriously, and quite frankly, I'm offended that somehow you're suggesting that we're not doing things that will help support, Mr. Chair, vulnerable individuals.

And maybe you don't like those facts, but they are facts and these things have made a difference for Manitobans. It's not me saying it, it's not our political directors, it's Stats Canada that is showing we're making improvements.

Are we going to make—is there going to be issue—is there—we're going to make mistakes as governments? All governments make mistakes, but I can clearly tell you that everyone on this side of the aisle wants to help vulnerable people as much as you do.

So I just don't—want to clarify, that isn't something that we take lightly.

I can tell you—I know the member from Rossmere is nodding—that is something that we talk about a lot. And are we happy with some of the results that's going way beyond a political process of who gets blamed and who gets benefit for it? It doesn't matter to me whomever gets blame or credit for this as well, but I can tell you that we seem to be going the right direction. We think it's a good idea. The poverty plan that was in place prior to this was not well-consulted. There was no consultation that's a part of it.

To be fair, we are out there; we're talking to individuals. We want to make a difference for families. And we may disagree in terms of the policy 'asprec'—the—you know, the elements of it, but I can clearly tell you we very much care for vulnerable individuals. That's what we're here about and that's really what our government is all about.

And I appreciate the fact that you bring forward ideas, but I don't want this committee to leave with some sort of thought that people on this side of the aisle don't care about low-income, vulnerable individuals. And, if that's your thought, I can tell you you're very much wrong on that.

Mr. Chairperson: Just on—again, the word of—the word you means it should be coming through the Chair. I would advise the word member or whatever to be used.

Anyways, the member for Assiniboia.

* (16:40)

Mr. Fletcher: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and please do not take any of my comments personally.

The—I would like to—and I'd like thank the honourable member for yielding some time to allow me to finish up some questions from the other day.

For the minister—not to be tabled, but for the minister—I have a few documents. One is from the government of Manitoba website describing what his responsibilities are and what the responsibilities of the Manitoba Housing renewal corporation is. I also have a slide deck and an article—no, no, not that one. Yes. An article from the Winnipeg Free Press that discredits the—or raises severe questions about the techniques that are used—oh, I have enough for—to table this one—techniques that are used in the Bruce Oake recoveries network, the Fresh Start in Calgary. That's in the Winnipeg Free Press. The scientific community has problems with it and, in fact, the

NDP government defunded it because of those concerns, because it wasn't evidence based. So for a government to claim evidence based, well, here's the evidence.

This brings me to the comments about city hall and the minister's assertions that things were public. Well, no. We have assurances that they're not public and this—and if the minister wants to refute that, great, table them. Table those documents to this committee because they're not on the website. But what is on the website is that this is an—the Vimy Arena purchase was unsolicited by the City of Winnipeg and they were forced to sell it to Winnipeg—or to the Province for a dollar, and when the audit goes through the City—because this will be audited and it'll be just one of a long continuation of shady land deals that have been occurring over the last 12 years at city hall of which the minister's correctly identified that he was a city councillor for eight of those years. So I'd like to table—or not table, pass on to the minister a reminder of all the loopholes that have existed.

But, Mr. Speaker—or, Chairperson, I am going to provide to the minister two documents—and this is what my question is—and I gave them last meeting. Well, I can table them. There's three of them. The first one is outlining the Bruce Oake Foundation as a non-profit. That's fine. It was done in 2014. The next one is creating, under the same name, a holdings company, a for-profit corporation under the Bruce Oake Foundation realty corporation. That in November 2017.

Is the minister aware of this holding company? Why is it necessary to have a holding company? It seems that everything that needs to be done could be done through the non-for-profit foundation. It—and as to his corporation—has—have they done the proper due diligence? Have they done the proper due diligence?

And the minister needs to admit that he initiated the process, can't offload it onto the City. He initiated it. The documents are in front of him; the letter is coming. Another shady land deal of many and I'd like to offer the minister an opportunity to focus on—

Mr. Chairperson: I would remind the member in the language that he's using that's not parliamentary. Shady is kind of a bit derogatory. *[interjection]*

It might have been my misunderstanding of what the word was that you used, so we'll continue on, but your time—your five minutes has expired.

Mr. Fielding: I can tell you that the Province has not invested one cent in the Bruce Oake Foundation. I can tell you, and I can tell you with some credibility—and the member always likes to somehow quote the rules.

Sometimes he's right. Most of the time, he's wrong, but sometimes, he is right. I can tell you the rules of City Hall quite clearly. I was there for eight years, and I can tell you, the member Assiniboine, that this is a land-use planning issue. It's a land-use planning issue.

As I understand from the member, Mr. Chair, was the issues that you clearly identified in your community are twofold, what you identified. You see, you have said—you said on the record that you support a facility like the Bruce Oake Foundation. You clearly said that.

What you have identified is two particular areas, and I can tell you that is clearly land-use planning issues—clearly land-use planning issues. That is what city governments do. I can tell you. I was there for eight years. And the two issues that you identified were—No. 1, Mr. Chair, was the green space. And the green-space issue was an important issue, and anyone that has represented the area or being part of it knows that there is a park there.

As I understand it—although I was not there. I'm not on City Council anymore. I can't defend or support or oppose any of the—I mean, that's—that is their role, to vote on these things. As I understand it, the land for the park was excluded—and, again, this is their decision—was excluded from the actual agreement that was brought forward.

And, as I understand it, I believe the Bruce Oake Foundation has—yes, the Bruce Oake Foundation has said that any park would be a public space. So that isn't an issue anymore. That shouldn't be an issue for you anymore—

An Honourable Member: A point of order.

Mr. Fielding: —because that is—Mr. Chair, that is a land-use planning issue—

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Assiniboia, on a point of order.

Mr. Fletcher: Mr. Chair, there's about 15 objections, including recreation space and park use. I wish the minister would not mischaracterize what has been said in the past.

Mr. Chairperson: The member does not have a point of order. It's basically a dispute of—over the facts, and I will rule that it's not a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Fielding: The second issue that the member claims—or, the only reasons why he is opposed to a centre like the Bruce Oake Foundation, which I support, by the way—I support—notionally, I think it's important to have centres in the province—is the amount of money that would be contributed to the local area through land dedication process. I can tell you I know the process very well. What happens is when land is sold at the City of Winnipeg, it goes into something called the land operating reserve.

But the local community, which is made up of—at least the councillors that make it up are made up of three different councillors. They have access to that money to invest in certain areas. What they're able to invest that money in is maybe expansion of the community clubs or what have you. That's there.

As I understand it from the area city councillor, or one of the area city councillors, is that the City reinvested that money. So, to address that issue that was brought up, what they said is that they contributed money—I don't know where they got it from. I'm assuming through—somewhere through their treasury system, you know, through their—the reserves—one to one and a half million dollars to local communities. So they would have access to deliver some of those services that are there.

I can tell you, I know the member has chose to run at the federal level, but, you know, maybe ticked off the wrong box, because you're coming here talking a lot about city planning uses, like, in terms of land-use planning. That is clearly a city initiative.

And what is important, I think, for residents—and this is what I do support, even though there is a difference of opinion in the community. I would say it's a 50-50 issue. But what I do want to get the information out to the residents is that they will have an ability at the rezoning process. There's a rezoning process. What happens is it's a process that is involved in the community. There is public signs that will be put up. They'll say, we're looking to rezone the land to whatever the applicable use would be.

And then at that point, the city administration will produce a report that's a total independent of the political process. What they do is they talk about the land-use planning that's there, and then what happens is everyone, whether you support it or you're

opposed to it, is able to come out; they're able to speak to the issue, the land-use planning issue that you're referring to, and make a decision.

Sometimes it's a tough decision amongst the area city councillors. And the area city councillors are able to make a decision one way or the other whether they support it or not. And that's based off the information that they get from the report from the community.

* (16:50)

So my point to you is that the community will have a say once the land-use planning happens. If the land use planning is not agreed to at city council, then that facility will not go on the Vimy site. So there is ample opportunity for the community—and, obviously, yourself, who's opposed to it, to come out and make representation at that point.

Mr. Fletcher: I am the member for Assiniboia. The minister continues to say Assiniboine—at the last meeting and this meeting. For goodness' sake, you represented the area, City Council. At least get one of the former rural municipalities names correct when you are making comment. The Chair has reminded you every time what the point is—

Mr. Chairperson: The member from Rossmere, on a point of order.

An Honourable Member: I withdraw the comment.

Mr. Micklefield: No point of order.

Mr. Fletcher: The—Mr. Chair, the City sold the land for \$1. It is the Province of Manitoba that owns the land and they are exempt from all those—all city bylaws. That is a fact.

The other fact is it was a deal initiated by the minister, yet the City had no choice. They had to sell it. And where did money come from? Well, it certainly didn't come from the Province, because the Province forced the City to sell it for \$1.

And it's just not green space, it's recreational space. The whole thing is a recreational space.

But, Mr. Chair, the minister did not address—the deal signed in the shade. Why is there a realtor company—a for-profit company under the same name before even the minister would even acknowledge that there was something going on? The process was bad. We have now documented evidence that everything was, quote unquote, fixed before it went any further—November 2017.

Why does that corporation—for-profit corporation exist under the name that Manitoba Housing is building under? Are they going to flip the property, Mr. Speaker? Has the minister done the due diligence? Has the minister done the 'duegill'?

Tell us what and why that document exists. That's all. Don't talk about anything else. Just that document.

Mr. Fielding: I can tell you clearly—I think we can all agree that this is city land. This is city land. You know, obviously, you know, the Bruce Oake Foundation went to the City, went to the mayor, asked for land that they could use for a facility. That is a—clearly a city hall decision. I don't vote on city hall decisions—I don't know if the member's aware of that or not. But I clearly don't vote on city hall decisions.

They could have chosen anything in their inventory. That is a piece of land which they chose in the inventory. That isn't something that we're involved in. We're not—for the province. We're not involved in the land-use planning for the facility.

So these are questions that you may want to ask the City, you know, in a whole bunch of respects. But I can tell you it clearly is a land-use planning decision. And they—individuals have an opportunity to come, make representation at City Hall. You continue to be asking these land-use planning issues, I—maybe you're confused in terms of the level of government that's there.

But I can tell you that we don't—we're not involved in any land-use planning here in the province of Manitoba. That is a zoning process. There is a zoning process. Those are clear guidelines that are in place.

And I do want to correct the record for the member. There is something that the member was—I'm sure he's talking about. There's something called Crown prerogative, that the higher level of government would not have to follow the bylaws, or what have you, the City.

I can tell you, that clearly is not something that our level of government is looking at in any way. If there's a process, the process should be a coherent, transparent, open process that's run by the City of Winnipeg that establishes the land-use planning.

We're not the planners. We're not the expertise in this. They will produce a plan of whether the land-use planning, should it be appropriate or not. And

that—at that point, members of the community—I would encourage them to do that, as well as yourself, if you're opposed to it—can come out, can make representation, and then it's a tough decision.

But it's a decision of the local community committee, which is made up of three councillors. Once that process is established, it goes to another level of committee. It'll go through the Property and Planning Development Committee. Then it'll go to the Executive Policy level of committee. Then it will go on to council as a whole.

Council, as a whole, is supreme. They will make the determination whether the land-use planning is there.

It really is—there is nothing, from a provincial politician level or a federal politician level, that we could do to stop that process. That is clearly in the mandate of the City of Winnipeg. That is their role.

Their role is to identify land-use planning issues, and the two that you have identified—it sounds to me that were addressed at community committee, but I don't know. That is something that will have to be established when the zoning process—if they apply for the zoning process—that would have to be established at that community level.

The report would come out. It would talk about those issues, and then the city councillors that would move on through council will make the final determination whether that site is useful or not for a facility like the Bruce Oake Foundation.

Mr. Fletcher: The minister has not taken responsibility for the letter that he signed to the City saying that the Province demanded that site, without any kind of consultation—the only way the process works, is the minister sends the request. There's—it didn't go from the City.

No, it came from the minister, and the minister, because of his—perhaps because of his time on council, was able to direct the exact purchase of that land. Maybe knew about that land, maybe he took the easy way and just said, oh, I know a piece of land. I'm not going to check other areas of the city or province, whether there's land.

Oh, the Shriners' Hospital, that's obvious, but I didn't think about that. I didn't even look into it, or Kapyong Barracks. No. Why would we put it on a—in a bus route with easy public access that meets all the criteria of the Bruce Oake? No, not there or—and the dozens of other places that exist.

No, he wants to put it on recreational property, and that is exactly what the documents show that I have tabled. Mr. Chair, the minister, not only threw his city councillors under the bus, but it turns out the city councillors are throwing the minister under the bus. People are pointing, say, no, not me, not me, not me, but the evidence leads to only one person, and it's this member.

Mr. Chair, I know that my time will run out some time after 5 o'clock.

The minister has made the comment that the residents—he has obviously not read the petitions that thousands of people from Headingley or St. James, or most importantly, Crestview, have been signing, and I've been reading every day. And lastly—

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

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

* (15:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of Committee of Supply will now resume the consideration for the Estimates for the Department of Sustainable Development. At this time, I invite the ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

Okay, so I'll get the minister to introduce her staff as they're being—taking their seats.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): I have with me Deputy Minister Rob Olson and Beth Ulrich, who is the director of Manitoba Status of Women.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

As pleased—previously agreed, questioning for the department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Welcome the minister and her staff to another exciting episode of Estimates.

I understand my colleague, the MLA for St. Johns, does have some questions along the lines for the women's secretariat, so good to have relevant staff here. For now, let's do some questions related to the Sustainable Development side of the minister's department.

Just a quick jurisdictional question, if there is such a thing in Canada, who's responsible for

riverbank stabilization work inside the city of Winnipeg?

Ms. Squires: I thank the member for that question and I do believe that the question would be greater asked of the Minister responsible for Municipal Relations.

We do have a lot of collaboration with the City of Winnipeg on issues that would pertain to the riverbanks and the waters directly below and the trees directly above. Specifically when it comes to things affecting the trees on the riverbank, we are greatly concerned about the presence of Dutch elm disease on many of those elms that are growing on the riverbank as well as the ash trees, and with the now presence of the emerald ash borer. We're working with the city hand in hand to work on any trees that would be, of course, on the riverbank.

* (15:50)

In—pertaining to the water, the federal Fisheries Act and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has a great responsibility over the water and, in particular, international water bodies that would be running through the city would have a lot of national oversight and, of course, we do provide a lot of—some of our laws and regulations pertain to the protection of the waters and the land in which case—but I do think that the question is definitely more—would be more applicable to the Minister of Municipal Relations.

Mr. Altemeyer: Thanks for that. Another question here related to water. I've got a few and then I'll turn it over to my colleague for River Heights to ask a question on water as well.

Has the department explored the possibility that zebra mussels could end up in the St. Martin channel which, of course, is being proposed for construction. They don't go upstream that easily, but particularly in periods of low water flow there would be that potential. So what precautions has the department taken or is going to take to prevent that from happening? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry—did you want to repeat that, or did you—

Mr. Altemeyer: No; it's not worth it.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay.

Ms. Squires: So the member's probably aware that the threat of the spread of zebra mussels occurs in predominantly two ways, and one of that would be

by the larva, and predominantly if the larva is drifting into other water bodies; that's certainly a real threat. And in relation to the larva drift going upstream of the Lake St. Martin-Lake Manitoba outlet, it's, you know, certainly not inconceivable, but that risk would be very low because the larva drift would not occur naturally going upstream. However, what would be of greater risk would be the transfer of the invasive species by people.

And that is the threat that we're facing every day in every Manitoba waterway, whether it be the Lake St. Martin-Lake Manitoba channel or any one of our 100,000 lakes in the province where when we have people moving watercraft, moving toys, even moving life jackets that have not been properly decontaminated, it certainly does increase the threat of a spread of the aquatic invasive species, and so we're doing everything that we can to ensure that people are not responsible for the further spread of aquatic invasive species and the zebra mussels.

So we've got extensive education programs out there. We've got decontamination sites set up throughout the province, those high-risk areas where we believe there—the threat is largest and, you know, really working against the clock when it comes to public awareness.

We need to make sure that everybody who's heading out to the lake knows that they—if they're putting a boat in the water, if they're putting a float noodle in the water and they're not decontaminating it properly, that there is certainly the risk of spreading the aquatic invasive species. And so we want all Manitobans to be active and engaged with us in stopping the spread of aquatic invasive species.

I also—my mind is triggering back to last week when we left Estimates, and I do believe that both members had unanswered questions or possibly only partially unanswered questions, or maybe they received the full answer in the time in which I did have to answer those questions.

So I do want to extend the opportunity. If either of your questions from last week when we ended Estimates were not fully answered to your satisfaction, please let me know and I'll attempt to re-answer them.

Mr. Altemeyer: Full answers are always welcome. It was too easy; it was just sitting there.

Just a quick housekeeping item. Emily, we're still good with the plan we talked about?

Just so your staff knows, there's apparently been a change on our side and our House leader is now busy this afternoon.

So what we'll do for Estimates is we'll—I will finish off with Sustainable Development and related questions today, and then if your women's secretariat staff and the Francophonie staff might be available tomorrow, then my colleague, the MLA for St. Johns, will ask questions on that front and then close out the department after that.

* (16:00)

So those of you that can now escape and have normal lives again, you're welcome to do so. I'm sorry to drag you down here.

Sticking with water questions, we have the very unfortunate situation of those four fish sheds who are out almost a million dollars potentially and who knows what all else has happened. One element to this story that certainly shocked me was learning that some amount of the fish from Manitoba ended up being transported in insanitary containers that are supposed to just be used for fertilizer.

So I'm wondering if the minister could tell us if her department has notified both food inspection agencies on both sides of the border, the CFIA here in Canada and the USFDA in the United States, and if that has happened, when those notifications were sent out. Thank you.

Ms. Squires: I do—my memory was just jogged, and last week you did ask a question about the Climate Change branch budget in 2016-2017.

And I wanted to provide an answer for that first of all, and it's not that the budget was decreased in any way. It was—there was some reorganization within the Climate Change branch and we moved two FTEs from the Climate Change branch to other areas of Environmental Stewardship division, and the salaries were not reduced, they were just reallocated. So that provides me with some peace of mind that I have answered your question, I hope, to the full extent from last week.

And in regards to the move to the open market for our fisheries here in Manitoba, we certainly do—our government is certainly opposed and definitely concerned with the unacceptable delay in payments that our—some of our fishers and, in particular, for fish sheds, had that experience, that our fish sheds had experienced with open marketing in the first month of the new market for the fisheries.

And I can inform the member opposite that we are in full co-operation with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. They have ultimate jurisdiction of the proper handling and storage and shipment of food products as it moves across the border. And, in terms of the specific example that the member raised, we certainly are in co-operation with the CFIA. They are acting on that according to their jurisdictional authorities allow.

And, in regards to the open market, I know that there has been some tremendous positive aspects of the open marketing, including 18 per cent increase in the price of walleye that a lot of our fishers on the open market are achieving.

We know that there are new markets for whitefish. I had the opportunity to go out to Lake Winnipeg not too long ago in the dead of winter and go and pull nets with some of our commercial fishers, and they had introduced me to their world of commercial fishing. And they were very pleased that we did move to the open market and were telling me that they've got enhanced markets for whitefish and higher prices for all their catch. And so we're very pleased with that.

We also know that there are new processing facilities being built in the province right now. I toured one of the facilities in Riverton, and it's quite impressive that they are going to have this facility up and running and be able to process the fish and also find new and unexplored markets for Manitoba fisheries.

So our message has been really clear from the get-go that Manitoba lakes are open for business, and we're excited that some of our—that our fishers are receiving high value for their catch and are experiencing new markets in ways that they weren't able to experience before under the monopoly. So we're very pleased with that.

And, in regards to the unacceptable delay in payment, I've shared with the member before that our department is—we take this very seriously, and our government takes it very seriously. We are investigating and certainly working with a lot of partners.

There are a lot of complexities involved in this investigation dealing with multiple fishers for fish sheds and across jurisdictional boundaries.

So there are many players involved, and we're working with all the stakeholders to ensure that we not only improve our processes so that this doesn't

happen again, and that, you know, remediation and—is taken.

Mr. Altemeyer: A layperson with some time on their hands reading the minister's response in Hansard might note that she didn't really answer the question that I asked.

I appreciate the information she put on the record, but what I was specifically asking is: Has her department formally notified the food inspection agencies on both sides of the Canada-US border, and, if so, when did they do that? So I'll give the minister one more chance to answer that question, please.

*(16:10)

And the obvious relevance of the question to the Estimates is—I mean, this type of incident can throw in disrepute the entire credibility of our freshwater fishery if we have insanitary containers being used to export a product, right? And I know that's not the minister's intention; it's not the government's intention, but it happened, right? So when did she—or her department notify those two food inspection agencies upon learning that this had happened?

Ms. Squires: —member's question, and I do want to reiterate that the CFIA is certainly engaged in looking at the allegations of the shipment of unprocessed product going across the border. As the member would know, that is certainly federal jurisdiction when food leaves the province and the handling and the storage of that is, certainly, rests in—under federal jurisdiction.

But I can share with the member that our department is fully co-operating and working with all bodies that are involved in this very complex investigation including the CFIA, and we're working with multiple stakeholders so that we can ensure that the product is shipped safely and stored properly and the food storage and handling process, that certainly, you know, I know the federal government is taking a lead in looking at their processes to make sure that public safety is adhered to, and when fish leaves Manitoba or is—crosses the border that it is done so in a safe and proper manner so that the handling of the product and the storage of the product and the shipment of the product is done so in a way that is going to ensure not just maximum value for the product that is being shipped, but is also safer for human consumption.

So I can assure the member that the CFIA is well aware of their jurisdictional authority and their

processes for adhering to the rules and the law and that they also have a process for dealing with people who are not as forthcoming as they ought to be with information and/or are not adhering to their framework for the safe handling of food. So I can assure the member that the CFIA is well aware of the situation. They're also well aware of the importance of ensuring that everybody's adhering to their process and that they will be taking action if they confirm these allegations, and that all will be known in due course.

Mr. Altemeyer: On a similar topic, the minister referenced the investigation that her department has under way into Northern Walleye. This company, of course, is in violation of the regulations that her government passed which required that fishers be fully compensated for their catch within a specific time frame. We're now going on five months since the fish was caught and presumably sold to Northern Walleye, but no money was provided to the fish sheds involved.

So my question is: When will this investigation be complete? Will the minister make sure that the investigation is done in enough time that no statute of limitations takes effect, and will she make the results of that investigation public when it is finished?

*(16:20)

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the member's question. He touched upon transparency in his preamble, and I can assure the member that transparency is certainly paramount to our government. We have provided an opportunity for all members of this Legislature and members of—all Manitobans access to a lot of information that previously was unavailable to them.

I know in the short time that I've been responsible for this Department of Sustainable Development, I have tabled numerous reports for public access that had been filled with scientific evidence and information that was very pertinent to the public's awareness. And so examples of that include the 2014 University of Manitoba report on anaerobic digesters that had previously been kept from the public. There was a report based on analysis of soil samples taken throughout the province—or taken throughout the city of Winnipeg—that had showed there were a few areas in the city with lead levels that were in exceedance of the CCME guidelines, particularly lead in soils in Point Douglas in a playground and a boulevard in Point Douglas and in Logan.

And, when I came across these reports, I was quite surprised that they had not been tabled prior to that moment in which I had uncovered these reports in my office. And so I thought that that information was certainly pertinent for public awareness and had tabled those reports. And just today in question period I believe our Premier (Mr. Pallister) had referenced a report that was previously—in fact, I think the whole report was redacted; in fact, it was called a prop, if I'm not mistaken, because it was just almost like a blank—a black piece of paper. It had been blacked out in so many ways because it had—the information that had—was supposed to be contained in that report was—so much of it was redacted that it was almost—the information there was negligible.

So that is an example of not being very transparent, and our government has certainly taken a different approach to being transparent with the public. And we do take transparency and accountability very seriously, and I know my colleagues in government here tabled numerous reports and provided a lot of information to the public. And that is a trend—that is not just a trend; that is a commitment or a core value of this government to be open and transparent.

And, in regards to the investigation into the unacceptable delay in payment that four of the 26 fish sheds in Manitoba had experienced, we certainly will, and we have been, very open and transparent in the investigation.

But we also have to be mindful that there is an investigation that is under way at a few different levels, and we certainly want to make sure that that investigation can continue without being interrupted or impeded in any way, shape or form by anything that well-meaning folks might say or allege, and that sort of thing.

So we're really respectful of the process of that investigation that is unfolding and it certainly does warrant a full, complete investigation into this complex situation. We're dealing with four fish sheds across two or three states and the province of Manitoba, so there are many stakeholders involved in that investigation, and we want to make sure that it is conducted fully and fairly.

And so I do commend the work that our chief conservation officer, Jack Harrigan, and his team have done to ensure that that investigation is done properly and fully, and so I support that process and really commend him for the work that he has done in conducting that investigation.

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, that was a transparently opaque answer. Perhaps my colleague from River Heights will have better luck. I give the floor to him.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I would like to ask the minister about her plan to address the algal blooms in Lake Winnipeg, to decrease phosphorus, including the timelines for completing the sewage treatment at the North End plant to remove phosphorus, addressing the monitoring in lakes and rivers in the Lake Winnipeg watershed plans with respect to other areas of phosphorus source, including agricultural sources and sources like commercial dishwasher detergents.

* (16:30)

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the member's question on, you know, protection and the survival, really, of Lake Winnipeg, and I know that in the past it's—he's brought forward recommendations and, I believe, even legislation in the past to help protect and improve water quality on Lake Winnipeg, and I want to commend and congratulate him for his ongoing advocacy for the cleanup of Lake Winnipeg and specifically in terms of how we can protect and improve our water quality here in Manitoba.

And so I can share with the member that our government has done—taken several measures thus far in how we can really move towards enhanced water quality and water protection. I had shared with the member, perhaps at committee for Bill 7 or in another forum, the importance of looking at the water that we have in our watershed.

We know that we do have an abundance of water. We have—over 50 per cent of our nutrients that come into Lake Winnipeg and I think 70 per cent of our water that comes into Lake Winnipeg comes from upstream jurisdictions.

And so a large part of what our government is doing is, of course, working with other jurisdictions. I've been in regular communication with Saskatchewan, and I know my deputy minister has been involved in a committee with his counterpart in Saskatchewan, at how we can make sure that Saskatchewan is more responsible upstream landowner, if you will.

We know that we do receive a lot of water from Saskatchewan and Alberta and Ontario, and working with them in a more collaborative approach to nutrient management is certainly a key to success. And so I'm pleased that that work is progressing.

I was also very pleased to see Saskatchewan take a real legislated—legislative step towards, you know, upstream—responsible upstream landowner management practices, much like what we do here in Manitoba and much like what our Bill 7, The Sustainable Watersheds Act, mandates is really making sure that the upstream landowner is responsible for what's going to happen to the downstream landowner when that water flows and what's going to happen in terms of the, you know, the flooding impacts, but also the nutrient management, and like I'd said earlier, so, you know, a huge majority, over half of our nutrients, come from upstream landowners, so we're working with those jurisdictions and certainly having good collaboration with our southern partners on this very topic, as well.

I believe the member is also in attendance at several of the meetings that we've had with the Red River Basin Commission and some of the events that we've had with them and recently had conversations with their officials on some of the issues that they're doing to ensure that the water that's coming into Manitoba has reduced nutrient loads and there's so many things that we can do to reduce—keep the nutrients on the land and not putting them into the water.

I did want to share with the member that one of the things that our government is doing is making available the nutrient reports where we're taking them from a variety of sources throughout the province, and we're going to be putting that data online every four years in a comprehensive report, but every year, we're going to be putting that data online so that people can see where nutrients are coming from and where nutrient reductions have been achieved, and we're going to be very transparent about that process. We think that that's going to have a positive impact on our water quality in Lake Winnipeg.

The member spoke specifically about the, you know, the issue of the combined sewage overflows and the North End Water Pollution Control Centre, and, of course, these are major projects that have been under way.

I know the CEC had recommended in 2003, which is long before our government had formed in 2016, so that was 13 years prior where the CEC had said that really, the city should look at, and the province ought to provide the framework for moving

forward to upgrade those combined sewer overflows in the city.

And so our government is working collaboratively with the City of Winnipeg and through Municipal Relations to ensure that the City of Winnipeg modernizes its—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Altemeyer: So the minister's view and her department's view on the plan to bury a damaged nuclear facility in Pinawa permanently in concrete, is she in favour of that proposal or opposed to it?

* (16:40)

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the question about the use of energy in the province of Manitoba and in specific about the current plan to deal with the decommissioning of the nuclear energy facility here in Manitoba. And, of course, member knows that that is a federally regulated jurisdiction. And I know he certainly has a keen interest in federal matters, and I wish him all the best in that.

But in regards to our energy strategy here in Manitoba, we are very proud of the fact that we have a clean, renewable resource, and we have been developing our clean energy strategy, if you will, since 1906 when hydroelectricity started to take form in Manitoba.

And we have long called Manitoba Hydro the crown jewel here in Manitoba and are very proud to, you know, have 98 or possibly 99 per cent, or maybe it's 97 per cent, but a very high percentage of the energy consumption in Manitoba, the electricity consumption in Manitoba, is from clean, renewable Manitoba hydroelectricity.

And we're also exporting a lot of that clean, renewable resource to other jurisdictions and we certainly hope to export even more of that clean power to other jurisdictions. We would like to see Saskatchewan reduce its reliance on coal for its electricity.

And I heard a statistic that I believe to be true. I don't have any reason to doubt its integrity. But it said, if we were to remove one coal plant in the province of Alberta and replace it with our clean, renewable hydroelectricity, that would be removing the same amount of carbon emissions from the atmosphere as the entire province emits in a one-year period of time.

So we think that that's really significant and that our electricity, by and large, is clean and it is not adding to the carbon footprint and—in a substantial way—and the more that we can export to our neighbours south of us and east and west of us and helping them remove their reliance from coal energy to renewable energy sources is going to have a benefit for all Canadians.

We know that carbon emissions do not respect jurisdictional boundaries, and we know that Alberta's carbon emissions are our carbon emissions.

We know that China's carbon emissions are our carbon emissions, and even in Saudi Arabia, those carbon emissions are our carbon emissions.

And so, when we are exporting a means for other—our neighbours to reduce their reliance on energy products that are negative for the environment, are of a detriment to our environment, that we are doing something for the betterment of not just Manitobans, but for all Canadians in reducing their carbon footprint and certainly moving towards that low carbon future.

So we believe that Manitoba Hydro has the great potential to help all of us transition to the low carbon future.

It is unfortunate right now that we are seeing some ill effects in our Crown jewel in Manitoba Hydro based on the previous administration's mismanagement of the utility, and we certainly have a goal of not just being the most improved province in the country, but certainly to turn our utility around and make it the most improved utility in the country and we certainly don't doubt that we can do that, and I know our Minister of Crowns is working very hard to ensure that our, you know, hydro utility corporation is managed properly and that we continue to have an abundance of clean renewable energy for the betterment of all Manitobans and really for the betterment of all of the world.

Mr. Altemeyer: Going back to the minister's opening statement at the very beginning of this section in Estimates, she referred to moose as one of the iconic species, I believe, was the language she used in our province. I certainly agree with her about that.

What I don't understand, then, is why her department would have approved a mining operation in Nopiming park in protected moose habitat.

Any explanation on that would be much appreciated.

* (16:50)

Ms. Squires: I'm pleased that the member recognized that moose are certainly an iconic species in Manitoba and deserve to be protected. I can assure him that these exploration permits in Nopiming are outside of the moose closure.

I also want to remind member that the woodland caribou are also an iconic species, and certainly deserving of our attention. In fact, the woodland caribou are even—are facing an even greater peril right now, based on a variety of circumstances in—not just in Manitoba but across the country.

And that is why it came as quite a shock to many people in 2013 when the NDP had permitted up to 99 per cent of the Grass River Provincial Park to be opened for what the member's friend Eric Reder had called industrial destruction.

And in terms of mining activity and how it would impact our iconic species, I thought that it was quite alarming when our woodland caribou were faced with this mining activity in that particular park. It is in a very sensitive area for the woodland caribou and was—you know, this decision that the former NDP had made did certainly provide a real threat to the woodland caribou.

And I know Kate Storey, who is a member of the Green Party or was a member of the Green Party council and a former researcher of the Reed Lake woodland caribou herd with the very department, had said that, if allowed to proceed, the Reed Lake mine will destroy the woodland caribou herd which the park was intended to protect.

And then she goes on to say that five years of industrial activity means five years of calf deaths to the caribou herd already endangered from logging, and this mine may very well be the tipping point which destroys one of Manitoba's last herds of woodland caribou.

So we certainly see what happened in 2013, and we saw what the member's commitment was to our iconic species in the province of Manitoba, and I certainly don't—I don't remember him raising concern about those—the woodland caribou when his government had issued those permits to proceed with the mining activity that did threaten the woodland caribou in there. And that's a stark contrast with what

our government is doing in terms of developing the caribou range plans for the protection of these iconic species.

And we certainly want to make sure that our caribou and our moose are protected not just for the here and now but certainly for future generations. And we take a very serious approach to that and will be continuing to work on sustainability issues from a variety of perspectives. And, really, to that end, I'm also looking forward to working in collaboration with all of our partners across the province, particularly our indigenous communities, on working on the preservation of our iconic species, the caribou and the moose and the elk, for sure.

But we know that protecting woodland caribou and the moose, it's not just something that's a talking point for our government. It's something that we certainly take very seriously and are taking measures to ensure that these species are protected for many generations.

Mr. Altemeyer: Let me just conclude with a few observations. And I recognize, having been in government for a number of years and now in opposition a few more, that the ability to make change does not rest in just one place. It does rest primarily in the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) office. And it falls to this minister to change the culture of her government so that the issues we have discussed in this Estimates become a much higher priority than they clearly are at the moment.

I want to thank all of the staff in the department for the work that they are doing to the best of their ability under the circumstances, but as we have demonstrated in Estimates and in question period, this government has accomplished very, very little on any of the key issues of the day, be they water protection, improving protected spaces, addressing climate change, reducing the amount of waste going into landfill. It falls to this minister to change her Premier's opinion, change the opinion of her Finance Minister.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 16, 2018

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<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>