

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, October 9, 2019

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, everybody. Good afternoon.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, I rise to table the 2018-2019 Annual Report for the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today in the Assembly to table the Manitoba Education, Research and Learning Information Networks 2018-19 Annual Report; as well as, again, pleased to rise today in the Assembly to table the Vehicle and Equipment Management Agency Annual Report for the year ending March 31st, 2019.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Status of Women—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.

Women's History Month

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): October is Women's History Month in Canada. It is an annual tradition for us to celebrate the achievements of women throughout our history and recognize the trailblazers who have shaped our country and way of life.

Here in Manitoba, we recognize the essential role that women in communities across Manitoba have played in shaping our province's past and future. Manitoba has a proud history of strong, ambitious women standing up and fighting for change.

Women in this province are making strides in STEM, with organizations such as Engineers Geoscientists Manitoba, who are working to double the number of newly licensed female engineers in the province.

We are also seeing more women in leadership roles, including in our Crown corporations, such as the first female president and CEO of Manitoba Hydro, Jay Grewal.

The Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Jessica Dumas as its newest board chair. She is the first indigenous woman to chair the board in its nearly 150-year history.

Women are also making great strides in the aviation sector here and around the globe. This past weekend, our government was proud to sponsor Girls in Aviation Day event at 17 Wing here in Winnipeg. There were over 200 young women and girls in the room who were able to learn and experience the diverse careers in aviation and aerospace from female role models. The amazing keynote speaker, Tera Fraser, is the founder of Iskwew Air, Canada's first indigenous-woman-owned airline company.

Since the first Girls in Aviation Day, nearly 1,000 girls as young as eight years old have been taught never to let gender stigma prevent them from pursuing their dreams.

I had the pleasure of meeting a group of young indigenous girls from Moose Lake who had travelled by plane for the very first time to attend this event last weekend. It was amazing to watch them learn all about all of the opportunities that exist within the field of aviation and aerospace, and to see their dreams take flight.

Thank you to Women in Aviation International, the Northern Spirit chapter, for their hard work and dedication in planning this event.

Here in Manitoba, the possibilities are endless. Female pilots have already made Manitoba history last March when Raven Beardy and Robyn Shlachetka

became the province's first female indigenous medevac team. We are so proud of their success.

Our government is honoured to be able to stand here today and celebrate the success of women in Manitoba with all of my colleagues and during Women's History Month.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and happy Women's History Month to you.

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): The theme of this year's Women's History Month is #MakeAnImpact. It is about looking back and honouring women in the past, pioneers in their fields, women who have blazed trails for those of us who have come after to continue their important work.

Women's History Month should also be about taking stock of what we are experiencing today as women and girls. It's about looking forward. It's about recognizing that we are making history right now. The choices we make and the attention we give to women and girls today will be tomorrow's history lesson.

When we talk about women and our place in history, we need to recognize that women have very different life experiences depending on where they are coming from. Women who are coming from a lower socioeconomic background, who are marginalized, who are discriminated against, have more obstacles to overcome.

When we honour missing and murdered indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit, when we reflect on the experiences of children from residential schools, as we did last week, we are recognizing a devastating history and hoping to set a trajectory for a better future.

The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth's recent report paints a very clear picture of what our most vulnerable girls in the province are facing. These are girls experiencing homelessness, child sex exploitation and the ravages of addictions.

This report highlights the ways that we continue to fail the most vulnerable of our province's young girls. The recommendations of this report are within our reach and power to implement. As legislators, let's ensure that we are doing all that we can to give our girls the best life possible. As legislators, let's ensure that we are on the right side of history when it is our turn to be judged on our legislative record.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Ms. Lamoureux: It is an honour to have the opportunity to rise and speak about Women's History Month.

I recognize that this is an opportunity to talk about the unequal wage gap, about how more women than men are in poverty and about how more women than men are being abused and harassed.

But, Madam Speaker, these are just a few of the ways in which our society needs to improve. But I want to use today's statement as an opportunity to share ideas that society could be doing, every day, to break down barriers for women, and why I am proud to be a woman in this day and age.

Madam Speaker, there are things that could be changing this very moment to better address equality in our province. We need to be thinking more about affordable child care and places for children to go on campuses or in workplaces that would allow for people to still pursue further education and careers that they have worked towards.

We need to get better at respecting each other. Us women, we need to stick together. In our case, here as legislators, I think it is critical that us women, in this House, put down our partisan walls when working with each other. Let us women set an example.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to be a woman in the Legislature and be able to serve Manitobans with other women from both the NDP and Conservative Party. I am proud to be part of a generation where movements such as #MeToo and Equal Voice are stirring our nation and uniting us more than ever before.

I am proud that I am in the position to be a daughter, an aunty, an MLA, a student and my own individual self as a woman in our society.

* (13:40)

Madam Speaker, in closing, I want to share some lyrics in which I have shared before but I believe are worth repeating: I am woman. / You can bend but never break me / 'cause it only serves to make me / more determined to achieve my final goal.

Happy Women's History Month, everyone.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Campaign Volunteer Appreciation

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): It is an honour to stand here today and speak about the importance of teamwork and especially teamwork surrounding my campaign team that is with me here in the gallery today.

They say it takes a community to raise a child and, of course, as a new father, I believe that is very true. However, it also takes a community to elect an MLA, person, candidate here in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, and I think that everybody here can attest to that.

In this case I want to thank my campaign—my core campaign team. My team worked diligently together from dawn 'til dusk on most days, not only at their assigned tasks but also helping our neighbour in Southdale, with many of them logging more than 25,000 steps on any particular given day. This is not a team comprised of paid individuals, as we know, but a hard-working team of volunteers, the heart and blood-life of a great campaign. And we know that Manitobans are known for their volunteerism.

As a result of this highly organized team I had the honour of being re-elected to the newly founded constituency of Lagimodière.

Please join me in thanking: Gary Smith, my official agent and my father; Geoff Banjavich, my campaign manager and GOTV co-ordinator; Gwen Yakiwchuk, my volunteer co-ordinator and assistant GOTV co-ordinator; Hannah Johnson, my assistant volunteer co-ordinator; Ernie Yakiwchuk and Ian Whitehill, my lawn sign team; Udai Jaryal, who, unfortunately, could not be here today, but he was my door-knocking lead; of course, Jaime Smith, my wife, my foundation and my sage adviser; and Lincoln Smith, my unofficial campaign manager, who was actually seven months old on election day, so it's quite a day for everyone.

Even though I was sad to leave the community of Southdale, I still was able to remain—retain an important piece of its history, so to speak: Jack Reimer Way, a street in the Bonavista section of my constituency, has been named in honour of Jack Reimer, the longest serving MLA for Southdale, who remained in office—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

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

Mr. Smith: I just want to say—and ask the Chamber here to help me in recognizing and honouring my hard-working team behind me—thank you.

Eadha Bread Bakery

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise as the first MLA of Union Station to recognize the great contributions of Eadha Bread bakery, an amazing small business on Treaty 1 territory in Union Station.

Eadha is described as a place for connection: connection with each other, ourselves, our food and the places and people it all comes from. Eadha strives to consistently push the boundaries on how and who we include in that process.

This model of inclusivity is clear by Eadha's anti-racist, two-spirit, queer and anti-colonial business lens and, as well, their willingness to provide support to other small businesses and host regular fundraisers for community initiatives like Camp Aurora, Sourdough for Queers and asylum-seeking refugees.

As the MLA for Union Station I represent a wide range of constituents from racial extractions, culture, sexual and gender identities, socio-economic status, religious beliefs and more. I applaud Eadha for their understanding, celebration and acceptance of diversity in all of our communities.

Eadha, which means endurance, is a reflection of the endurance of both the staff and the people they serve. Their commitment to sustainability includes their employees making a living wage and the implementation of health benefits within their second year of being open.

Madam Speaker, Eadha runs an admirable pay-it-forward program, which allows patrons to purchase for themselves and also pre-purchase vouchers so those less fortunate can exchange those vouchers for baked goods.

Eadha demonstrates how, as MLAs, neighbours, friends, family and community members, we can all do our part to help minimize the impacts of systemic poverty on our fellow Manitobans—an example that all acts can have a great impact in all of our communities.

Today we're joined by the owner of Eadha Bread, Cora Wiens, and two members of the team, Melody and Tamika. These individuals exemplify true

community inclusion, kindness and advocacy in all of our communities.

Please join me in honouring Eadha Bread for their positive impact in Union Station and beyond.

Prairie Crocus Thrift Shop

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Madam Speaker, addictions are an awful reality in our province, and so it gives me pleasure to tell the House about a small, noteworthy effort to help people trapped in this terrible life: the Prairie Crocus Thrift Shop in Rossmere.

Staffed almost exclusively by volunteers personally impacted by friends or family struggling with addictions, Prairie Crocus Thrift Shop gives 100 per cent of its profits to two local addictions recovery resources: the Finding Freedom addictions recovery program, which helps people at all stages of recovery from many kinds of addiction, and Dignity House, which helps women transitioning from complex trauma, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, abuse and addictions. The goal is to one day see these two organizations sustainably funded through Prairie Crocus and other creative initiatives.

Next week dozens of volunteers and staff will open the new Prairie Crocus Thrift Shop, and I look forward to attending their grand opening on Saturday, October 19th, at a new location on McLeod Avenue in Rossmere which is 50 per cent larger than their former space.

Prairie Crocus Thrift Shop is attractively set up because they are intentional about crafting an environment to give frugal shoppers a place of dignity, peace and value.

Madam Speaker, the prairie crocus is the first flower to bloom each springtime and, as such, has become Manitoba's provincial flower and a symbol of hope and the promise of new life to come. It is my hope that Prairie Crocus Thrift Store in Rossmere will live up to its name by bringing new life and the promise of future hope where there has been none for a long time.

I invite this House to join with me in welcoming staff of Prairie Crocus Thrift Shop, represented today by Kim and Bruno.

Youth Fundraising Activities

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Madam Speaker, today I rise to honour the young Winnipeggers who are our future leaders.

In 2018 our youth raised well over \$35,000 in association with their parents and other community donors.

The first set of funds went towards establishing Seven Oaks Performing Arts Centre in Garden City Collegiate.

Next, given a target of \$25,000 with a five-year deadline, they not only met but exceeded expectations by raising \$25,000 in a matter of seven weeks. Due to their efforts, University of Manitoba students, irrespective of their race, gender, ethnicity or religion, can now benefit from the Baba Nanak Scholarship, which supports human rights education.

During my election campaign it was amazing to witness their hard work, active participation and their growing interest in Manitoba's political process.

On behalf of all members, I thank the youth here in the gallery, who represent all those not with us today. I want to thank the parents for raising responsible and intelligent children.

I want to thank Mrs. and Mr. Mohinder Saran, Dasmesh School Winnipeg, Shaheed Udham Singh Cultural and Sports Club, Seven Oaks School Division, the Bedi team and the wider community within and outside Manitoba who donated generously to these causes.

I would like to give a special mention of our late friend, Harminder Aulakh, who was a great motivator for the Baba Nanak Scholarship.

While standing here in the Manitoba Legislature, I request that anyone on this earth who supports human rights education to contribute online to the University of Manitoba's Baba Nanak Scholarship fund. My friends, every single dollar counts.

Thank you.

* (13:50)

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): I rise in the House today to inform my colleagues of a tragedy that happened in my constituency that—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Oh, pardon me.

The honourable member for Burrows, to introduce guests?

Mr. Brar: Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to include the names of my guests in Hansard.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to include the names of all the guests in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

Divnaaz Brar, Fateh Brar, Harbir Brar, Harjeevan Brar, Jai Brar, Mehtab Brar, Muskan Brar, Sarina Brar, Japneet Gill, Yuvraj Kang, Paher Khubbar, Suman Randhawa, Amreen Sidhu, Prabhnoor Singh

Oak Point Community Hall Fire

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): I rise in the House today to inform my colleagues of a tragedy that happened in my constituency this past Saturday.

Shortly following a funeral for a local community member, my home community hall in the village of Oak Point succumbed to a fire.

Built in 1926, there have been many, many joyous occasions, from weddings to fundraising socials, baby showers, old-time dances and we would even use the centre for our school's Christmas concerts. I believe I participated in the very last concert performed in that hall in December of 1981. I was the lead in the school play.

The NDP actually closed down that school and many other rural schools the very next year. The two-room school that I was privileged to attend was—also used the hall as a temporary library, as we didn't have the room in the two-room school. We would walk the half mile, and I remember it was in the spring and it was still quite cold out—

An Honourable Member: Up hill both ways.

Mr. Johnson: Up hill both ways. Yes, yes.

The school would bring in a mobile library. Now, I know I don't look this old, but the library would come in using the railroad line. So the library would get parked on the side rail behind the hall where we could check books out for a few days.

We would go into the hall, of course, to warm up before we made our journey back to the school. Sometimes we had a little bit of a detour. But as rural residents know, your community centre binds your community together.

I would like to thank the St. Laurent, Lundar and Woodlands fire departments for making a valiant effort in their attempt to save our hall, however unsuccessful.

I want to thank all the volunteers for the entire 93 years that—who have kept the Oak Point community hall open and serving not just Oak Point but the entire surrounding area.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli.

Mr. Johnson: Madam Speaker, as there has been a GoFundMe site open for the—to help rebuild the Oak Point Community Centre, I ask for leave to enter that text into Hansard?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to include that text in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

Oak Point community centre GoFundMe page: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/oak-point-community-centre>

ORAL QUESTIONS

St. Boniface Hospital Cardiac Unit Staffing

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Manitobans heard about the story of Shervin Shahidian yesterday, Madam Speaker. He made the trip to Winnipeg from Portage la Prairie twice within the past seven days, attempting to get double bypass cardiac surgery. However, he was sent home on both occasions, with the staff at St. Boniface saying it was due to staff shortages in that hospital.

Now, his story is truly concerning, and I quote from the gentleman here: Every time I do this I have to write my own will again, end quote, he says.

Now he has had two heart attacks since 2015, had stents placed in the heart. Now cardiologists are telling him that he needs this double bypass surgery. But, again, the hospital is telling him that he can't get it because of staff shortages.

Why has the Premier cut staff for cardiac services at St. Boniface Hospital?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

Before I respond, I wanted to inform the House that as a result of heavy rains across the Red River basin last month and predicted—forecast for tonight and through Saturday, Red River Floodway may be activated as early as this evening. Operation will remain dependent on conditions which are being continually monitored, and we have—and additionally we have issued a high wind effect warning for areas of Lake Manitoba, Lake Winnipeg and Dauphin Lake. Wind speed and wave action could raise levels by as much as five feet or more. Residents and property owners are advised to take precautions.

The wait times for elective surgeries are half now what they were when the NDP was in power.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, we know the pain and the worry that comes when a surgery as important as cardiac surgery gets cancelled. Just imagine going to the hospital expecting to have surgery on your heart, all the worries and anxieties that would feed into that, and then to be told, actually, no, sorry, we don't have enough staff to give you the health care that you were promised when you left your home earlier today.

That is the situation. It has become particularly acute. Over the course of the past year we have seen the number for waits, for cancellations increase, but persistently high is the number of vacancies for staff in the cardiac unit at St. Boniface Hospital.

Will the Premier simply admit that his cuts to health care are putting the care of cardiac patients at risk?

Mr. Pallister: Were it true, I'd be the first to admit it.

It is not true. It is patently untrue. The wait times are down since March. They are half of what they were when the NDP was in power, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Kinew: I am more than willing to help educate the Premier.

I'll table the documents here that show, in fact, vacancies in the cardiac unit at St. Boniface Hospital have increased by 50 per cent; now, more than 16 per cent of the positions in that unit are vacant. This is the reason why patients are being turned away even as they sit on gurneys in the hospital awaiting surgery. This is why the gentleman that you heard about in the media yesterday was sent home, Madam Speaker. That—we have seen that the cuts and the staff reductions that this government has brought in has led to a decrease in the quality of care.

Will the Premier simply commit to hiring back the nurses and health-care aides necessary so that St. Boniface's cardiac unit can operate functionally?

Mr. Pallister: I note that the member tried a little bit of sleight of hand there and changed the metric from wait times later to try to link it to consolidation of emergency rooms, Madam Speaker. But Manitobans are smarter than the member's sleight of hand.

I will say again, the wait times are down. They are down to less than half of what they were when the NDP was in power. They are down since March.

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

IV Drug Use and HIV/STBBI Outbreaks Harm Reduction Strategy Request

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Careful observers of question period will know that each question I ask focused on staff shortages. The document that I tabled proves it.

I'll table a new document—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew:—for the benefit of the Premier and for all of his backbenchers, because the government has not yet released this document. This is the new report on the HIV program here in Manitoba.

There's a lot of concerning information. We know that there is more than 80 new cases last year, including one case of mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Manitoba—which is completely preventable if we have adequate access to public health.

But perhaps the most concerning piece of information is that this report now says that intravenous drug use is the No. 1 vector for spreading HIV.

Will the Premier look at the facts and begin to implement a positive HIV strategy that begins with harm reduction?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, again, Madam Speaker, the member in his preamble denied that he tried to sleight-of-hand his way out of an answer that doesn't—didn't suit what he wanted to create as a false impression, but that doesn't change the sleight of hand.

Cancellation of surgeries is always a concern. It's always a hardship for a family and it's been going on for a long time—I expect since the system itself was developed. But the fact remains that the waits for surgeries are down significantly, and so I will repeat for the member—who attempts to link this to our initiatives to consolidate our emergency rooms—that they are not linked. They are entirely separate and the fact remains that the wait times for surgeries are half of what they were when the NDP was in power.

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

* (14:00)

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the question was about HIV and the new information that intravenous drug use now accounts for the greatest number of new cases of HIV being acquired by Manitobans.

We also know that part of what this means, on account of this report that the government has so far refused to release to the public, is that there is also an increase in the number of co-occurring disorders, meaning there are more people who are now falling ill with HIV who have other forms of disease like STBBIs at the time of diagnosis. It's now 25 per cent of new HIV patients who suffer from other STBBIs.

This is another indication that the IV drug use crisis in our province is getting worse and worse. We are simply asking for the Premier to do his job and to bring steps into place to counteract these outbreaks.

Will the Premier announce new measures today, beginning with comprehensive harm reduction policies?

Mr. Pallister: Well, if the member, in referring to innovative practices, is referring to the faulty attempt that his party has continued to make to advocate for injection sites so it's easier for meth addicts to get meth, then no, Madam Speaker, that will not be the case.

The trends he talks about are very much of concern to this government. They are nationwide. They are, in fact, North America-wide, and our minister continues, as all of us do, to consult with our colleagues in Ottawa and other jurisdictions both here in Canada and in North America to make sure that we're on the cusp of innovative alternatives and approaches that we can use to assist in alleviating the spread of this—these concerns the member highlights.

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

Funding for Public Health Nurses

Mr. Kinew: We know that there are many factors leading to these outbreaks. Some of them are multigenerational and have to do with poverty, but others can be mitigated with harm reduction techniques like distributing clean needles and collecting used needles later on.

But we also know that this government has exacerbated certain aspects of this situation, in particular when it comes to public health nurses. We know that public health nurses in this province wrote to the Premier this year and they said, quote,

workplace health and safety, staff engagement and morale are at an all-time low. End quote.

These are the nurses on the front lines of these outbreaks and this ongoing public health crisis. They are dealing with staff shortages. They are dealing with the impacts of cuts on the front-line services.

Will the Premier, in addition to expanding the use of harm reduction techniques to slow down this outbreak, also fully fund the public health nurses to give them the resources that they need to keep us all safe?

Mr. Pallister: Déjà vu all over again, Madam Speaker. False comments in the preamble again.

Four hundred million dollars more than the NDP ever put into the health budget is what we're investing this year alone.

But, Madam Speaker, the member speaks about this issue, and that's good he's speaking about it, but the NDP never invested in it. In fact, in terms of preventative efforts such as educational programming, the NDP did not update their drug education program in four terms—in 17 years, Madam Speaker—not once.

That work is under way; that work will help and it is part of the solution, a part of the solution the NDP misses when they focus on one solution to a complex problem. That solution they propose, Madam Speaker—not recommended by any expert worldwide—would be to make meth more available to meth addicts.

Minimum Wage Increase Request

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Tens of thousands in Manitoba make minimum wage, and with the growing cost of living the minimum wage is simply not enough. Under the Pallister government it's one of the lowest in the country.

The NDP have a plan to ensure that working people earn enough to make their basic needs.

Why won't the Pallister government join us and support a \$15 minimum wage?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I want to correct the record. The member is wrong. We are middle-of-the-pack when it comes to minimum wage. We made some changes in terms of minimum wage.

The difference between ourselves and the NDP is the fact that we're making life more affordable for

Manitobans. We're cutting taxes, things like the PST. We're increasing things like the basic personal exemption that will help low-income individuals—Manitobans pull themselves up.

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

Mr. Wasyliw: Yesterday, Winnipeg City Council's executive committee, including the mayor, voted to study the pay rates of other cities and determine the costs and impacts—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —of implementing a \$15 minimum wage for civic employees. They've taken approach based on fairness to consider this issue, and they're looking at how Winnipeg might take a leadership role.

Will the Province do the same and commit today to consider the costs of implementing a \$15 minimum wage for those working for the Province?

Mr. Fielding: The changes that we have made have improved the lives of Manitobans. I can tell you with the tax relief that we put on the table—and by the way, when you compare ourselves versus the NDP, we know what they did, Madam Speaker, that they raised taxes at every chance. In fact, they raised them 14 times in close to 15 years. There's not a tax out there that the NDP do not want to take.

And I'll tell you what, when the PST was increased, what we heard from social planning advocates is that the low-income individuals are the ones that are hurt the most by the—by this destructive policies under the NDP to take more money out of the pockets of Manitobans.

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

Mr. Wasyliw: The minister's unwillingness to even consider such a modest proposal tells you all you need to know about the approach of the Pallister government. It's not about fairness, it's about politics. While other provinces have moved far ahead of Manitoba on increasing the minimum wage—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —the Pallister government has been fighting to keep wages low. They won't even consider increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for those who work for this Province.

Why is the Minister so set on low wages for working people in Manitoba?

Mr. Fielding: Well, there's two policies that I want to talk about the NDP. One is the sneakiness, the fact that they didn't increase tax bracket, the tax creep that happened under the NDP where there was a backyard tax increase that I would suggest that's there. The second is in terms of the overt taxes that they had brought forward: the PST increases, the 14 increases in property—in taxes that the NDP put forward.

We also know the member of the opposition, or the member opposite, when he was on the school board, raised taxes as well as spending massive amounts, and that's something that has a direct impact on all ratepayers, all Manitobans within the Winnipeg School Division or across the province. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Disability Community Abuse and Neglect Cases

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Madam Speaker, there has been an alarming increase in the number of abuse and neglect cases in the communities living with disabilities. Over the past two years the reports of abuse and neglect has increased by 50 per cent; substantial cases have doubled; and charges of abuse and neglect under the Criminal Code has quadrupled.

The minister responded in Estimates—was just not good enough given the large increase.

Why is abuse and neglect increasing in the community with disabilities?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Families): Well, and I says—I said to the member yesterday, we're working very closely to encourage those come forward with these allegations of abuse, Madam Speaker, and that's why there has been more reporting out there. We've been working more closely with those stakeholders in the community to ensure that they encourage those people to come forward.

I would hope the member opposite is not suggesting that she should—that she is discouraging people from being—coming forward with respect to these allegations.

We will work, we will continue to work towards more safety for all of those people, including those with disabilities in our communities.

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

Ms. Adams: Madam Speaker, I asked many questions about this issue in Estimates and the minister still has not provided a satisfactory answer.

Doubling substantial abuse and neglect; quadrupling of criminal charges; the minister could not point to one thing that her department has done to encourage more reporting. Instead, this appears to be real rises in abuse and neglect in the community living with disabilities.

What is the minister going to do to address this alarming increase in abuse and neglect?

* (14:10)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, unlike members opposite, under their previous government that—when their misogynistic culture of cover up, Madam Speaker, we're working with those in the community to ensure their safety. We're encouraging them to come forward, unlike members opposite, who've swept it under the carpet. We will continue to—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —work with vulnerable people in our communities to ensure their safety in the future. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Thompson, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Adams: The minister bends credibility on this issue. We know disability services is a challenging field: a high rate of turnover and burnout. It's alarming that—to the minister that there should be a doubling of 'substancer' cases of abuse and neglect, and quadrupling of criminal charges.

It is a simple question.

What is the minister going to do to reduce the abuse and neglect in the community living with disabilities and services?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, the only person that lacks credibility, Madam Speaker, is the member opposite when she asks these questions.

I answered these questions for her yesterday. I suggested to the member opposite that we're continuing to work with our service providers to encourage these people to come forward. Where they are feeling that they have been abused, it's important that those be reported and that people come forward. So we will continue to work with our service

providers so that we provide a safe environment—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —for all those living with disabilities in our community.

Adult Education Enrolment and Funding

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): We know that a high school diploma is an important step for Manitobans to find a good job and start a good life.

For those who just don't make it through school for the first time, support through adult learning is critical to their completion of high school. Unfortunately, high school graduation through the adult learning declined by 12 per cent last year and the number of those registered also declined.

Why is adult education declining in Manitoba?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, the rate of high school graduation in Manitoba is going up, Madam Speaker, but it's not enough. There is more to do when it comes to results for our students in our classes.

And I would encourage the member not to do as the former critic did, the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), and shy away from asking questions about results and only worrying about money. I would encourage him to do more asking about results because we are undertaking a historic K-to-12 review. It hasn't been done in 50 years, Madam Speaker. Because we know, under the NDP, results continued to go down when it came to math, science, literacy.

We're going to get better results for our students, continue to increase the graduation rate, and that'll help on the adult side as well, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Transcona, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altomare: Again, I was talking about adult education.

I'll refer the minister to Public Accounts, which show a significant decline in the funding of adult education centres. For many years, funding to adult education centres was over \$1.1 million. In 2018-19, they received only \$313,000. That's a reduction of \$800,000. And grants for adult literacy were cut.

Enrolment and graduation from adult learning is headed in the wrong direction.

So I'll ask the minister again: Why did funding decline to adult ed centres and why are adult education enrolments declining in Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: I look forward to the questions during Estimates this afternoon. I know they haven't been willing to call Education Estimates. We're finally getting to them this afternoon, Madam Speaker.

Of course, there is a correlation between high school graduation and adult education. When we do better in the high school system, of course, we won't have as much reliance on the adult education side, Madam Speaker.

However, I would say to the member there has been a lot of concerns about adult education for many years in the province and how the system was run. He could refer back to some of the scandals that have happened in the past.

If he doesn't remember them from the NDP days, he could talk to the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), who is the encyclopedia for the NDP scandals—the encyclopedia for NDP scandals over there. I'm sure he would inform them of the one regarding adult education.

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

Mr. Altomare: I'll repeat for the minister that the number of high school diplomas awarded through adult ed declined by 12 per cent in just one year. That's unacceptable. The Province should be intensifying its efforts to ensure that more adults come back and get their high school diploma. Instead, funding and grants for adult learning have been cut.

So will the minister refer and restore funding, and will he ensure that more adults, not less, get the tools they need to be successful by getting a high school 'gradugate'—graduate certificate?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, this government is fully committed to ensuring the results when it comes to education, whether it those in the K-to-12 system or those in the adult education system, are improved.

We know—and I hear the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) talking about the NDP days when it got worse and worse every year. He's absolutely right; it did get worse and worse every year when it comes to math, when it comes to science, when it comes to

literacy. Every year they spent more money; they got worse results.

I finally have convinced the member for Concordia to turn against the former NDP's record.

Health-Care Service Reform Vacancy Rate and Overtime

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, Manitoba families are the ones who suffer as a result of the Pallister—the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) cuts, rather. We have learned over the past couple of weeks that the Pallister government continues to deprive our health-care system of necessary funding, leaving high—record-high vacancies and asking nurses to take on more overtime. It appears this trend won't change anytime soon.

I'll table documents for the House which show that the minister is cutting HR positions in our health-care sector by 163 positions. That's 35 per cent.

Why is the minister planning on firing very—the very people who help recruit and train our front-line workers?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, the member's assertion is not accurate.

But let me take this opportunity to respond to what they said about pain in the health-care system. Just yesterday I was very pleased to have the Premier of Manitoba, myself and the Prices join us at the Children's Hospital Foundation event to officially kick off construction of a brand new Cardiac Centre of Excellence at the Diagnostic Centre of Excellence.

For too many years under the NDP, Manitobans suffered who had to go out of province for services that now and in the future will be available here at the Health Sciences Centre.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, these are people that recruit and train the front-line workers that care for Manitoba families each and every day. That's 35 per cent less people to see—oversee the recruitment and training of the apparent 200 nurses that the minister is supposed to be hiring—only 200 even though he's fired over 500.

So the minister and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) can make all the promises they want for Manitobans; the fact is they can't fulfill those promises.

Will the minister stand up today and admit that his plan is failing?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, all Manitobans should remember it was only weeks ago when this NDP opposition tried to assert somehow that the number of nurses working in Manitoba was down, and they were quickly reprovved by CIHI who said that there was no accuracy in what they were saying.

Madam Speaker, we have been responsible for changes that have seen 200 more nurses working in the province of Manitoba, and just weeks ago we made a promise to add 200 more nurses in the system, and you know, when it comes to promises it's this party that Manitobans can believe.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, they fired over 500 nurses in phase 1 of their health transformation. This has caused—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —some of the highest vacancy rates in—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —emergency departments. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: This has caused some of the highest vacancy rates in emergency departments. We hear this from nurses all over, especially in St. Boniface emergency room, which has a record high 26 per cent vacancy rate.

* (14:20)

Now the minister is asking nurses to take on more overtime shifts because of the upcoming flu season and people are still waiting 25 per cent longer in the emergency room. These nurses are already over-worked. They're telling us this day in and day out.

Will the minister stand up today and admit that there are more cuts to come in our health-care system and that his plan is failing?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, the first time the NDP said it it was wrong, and now what do they do? They double down and repeat the same falsehoods and pretend that there will be more successful this time.

Madam Speaker, that member and all NDP members know that wait times in this province

continue to fall under this PC government. That member and all members know that we are reinforcing our efforts to hire nurses; we've made a commitment to hire 200 more nurses, and I would invite them to get on board. If they have good ideas about how to make that happen we're happy to hear them. In 20 hours of Estimates, no ideas from the NDP party about we—what we can do together and collaboratively to make Manitoba better.

Madam Speaker: I would just point out to members that the word of falsehood, the use of the word falsehood, is not an acceptable term in the House because that does equate to using—or inferring lies, and I would indicate to members that the use of falsehood is not an acceptable term.

And I would also ask for some co-operation now too. I think the level of heckling has certainly increased, and I was kind of hoping that the level of heckling that we saw in the last two days, which was really quite good, would prevail through the week. I'm a little disappointed that it is not happening today, especially when we have so many guests in the gallery.

So I would ask for everybody's co-operation, please, so that people could be heard in asking questions and answering questions.

Health-Care Funding Government Intention

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I'd like to take the Premier up on his offer yesterday of having a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss health-care funding. I believe I overheard the Leader of the NDP say he would also welcome such a meeting. I have AIR MILES I can use. I can stay with relatives in Ottawa. We can do it on the cheap.

But I have said many times in this Chamber that Ottawa needs to revisit its health-care formula. It should be based on need, and if a united front would make a difference, we'd be happy to be a part of it.

However, I would like an assurance that if we are going to ask for increased funding for health, will the Premier join us in committing to spending those increased fundings on health care, because this government's actual spending on health has been frozen for three years.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, this is a wonderful and momentous occasion, Madam Speaker. The Liberals have finally agreed that we have a deficit in federal funding on health care. I

thank the member for his intervention. I accept his comments, and now we have unanimity on the sad reality that we have to stand up to Ottawa and get them to partner to the promised levels on funding Canada's most important priority.

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

Mr. Lamont: According to Finance Canada, since 2016-17, health transfers have increased by \$250 million while total transfers to the Province have increased by over \$500 million, yet during that time actual health spending by the Province was lower in 2017 and 2018 than it was in 2016.

We all want a sustainable national public health-care system.

Can we get unanimous agreement in this House that if a new formula increases health-care funding to Manitoba it will actually go into health care and not be used to reduce the deficit, be put in a rainy day fund or bail out a stadium?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I—again, I appreciate the intervention of the member, and I would repeat that our funding this year alone for health care is \$400 million more than the NDP ever invested in health care. But the fundamental point is that we're getting better results from the investment, and, Madam Speaker, that's where the Liberals fall short yet again, both federally and here. They assume that if you spend more you care more. They forget about the results or the outcomes.

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister of Canada has said that we have a low debt-to-GDP ratio in Canada, but he forgets to include provincial debt. We have the largest debt of any province in the country right here in Manitoba. We face monumental challenges. There are strong storm clouds approaching. We need to get our province stronger.

If the member is against rainy day funds, he should put it on the record. If he's against reducing taxes, well, he already has, Madam Speaker.

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

National Pharmacare Plan Government Position

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): On average, one in 10 people here in Manitoba are not taking the prescribed medications due to affordability. No one

should have to choose between jeopardizing their health and having shelter over their heads.

In order for a national pharmacare program to work it requires partnership between the federal and provincial governments.

Madam Speaker, will this government participate in and support a national pharmacare plan?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, a couple of points, I suppose, are important to make here.

The record of the Liberal caucus on standing up for Manitobans is very dismal in respect of health care and other issues. Their record for standing up with Ottawa and Justin Trudeau is impeccable. That being said, we're here to stand for the best interests of Manitobans, and Manitoba has a very strong Pharmacare program compared to most other Canadian provinces.

We want to make sure that we maintain that program. The devil will be in the details. The Liberals appear, not here at least, not willing to get into the details. They just want to support Ottawa's proposal. And, Madam Speaker, we want to support what's best for Manitoba, not what's best for Ottawa.

Mental Health and Addiction Government Initiatives

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Madam Speaker, mental health and addictions affects our family, friends and neighbourhoods. Our government has implemented many recommendations made in the VIRGO report, the most comprehensive assessment of mental health and addictions services in the province's history.

Can the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living please update this House on the work our government has undertaken in this area?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, our government is continuing its whole-of-government response to add capacity and make meaningful investments to address the issues of mental health and addiction that were ignored for years under the NDP.

On Monday I was joined by the ministers of Families (Mrs. Stefanson), Education, and Justice (Mr. Cullen) in order to make announcements at the northwest community hub. We announced \$3 million of funding, including mental health and addictions funding that will help another 150 students and

children every single year to receive services in that area by that third party group. And I can tell you, there was excitement in the air that day.

Madam Speaker, it is only some of the announcements and some of the investments we'll continue to make. We can't wait to update Manitobans on what we're doing to increase mental health and addictions.

Immigrants Working in Trucking Industry Education and Training Responsibility

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): All Manitobans deserve to be protected and well trained in their job. While we continue to open our doors and welcome newcomers to our province and our workforce, it's important to ensure that they have proper training to protect their safety and the safety and well-being of all Manitobans.

Even with mandatory entry level training in trucking, Manitobans have not heard how this will be overseen to ensure implementation and co-operation across the industry. Businesses should be held accountable to provide new recruits with training they need, Madam Speaker.

Now, I ask the minister: What safeguards does he have in place to ensure newcomers receive proper training by their employer?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education and Training): We know that whenever we have newcomers coming to Manitoba it is important that we have supports for them. We've continued to provide additional support for those who are coming to Manitoba.

We had a record investment of those supports. Last year there was an announcement that was very welcome within the newcomer and the immigrant community, Madam Speaker, when it comes to MELT. We know, as a result of the Humboldt Broncos tragedy that happened, there was a Canada-wide effort to bring in new standards. Those were welcomed across Canada, and as those standards are implemented we'll continue to monitor to make sure they're happening in the way they're expected to.

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

Mr. Moses: Many newcomers find themselves working in the trucking industry. A troubling story shed light to the lack of systemic integration between the provincial regulators in the trucking industry and those overseeing immigration at—system at the federal

level. This causes newcomer truck drivers to work in perilous work conditions, low pay and little training.

What is this minister doing to ensure that there is proper integration in the trucking industry and our federal and provincial governments?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Municipal Relations): Certainly, take a little offence to the member throwing the trucking industry under the bus, Madam Speaker.

Coming from the trucking industry, I know that small-business owners and large-business owners in the trucking industry, Madam Speaker, spend a lot of time working with truck drivers around this great province to ensure that safety is No. 1 for everybody that enters the roads or highways in this province.

* (14:30)

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, it is the minister's responsibility to hold companies accountable and it should be the minister's responsibility to adequately share this information with the federal foreign workers program. This should be done to ensure that newcomers are not left working for companies with a history of incidents to ensure worker protection and our public safety.

What is this minister doing to ensure 'propple' integration between the governments and the training for newcomers?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The member raises an important issue, and just for his illumination and that of his colleagues, the NDP position was for years—in fact, for decades—against even co-operating with other members of the New West Partnership, our provinces to the west, for example, Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC, on issues like this.

The Manitoba Federation of Labour position was that this was not a good idea, so the NDP took exactly the same position and that has led to the cleanup that we have to do, cleaning up the mess.

Joining the New West Partnership and knocking down barriers to trade and commerce among our partner provinces is leading to a stronger nation and safer workplaces for truckers and people in the trucking industry, as well as all other Canadians, Madam Speaker.

Immigration Programs Abuse Allegations

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, a recent investigation by The Globe and Mail tells a troubling story. Immigration programs across Canada are being abused by companies that are not properly training their employees. When someone gets behind the wheel of a semi without the proper training, the results are simply devastating.

Can the minister assure the House: What steps has he taken to investigate similar abuses of immigration programs in Manitoba?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education and Training): I do appreciate the question. There is no doubt that those who would try to profit on the backs of promising a new and a better life in Canada, a life that we all enjoy, but not doing so in an ethical way or an equitable way, Madam Speaker, is troubling.

Certainly, my department is aware of the allegations that've happened across Canada. They are doing the proper due diligence to ensure that, in Manitoba, we ensure that those who are coming to Manitoba are doing so not only in the right way but they're not being taken advantage of by those who might try to profit off it, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Marcelino: The Globe and Mail investigation reveals systemic efforts by bad actors to abuse immigration programs. In so doing they put ill-equipped drivers on the road, resulting in tragedy.

What assurance can the minister provide that similar abuse is not happening in immigration programs in Manitoba, and what steps is he taking to protect our public?

Mr. Goertzen: I certainly have had meetings with officials on this very subject. We are actively working with the industry and with our partners in immigration to ensure that those who are coming to Manitoba not only have the training that they are saying they are accredited for, but that there are not companies, or those purporting to be companies, putting themselves out as a way for those to come to Manitoba with poor qualifications or qualifications that don't meet the standards that we need for truckers or for otherwise.

Madam Speaker, it's certainly an issue that is not just a new concern, but it's been an ongoing concern for many years, and we are very diligent and vigilant on it.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, an amendment to the Estimates sequence.

In accordance with section 2(b) of the Sessional Order passed by this House, on September 30th, 2019, we are advising of the following change to the Estimates sequence: (1) in the room 254 section, we're moving Executive Council after Sustainable Development. This change is permanent, and it is signed by myself as the Government House Leader, and the Official Opposition House Leader, the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine).

And I'm tabling that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced by the Government House Leader that, in accordance with section 2(b) of the Sessional Order passed by this House on September 30th, 2019, we are being advised of the following change in the Estimates sequence: in room 254 section, move Executive Council after Sustainable Development, with this change being permanent.

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, could you please resolve into Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker: It is 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)

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

* (14:50)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Sustainable Development, which includes Francophone Affairs and Status of Women.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): Yes.

It is a real honour to be the Minister of Sustainable Development and the Minister responsible for the Status of Women and Francophone Affairs.

I do just want to welcome my critic into her role and congratulate her once again on her election. I look forward to a really robust dialogue and ongoing conversation about some issues that are really near and dear to many people's hearts in this room and around the province of Manitoba.

I would also like to say how great an honour it is to be what I believe is the longest serving woman minister responsible for our natural resources in the Province of Manitoba. I'm not the first woman to be responsible for the province's natural resources; that title does belong to my predecessor, Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Mrs. Cox). She was the first woman minister, but I've been now in this role for two and a half years—or two years and two months, pardon me, and it is an incredibly diverse role and one that is a great honour to have.

I also am enjoying seeing the advancement of women in this sector grow. In my short time as being a minister, I've seen many of my colleagues from across the country at FPT tables are increasingly—there are women leaders at those tables. We know in the energy sector there are a lot of women who are emerging as leaders and ministers responsible for energy and the environment.

I'm also pleased to be working with several very wonderful and competent women, assistant deputy ministers both in the Environmental Stewardship division as well as in the Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office. And I'll formally introduce my staff in a short while, but it's just really exciting to see the advancement of women in the role of Sustainable Development and, of course, pointing out another woman leader to Sustainable Development, the critic, who is also a woman. So it's pretty exciting to see this dynamic and this emerging trend of women leaders.

Our department has had an incredibly busy year, sustainably balancing the needs of Manitobans while protecting the environment and growing our economy. There has been a lot of work that's taken place over the last several months. Moving forward with that, as many will know, in October of 2017 our

government had introduced one of the most robust climate and green plans this province has ever seen. In fact, it was the most robust Climate and Green Plan this province has ever seen, one of the best in the country. And it set out a bold vision on how Manitoba can be the cleanest, greenest, most climate-resilient province in the country.

And we have since then introduced a variety of tools to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to a changing climate, and build a prosperous green economy, which includes protecting our valuable waters.

Water is a unique function here in the province of Manitoba; a lot of people have commented that our Climate and Green Plan has a pillar directly dedicated to water, and I—my answer to that whenever folks ask me why water is such an integral part of our Climate and Green Plan, it's simply that when we have a province shaped like ours, when we are a basin, receiving water from four Canadian jurisdictions and four southern U.S. jurisdictions, and one of the largest watersheds in the world, it certainly is integral to any climate plan. And protecting our waterways is certainly a way that we will not only preserve our environment for future generations but will also help us achieve our goals of climate adaptation and mitigation as we move forward in reducing our carbon footprint in the province of Manitoba.

We also recently had announced a Youth Advisory Council that will give us input and help us—they will provide some leadership in helping us achieve some of our goals in becoming the cleanest, greenest, most climate-resilient province in the country. And we're really excited to be harnessing that energy from our youth.

We have been working with youth on a variety of initiatives, and I've heard from youth. They are probably the most invested and most connected to the issue of climate change, as—and it is fitting, as they are the ones that will inherit the earth from us, and is incumbent upon all of us around this room to ensure that we pass on a planet that is more sustainable and clean than the one that we inherited from former generations, and so I'm looking forward to having a formalized process where we will be working with this Youth Advisory Council.

We also set out an ambitious plan. It is a plan that will make us leaders—arguably, some of the leaders sitting around this table accountable for the goals that we set out in our Climate and Green Plan, with our emission reductions target.

Governments of previous day have talked about targets set well into the future: 2030, 2045, 2050. Those are ambitious goals. Those are great, lofty goals to have when we're talking about where we are—the agenda of the future. But the reality is, is many of the leaders who talked about the goals from the past that they failed to achieve, they're not around the table to be accountable. When you talk about goals that are set 15 years down the road, who of us will be here to be accountable for the completion and the achievement of those goals?

So we have set a carbon savings account. It's the first of its kind in North America. It is being lauded as a very ambitious, innovative way to get results and to hold leaders to account. And so we have also legislated—the first time in this province's history—a target of emission reductions, so that we will—and we will be reporting on that target annually so that we can ensure that we have results, that we're on track to achieve our results, and that we can share those results with Manitobans.

And Manitobans can be part of the solution if our economy is growing. If we have a really robust year and there a lot of new operations setting up, they—in the province, and our emissions happen to be growing, well, we have an opportunity for accelerating the plan and ensuring that we get more results and that we can carry them over into the next savings account. If we fail to achieve the results in the first five years, we move that goal over. So it's an increasingly ambitious goal to reducing our carbon footprint.

That's just one of many things that we're doing in the province. So we also have set up two historic trusts which, in tandem, will be getting meaningful, lasting, life-long results in—not only in our watershed, but also in our natural habitat areas with our \$102-million Conservation Trust and our \$50-million GROW trust.

And then, during the campaign, we announced another \$50 million. This will—these two trusts in—will ensure that we have a fund in perpetuity for initiatives and projects in the province of Manitoba, whether it be in the natural—on the natural landscape or in water, to ensure that we're getting results at preserving our habitat.

We know that a properly placed wetland can really reduce up to 70 per cent of the nutrients going into that watershed. And those wetlands, the restoration and the—in some areas, the creation of a wetland will certainly do much to reduce and filter out a lot of those nutrients that are, sadly, going into our

Lake Winnipeg. So we're—government was very proud to have those two trusts that will help us to get results and create a lasting, healthy future on our landscape.

The other initiative that our government has been really involved in this past year is with our fisheries. We announced probably the first quota buyback initiative in the province's history. We know that there were about two million kilograms fish that were being taken out of the lake that were above what would be a sustainable target. We know that a sustainable target for kilograms of fish, we're talking quota species fish, being pulled out of the lake every year, was at a level that was not sustainable. And that too many walleye and sauger that had not even had a spawning season were being pulled out of the lake.

So we did many initiatives over the last year to, not only buy-back—buy-down the quota so that we're getting to more sustainable levels of commercial harvest, but we're also moving towards the—changing the net sizes that will ensure that our walleye and sauger have at least one year to spawn.

And I hope that we can get into a robust discussion on many of these exciting initiatives that my department has undertaken over the past year, and subsequent questions. But thank you for the opportunity to provide opening remarks.

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

Before I continue on, I'll just—I regret that I forgot to tell you—when there's one minute left in your speaking time, I will wave this little yellow. And then, when there's five seconds left, I will click the mic so you'll hear that, so you'll know that five seconds is coming.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

* (15:00)

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I want to thank the minister for that warm welcome. I think it's particularly fitting as we recognize Women's History Month today that you recognize the female leadership in this room, and I appreciate that, and also appreciate that you recognize the leadership of youth around environment and climate change, because that is where the leadership is coming from in this country, and that's important to recognize as well.

And what I'm hearing is that I think our values are perhaps aligned along the importance of the

environment, and my hope is that this government will move forward with a budget that reflects those values in the way that we would like to see them.

So I'm going to start with—can I start with a question? Or is that my—I don't know what the process—yes, keep going, okay.

So, could the minister please provide the most recent staff listing for Sustainable Development?

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry. Basically have your opening statement, and then once we recognize that, then I'll ask for questions, but here's still a little bit of stuff to do before that.

We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 12.1.(a), contained in resolution 12.1.

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

Ms. Squires: I'd like to introduce my staff at this particular moment. Seated beside me is Deputy Minister Bruce Gray. Beside him is Matt Wiebe, the assistant deputy minister of the Finance and Shared Services Division, and along the wall, starting with Kate Rich, who I briefly spoke about earlier; she's the assistant deputy minister of the Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office.

And next to her, also spoken about previously, is Cordella Friesen, the assistant deputy minister of the Environmental Stewardship Division. And next to Cordella, we have Blair McTavish, the assistant deputy minister of Parks and Resource Protection Division; and then we have, next to him is Michel Trudel, a policy analyst in the Francophone Affairs Secretariat; and we have Elliott Brown, who is the assistant deputy minister of the Water Stewardship and Biodiversity.

And last but certainly not least, we have Beth Ulrich, the executive director of the Manitoba Status of Women Secretariat.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

Some Honourable Members: Global.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Global.

Mr. Chairperson: Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

Thank you. It is agreed that questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner, with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Naylor: Could the minister please provide the most recent staff listing for Sustainable Development?

Ms. Squires: I thank the member for that question, and I do want to point out, first of all, that we have hired an additional eight conservation officers who are in training right now. We're really excited about the new conservation officers who will be online and in-working in the system, starting at early November.

Staffing at the conservation officer complement has been a goal of our government, and when we took office we were certainly dismayed to know how many conservation officers had left the force, and how the force had not been maintained.

And we've worked very diligently to ensure that we have a full complement of conservation officers working in the province of Manitoba, and we're well on our way to achieving that goal, and I'm excited for November 1st when these new recruits come out of their lengthy training course that they have been taking since we hired them a few months prior. They will certainly be adding much to the conservation of our natural resources in the province of Manitoba.

Currently, we have 736 FTEs that are full-time working in the system. I would also like to point out for the member that we do have many—almost 700, or over 700 seasonal staff that we hired during the summer months to work in our parks, to work on our initial attack fire crews to fight fires in northern Manitoba, and to provide maintenance and service in our parks.

So we are up to about 1,500 seasonal—1,500 employees during the summer months, and then these seasonal employees, when we bid them farewell in fall, we're down to around 700-plus regulars. And right now the current FTE count is 736.

Ms. Naylor: Could the minister please provide the staff listing for the Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office?

* (15:10)

Ms. Squires: We have 22 in total. There's 19 FTEs associated with that office and three secondments, and, currently, they're all filled with the exception of one.

Ms. Naylor: Can you also please provide the most recent vacancy rate for Sustainable Development? I hear that you're training eight new conservation officers, but I'm wondering how many current vacancies are conservation officers.

Ms. Squires: So when it comes to the conservation officers, we—there are 102 FTEs; 96 of those are filled right now. We have six vacancies that we are continuously working with partners across the province, University College of the North and other initiatives, to continuously enhance our recruitment of conservation officers.

I would like to point out that when we formed government less than four years ago there were 26—over 20 vacancies, nearing 26 vacancies, in the conservation officer ranks. And that was certainly a detriment to not only the workforce but to the natural resources in the province of Manitoba. And we have put significant effort into recruitment and retaining our conservation officers, and I'd like to thank all of those involved in helping rebuild this workforce.

And I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our conservation officers who work tirelessly all throughout the year to protect our natural resources and work in all four seasons of this province, the best and the worst of what this province has to offer in terms of weather. And they go out into incredible conditions to ensure that our natural resources are protected. And I'd like to thank each of those women and men in service.

Ms. Naylor: So just a point of clarification, you said that there's currently six vacancies, and I just wanted to check. It appears there is a decrease by 27 positions between 2017-18 and 2018-2019, and you've referred to eight people being in training right now. So that would indicate still having 19 vacancies. So if you can just explain that—those numbers to me.

Ms. Squires: Well, I thank the critic for that question, and to clarify, we do have more conservation officers working in the province of Manitoba. What we've done is move to a more streamlined approach when it comes to protecting conservation as well as fighting fires. There used to be a double duty of our conservation officers prior to these changes that took effect

this year, where our conservation officers were having to go on the front lines fighting fires.

And it's not that they weren't qualified to do that firefighting work. We know that their duties were stretching them fairly thin. And summertime is also a very busy time for protecting the natural resources, and so we have worked to create efficiencies within the ranks, if you will. And our conservation officers now are dedicated to protecting and preserving natural resources, and we have a separate unit, of course, that does the firefighting with the seasonal employment of our initial attack crews, as well as full-time, year-round strategic planners and people on the front lines of firefighting in the province of Manitoba.

Ms. Naylor: Comparing the 2017-18 annual reports, it appears that the Environmental Approvals Branch has lost two FTEs. So these are the peoples responsible for overseeing development approvals.

Is the minister concerned with oversight because of increased workloads in the Environmental Approvals Branch?

*(15:20)

Ms. Squires: I'd like to point out to the critic that the FTEs in the department has ultimately remained flat. What she is seeing is that we have pulled out the Climate and Green Plan office. The 19 FTEs that have been pulled out and put into their own dedicated office is a result of some reorganization that we've done that makes sense for a variety of reasons.

And we have the environment approvals branch is working with 133 FTEs—the Environmental Stewardship division, pardon me—with 133 FTEs, and they are working diligently and productively to continuously rebound from a year not too long ago under the NDP where they saw a significant reduction in FTEs. They had four professional and technical staff and two admin support slashed from their budget, which resulted in a reduction of \$344,000 in salaries and their operating budget was reduced by \$140,000 in the Environmental Stewardship area.

This also resulted in a freeze in their capital budget, and since our government took office we have been trying to enhance the Environmental Stewardship office and replace and repair some of that much-needed equipment. This past year alone we were able to purchase a mobile air quality monitoring unit as well as respond to community needs by installing an additional air quality monitoring unit in the community of St. Boniface, to name but a few of the capital projects that we've undertaken

since we formed government. And that is, of course, playing catch-up from all those years where the Environmental Approvals branch and particularly environment stewardship saw massive reductions in their budget and their FTEs.

Ms. Naylor: Many environmental organizations require government assistance to do the important community education and development work that they do. And now, as the minister knows, I'm new to this portfolio, so I was hoping the minister could clarify some things for me.

Could the minister please inform us if the various environmental organizations who generally receive government funding have received their operating funding for this fiscal year, 2019-20?

Ms. Squires: Just a point of clarification, which groups specifically?

Ms. Naylor: I know of several organizations within the city of Winnipeg; I'm not certain if there's others outside. But in general, have grants flown, like, gone out to the organizations that normally would receive them in April of 2019?

Ms. Squires: Well, I regret I'm not able to give a full answer to the question about funding for grants for specific organizations without having those specific organizations named.

What I can tell the member is that we are moving towards a single portal window for granting where our grants are having a more—our grant recipients and applicants are having a more streamlined approach to applying to government for grants. And we're offering that service online. There's a new portal. It's called the GO portal, Grants Online, and we have many Sustainable Development grants currently or moving towards this process. It's a more easy, transparent process for organizations to apply for money from government sources in the future.

Ms. Naylor: So we're six months into the fiscal year, so I guess I'll rephrase the question and ask, have any of the community environmental organizations that receive annual grants from the government received them for this fiscal year?

Ms. Squires: Yes, the department has filled several grants. The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation has received grants; the Fish and Wildlife Enhancement grants have flown out the door; IISD grants; conservation districts have also received grants from the department.

And speaking of the conservation districts, in the grants that we have provided to them thus far this year, I'd like to point out that our conservation districts were another entity that did not receive any funding increase over several years under the former administration, and now, for the first time ever, not only will they be reorganized, they will also have new funding streams available to them through our historic investment in the Conservation Trust as well as the GROW trust.

We invested \$102 million in our Conservation Trust last year. We are very pleased to have our first intake; the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation had offered—opened up an intake earlier this year, and there were several signature projects, some of them in the city of Winnipeg.

* (15:30)

The Save Our Seine group received \$100,000 to do some work over on riverbank stabilization and protecting that vital river. The Wildlife Haven received some money through that first intake of the Conservation Trust and through the—under the category of connecting people with nature. We know that when students, particularly, and young adults come out to the Wildlife Haven and are introduced to wildlife, it helps build a connection with nature, and that is one of the categories under which we are funding recipients and helping to educate people on how to cohabitate with our precious wildlife in the province of Manitoba. So very pleased that that recipient received funding through that Conservation Trust.

We had announced earlier this year a \$50-million GROW trust, which is really going to be providing conservation districts with another avenue for finding funds to protect wetlands. During our election commitment, we did commit to doubling the size of that trust. And we will have a \$100-million GROW's trust, which will help benefit everyone on the landscape who's interested in protecting our habitat and preserving our wetlands. And so very pleased there will be new funding streams available to these groups dedicated to conservation.

Ms. Naylor: So, again, we're six months into the fiscal year and several organizations have not received their annual—the funding that they usually receive. And so if I can—if the minister can explain to me what's the delay and when can those environmental groups anticipate receiving their funding.

Ms. Squires: Well, I would consider the IISD to be an environmental group, and the IISD is one group that has received money. So it is inaccurate for members opposite to say that environmental groups have not received their money.

Ms. Naylor: So the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is currently pursuing a court case against the federal government regarding their price on carbon. Can the minister tell me when the next court date is for this hearing?

Ms. Squires: So the member will know that currently the court of public opinion is deciding about the federal government's position on the carbon tax in the country with the federal election coming up in less than two weeks.

I have not looked at the Saskatchewan or the Ontario court registry to find out when those dates are set, and if the members opposite would like, I could email her the link to the registry for the court registry in those respective jurisdictions.

But in our province, I'm always happy to talk about our Climate and Green Plan, particularly with members opposite who had four plans and four different prices on carbon in four months. Our government has come up with a robust plan to get meaningful change in the province of Manitoba, to reduce our carbon footprint, and to protect the environment while growing the economy at the same time.

And we will continue to do that. We will continue to get results for Manitobans in the areas of adaptation and mitigation, while the members opposite are, perhaps, working on their fifth climate plan.

Ms. Naylor: Will the minister please share with me how many FTEs and work hours have been devoted to developing and making the legal challenge to the federal government regarding the price on carbon?

Ms. Squires: Well, of course, you'd have to ask the Minister of Justice that question. And if she would like, I'm sure that we could call him in here for that answer.

Ms. Naylor: Does the minister endorse the target signed by Canada and other nations set out in the Paris climate agreement? And does she believe that Manitoba ought to attempt to reach those targets?

* (15:40)

Ms. Squires: I'd like to thank my critic again for that question and point out or remind her that Manitoba is

a signatory to the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change. We did sign that agreement, along with many other provinces, in late winter of 2018. And as a signatory to that Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change, it simply means that Manitoba is responsible and willing to do its part to help Canada meet its target that it has signed on to.

What we have also done with the federal government as a signatory to this framework is sign on to the Low Carbon Economy Fund, which is a \$67-million commitment from the federal government—\$67-million commitment from the provincial government to provide a revenue source for groups that want to help us achieve our goals on getting action on climate change and reducing our carbon footprint.

And so one of the signature projects that we had announced earlier this year as part of that Low Carbon Economy Fund was to work with our trucking industry to help them reduce their emissions. We know that the transportation sector in the province of Manitoba is vital sector, and they are also a sector that has increasing emissions, and it goes without saying that the more trucks that are on the road, the greater the emissions. And so, we want to continue to have those wheels rolling. We want to continue to grow the economy and grow that transportation sector, but we want to reduce their carbon footprint.

So we did announce a initiative that is with both parties to the Low Carbon Economy Fund of Manitoba and Canada, as well as partnership with the trucking association to offer initiatives to truck owners to retrofit their vehicle to get greater emissions and reduce their carbon footprint.

And so that signature project was unveiled, with much success, earlier this year, and we are pleased that that is just one of many initiatives that will come under the Low Carbon Economy Fund that is, as a result of us being a signatory to that pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change, and looking forward to working with all partners to ensure that we've got maximum carbon emission reductions for every dollar that our government is committed to investing in the transition to the low-carbon future.

Ms. Naylor: Has the minister or her government initiated any new consultation with large emitters on a carbon-trading plan since the document that was released in September 2018 to develop the output-based carbon-trading scheme for large emitters in the province?

Ms. Squires: So while our government does continue to consult with many of our large industries in the province of Manitoba and working with them on initiatives to reduce their carbon footprint, I would like to point out that it is the federal government that is imposing output-based pricing on large emitters in the province of Manitoba, and I cannot speak to the engagement process that has under—that is being undertaken by the federal government.

Ms. Naylor: What plans does the minister have to lower the emissions of large emitters in the coming years, and will the minister commit to any kind of targets on a one-year or five-year basis?

* (15:50)

Ms. Squires: Well, thank you very much, and, again, I'd like to thank my critic for that question about our government's commitment to bending the emission curves through a result-driven and transparent process.

We are following the advice from our Expert Advisory Council that our government had established to provide us with regular input and advice on how we can all transition to that low carbon future. And based on the Expert Advisory Council report that they had given to me, which I believe is made available publicly and online. If the member likes I can point out where she can find a copy of the Expert Advisory Council report for her own reading.

But in this report, she—you will note that there is a target of one megaton reduction in the 2018-2022 period and once implemented, this will be the single largest emission reductions effort ever taken in Manitoba by the Manitoba government. We would essentially see almost one-twentieth of our carbon emissions go down with this reduction of a one megaton reduction over this five-year rolling—this five-year period. And we are the first jurisdiction in North America to set emission reductions goals in these rolling five-year periods, which I'd explained earlier is to ensure that we continuously increase the ambition of our targets so that it is increasing as we're moving along towards our goal of achieving that low-carbon future.

So we are—we have put that in legislation. It was required by the act to be implemented November of this year. We had announced in June, ahead of the legislated date of November by five months, because we wanted to signal that we were ready to get down to work with many of our partners in transitioning to a low-carbon future and to move forward on many of

the recommended actions for inclusion by the Expert Advisory Council on how to achieve these targets through this carbon savings account.

And some of them I've already spoken about. And some of the other initiatives that we are going to move forward on: our biodiesel mandate and demand-side management program and how to change our live-stock practices; our heavy-duty vehicle retrofits, which I've already spoken about; and how to reduce GHG emissions in the public sector as well; as the white goods recovery are just a few of the initiatives that we have—that we're—that we received advice on to achieve our 2018-2022 reduction goal.

Ms. Naylor: The minister uses a different accounting method to track greenhouse gas emissions than the manner set out in the Paris climate accord. Is the minister aware if there is any other jurisdiction in Canada that uses the same accounting method for greenhouse gas emissions as is used in Manitoba?

Ms. Squires: I do want to point out that the Paris accord is not prescriptive in terms of how nations or subnational actors will achieve results. They are just simply requiring them to get results and setting out those targets and leaving it up to each jurisdiction on how to achieve those targets. And here in Manitoba, the carbon savings account is our unique way of driving ongoing emissions reductions for our province.

And I will simply endeavour to elaborate more about the carbon savings account. We do—we have had a lot of feedback from our stakeholder groups and Manitobans who are interested in how to bend the cost curve on our carbon savings account. So I'm going to spend a little bit of time, for the benefit of all around the table and perhaps future readers of Hansard, exactly what this carbon savings account sets out to achieve and why it is a more ambitious way to achieve results.

* (16:00)

Simply put, it is the sum of all emission reductions over a five-year period on a cumulative basis. This is tracked against a set cumulative emissions reductions goal for those five years. And the emissions reductions are the carbon savings; the tracking against the goal—that goal is the account.

So these cumulative emissions reductions is the best method to measure carbon emissions reductions in Manitoba, given the province's clean electricity grid and the nature of the province's emissions profile. Each carbon savings account period will be assigned

a cumulative emissions reduction goal for the whole five-year time frame. That goal will result from a set of specific emissions reduction actions to occur within the five-year carbon savings account period. Those actions will continue into subsequent CSA periods and will be built upon with additional emissions reduction measures.

The Expert Advisory Council considers the overall objective of each carbon savings account is to build on the prior account period and produce sustained and—sustained emissions reductions that are growing in ambition to: reduce the total amount of carbon emissions that would otherwise be generated in Manitoba without emissions reduction measures from a business-as-usual forecast; reduce the absolute level of carbon emissions in Manitoba measured from the start and end points of each carbon savings account; and bend the curve of provincial carbon emissions over time in Manitoba so sustained emissions reductions occur by ensuring fewer emissions are occurring over each five-year carbon savings account period, compared to a business-as-usual scenario.

Ms. Naylor: Does the minister acknowledge that the method she uses to track carbon emissions differs from the official greenhouse gas inventory compiled by the federal government and submitted to the United Nations as part of our international commitments and obligations?

Ms. Squires: So I would like to point out for the record that there were several inaccuracies in the preamble of the last question.

We do use the National Inventory Report for the baseline. We—when we look at Manitoba's emissions profile, we know that it's sitting at around 21 megatons a year. That is what—we know that as per the National Inventory Report that we get from the federal government, as does every other jurisdiction in the province of—every other jurisdiction in the country of Canada.

We also know that we will be measured by the results provided through that National Inventory Report, and we—so to reframe the question, we are using the same inventory report as every other jurisdiction. What we are doing that is unique, innovative and ambitious is setting targets through a carbon savings account, and we know that this is a way to track progress on an annual basis.

When people sit around a table and set a target that is 10 or 15 or 20 years down the road, they are

doing that with the full knowledge that they will likely not be sitting around the table to be accountable when that time has come; and when the National Inventory Report releases information that will either confirm their achievement or confirm their failure, they will not be around the table. When we say that we're going to be setting ambitious targets that are growing in ambition through the carbon savings account on an annual basis, and with a reporting and measured up against the National Inventory Report findings, we are doing that with the full knowledge that each of us will be here to stand account for our targets and whether or not we've achieved them.

And so I would like to point out that how we set our targets is certainly up to each jurisdiction, but how we measure whether or not we've achieved those targets is certainly not up to each jurisdiction. It is set through the national framework and how they calculate carbon emissions and calculate carbon emission reductions in the specific jurisdiction, and then how they report them, which is through the National Inventory Report. And I cannot be more clear that Manitoba is getting its information and confirmation of its success or failure through the results that will be reported in that National Inventory Report.

Ms. Naylor: Okay, so according to the official greenhouse gas inventory, greenhouse gas emissions increased in Manitoba by one megaton from 2016 to 2017. Does the minister acknowledge that this is evidence Manitoba's not going in the right direction in finding solutions for the climate crisis?

* (16:10)

Ms. Squires: So, in citing the carbon emissions profile for that period of time, is certainly indicative of the former NDP government's failure to bend that emissions curve downward. And so we were not seeing a downward trajectory of emissions when we formed government. That is certainly a fact and one that our government took action on.

We did unveil our Climate and Green Plan in October of 2017. And I would like to point out that, during the period that the member cites—is also a period where we had significant economic growth, and so the emissions amount is not proportionate to the economic growth that the province had in—achieved during that year.

And so we do know that it is one thing to achieve emission reductions in a time of economic downturn. It is quite another thing to achieve emission reductions

while growing your economy at the same time. And that is certainly what our government's ambitious plan is to do.

And that is why we have set these targets that are realistic and achievable and yet ambitious, so that we can grow our economy and also reduce those emissions, and that is what we are setting out to do. And ever since we had unveiled our Climate and Green Plan in October of 2017, we have had a plan and a path forward to achieving that goal of reduced emissions.

Ms. Naylor: Does the minister agree that using natural gas increases greenhouse gas emissions?

Ms. Squires: Well, I appreciate the question about natural gas use in the province of Manitoba and its contributions to our carbon emissions profile. And it gives me an opportunity to talk about the clean electricity grid that we have in the province of Manitoba where upwards of 98 per cent of all of our electricity is through renewable resources. And that's something that we're incredibly proud of and are continuing to work, and that's why we're diligently working to clean up the mess in Manitoba Hydro, so that we can ensure that this province remains a leader in clean, renewable electricity.

And when it comes to natural gas, we know that in 2004, the former government was ordered to establish a demand-side management program outside of the Hydro utility that would look at natural gas reductions as well as other electricity reductions. And the reasoning behind that order to move demand-side management out of the utility was in order to achieve results because there's recognition that natural gas is a contributor to our profile, and we want to do everything that we can to conserve and reduce our reliance on natural gas.

And it was much to the chagrin of many people in Manitoba, particularly environmentalists, when this directive was ignored for several years. And it wasn't until our government took office where we actually did set out a goal to achieve a separate Crown corporation to handle the demand-side management. And we have legislated targets in that Crown, in our demand-side management entity to reduce our—not only our electricity consumption, but also our natural gas consumption because we know that that will contribute to a reduced profile.

We also know that many homeowners want to do their part to transition to a low carbon future and want to ensure that their homes are running as efficiently as

possible. And that's why we were very proud to announce a commitment for retrofits for homeowners in the province of Manitoba to look at replacing their windows or appliances that are reliant on natural gas or other substances that produce a larger carbon footprint in the province of Manitoba. And moving forward so that everyone can be part of the solution as we transition to the low carbon future.

Ms. Naylor: Many Manitobans want to do their part in reducing their emissions. Some certainly need some help to do that. The furnace replacement program helped Manitobans switch to a high-efficiency furnace to help reduce the cost of their Hydro bill but also to reduce natural gas consumption and emissions. And so I'm—I'd like to know if the minister will advocate to keep funding this program.

* (16:20)

Ms. Squires: I would suggest to the critic that if she would like to have a conversation about the establishment of Efficiency Manitoba, the Crown Services Minister is certainly available, and we can call him in here if she wishes, and we can move into Crown Services Estimates.

What I can tell the member is that achieving our efficiency—our targets for reductions in—through Efficiency Manitoba is not only a legislated target, it's a target that our government stands behind. We are committed to achieving those emission reductions.

I had shared with the member that not too long ago our government announced an initiative to move forward with retrofits for homeowners to achieve efficiency in their homes, whether it be through window and door replacements or upgrading their equipment, their furnace, their refrigerators or other appliances that contribute to our greenhouse gas emissions or carbon emissions profile in the province of Manitoba, that we are establishing a mechanism for them to have rebates from the government to achieve projects that will help them transition to a low-carbon future. So we are certainly committed to those reductions in natural gas consumption in the province of Manitoba.

Ms. Naylor: So it sounds like the furnace replacement program is not going to be an ongoing part of the Efficiency Manitoba plan for homeowners. Can you tell me why that won't be a—sorry—can the minister please tell me why that won't be a part of the plan?

Ms. Squires: I would just like to point out that the plan for Efficiency Manitoba has not been tabled and is under development right now.

Ms. Naylor: So the Efficiency Manitoba plan is coming out, it sounds like, about a month late, later than it was expected. I know that Manitobans are heading into winter and really wanting to know what kinds of things they can do to participate in reducing their climate emissions.

Can the minister speak to why the plan is coming out later than anticipated?

Ms. Squires: So, while I can share with the member that our government is committed to quickly and expeditiously setting up an independent demand-side management, I would like to point out there was a letter to the editor that was published in the Free Press today that is worth reflecting on. And it talks about how the NDP gave Cabinet approval in November of 2003 to create a new, stand-alone agency to enhance delivery of energy efficiency programs and co-ordinate them with other environmental efforts, including water, waste and transportation.

Giving—given the working title Efficiency Manitoba, details of the new entity were announced at a major media event by then-ministers Rosann Wowchuk, Steve Ashton, Stan Struthers and Tim Sale in December of 2003. An ambitious target to launch Efficiency Manitoba by September 2004 was subsequently missed. Yielding to the pressure from Manitoba Hydro, the NDP eventually abandoned the creation of Efficiency Manitoba.

So, sadly, Manitobans have been—had to wait the entire time that the NDP was in office and still got no results under the NDP on establishing Efficiency Manitoba. Our government made it a priority. We made it a campaign announcement and we are getting results with the establishment of Efficiency Manitoba that will not only help everyone transition to a low-carbon future, it will meet the legislated targets for reductions as set out in the act.

Ms. Naylor: Efficiency Manitoba's plan is supposed to outline ways to achieve natural gas reduction targets that are outlined in the act. I—can the minister tell me if there's any money or funds attached to this for Manitobans to encourage the reduction of natural gas, and, if not, how does the minister expect Efficiency Manitoba to achieve the legislated targets?

Ms. Squires: Well, I can assure the member that I am greatly anticipating the plan from Efficiency Manitoba.

I would like to point out that it is under Crown Services; it is not under Sustainable Development,

and while our government—we do work as a team—we do stand shoulder to shoulder and work together towards all of our goals, especially our lofty goals of transitioning to a low-carbon future. The Efficiency Manitoba is established as a Crown and it is under the purview of Crown Services.

Ms. Naylor: I'd like to thank the minister for her answers, and I'm going to move on to speaking about Lake Winnipeg.

* (16:30)

All Manitobans know that the North End Sewage Treatment Plant requires immediate upgrades to help reduce the amount of phosphorus that's sent to Lake Winnipeg.

Has the minister determined whether or not she and her government will commit the provincial portion to help fund this important project?

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Ms. Squires: Well, I thank the member for the question on the North End water pollution control centre, and we know that, you know, for 17 years the NDP allowed tens of thousands of litres of waste to flow unchecked into our rivers and Lake Winnipeg.

And so we are working on initiatives to clean up Lake Winnipeg, including reducing the phosphorus load, all the nutrient load in Lake Winnipeg, as well as cleaning up our watershed. And we know that the North End water pollution control centre is certainly a vital initiative to move forward to getting the results that we require for the cleanup of Lake Winnipeg. And so our government is committed to looking at all the options and potential solutions that will improve the health of Lake Winnipeg.

We're currently reviewing the City of Winnipeg's notice of alteration request for the North End water pollution control centre, including their request of extension until December 31st of 2021, to allow them for the development of a compliance plan. This filing is being reviewed for completeness—completeness and accuracy and to identify additional information that may be required from the City.

The current notice of alteration proposal before the Province does not have an interim solution proposed. And in order for the Province to formally review additional—review any additional proposals, the City would need to resubmit its amended notice of alteration.

Ms. Naylor: Will the minister commit to the provincial portion of the North End Sewage Treatment Plant, the costs of that?

Ms. Squires: It's an unfortunate reality that we cannot fund a plan that does not exist, and so we have asked the City of Winnipeg to submit a plan. And when we receive that plan from them, we will review it fully and completely and—but until we receive a plan we cannot commit to a request that simply doesn't exist at this point.

Ms. Naylor: Does the minister support interim measures, such as the use of ferric chloride to help reduce the amount of phosphorus sent by the North End Sewage Treatment Plant to Lake Winnipeg?

Ms. Squires: I can share with the member that I've had positive meetings and conversations with the IISD, as well as the Lake Winnipeg Foundation, on this very subject, and that we do certainly want to look at all options on the table for getting immediate nutrient reductions, as well as a long-term solution for nutrient reductions in the watershed.

We also are working collaboratively with the City of Winnipeg and want to move forward in a collaborative manner that will achieve results for Lake Winnipeg. Ultimately, the decision is with the City of Winnipeg.

When the City of Winnipeg engineers did meet with IISD and with the Lake Winnipeg Foundation on their proposed interim solution of using ferric chloride to reduce nutrients in waste water, there were issues and challenges that did not have a solution, according to the City. And they had mentioned that there was a problem with the excess sludge that would be created from the treatment proposed, and I certainly respect the jurisdiction of the City and their assessment.

* (16:40)

I—we know that ultimately the final decision rests with them. We certainly encourage them to look at all the options that are before them. We are willing to work collaboratively with them on all the options that are before them. However, if the City does deem an interim solution to be not feasible for the requirements that they have, I certainly would like more clarification on that, but ultimately, they have the ultimate jurisdiction on this issue in terms of what interim solution could possibly work for the requirements of that North End water pollution control centre.

Ms. Naylor: I'd like to thank the minister for the answers regarding Lake Winnipeg, and I'd like to ask about the first 100-day mandate. One of the promises that was made by the Conservative government during the campaign was to consult with private sectors to eliminate these suppressed plastic bags in Manitoba. I'd like to know, now that we're well into the mandate, if the minister—I'd like to ask the minister if a task force has been compiled, and who is on it.

Ms. Squires: I thank the member for the question.

It was certainly a pleasure to read in the 100-day Action Plan our government's commitment to consult with the private sector to eliminate the use of plastic bags in Manitoba; and while this may have been the first that the member had heard of our government's commitment to working towards the elimination of the use of plastic bags in the province of Manitoba, certainly, the work that has gone on prior to this—this commitment in the 100-day Action Plan stems back months, if not years, from when our government first took office. That commitment to not only reducing our reliance on single-use plastics, but also enhancing our recycling initiatives in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

So, specifically, with that single-use plastics, we know that plastic bags, for example, are a huge detriment in the province of Manitoba. We saw that the number of plastic bags, single-use plastic bags in the Manitoba—in the Brady landfill was accelerating up to about 260 million bags per year ending up in Brady, and that was simply unacceptable.

And so through a variety of initiatives, education, awareness and working with other groups to reduce, reuse and recycle single-use plastic bags, we're seeing the use of those plastic bags, the distribution of those plastic bags decrease in the province. And currently we still have about 160 million of those bags ending up in Brady landfill each year. So while we have bended the curve on the number ending up in Brady, we know that's not enough.

We can certainly do better as a jurisdiction to eliminate that from happening in the Brady landfill, and so we have taken a variety of measures prior to this commitment in the 100-day Action Plan. We established a recycling task force about a year and a half ago which was committed to doing research and consultation. We have had conversations with the Retail Council in Manitoba as well as other industry stakeholder groups and—to find a solution and to find

a way to work collaboratively with all Manitobans to eliminate the use of plastic bags here in the province.

And so between the work that we've done on the recycling task force, between the work that we've done with 'consulting'—or consulting with shareholders and—or stakeholders, we have already achieved results and are going to be expediting those plans in the near future. We also know that other plastics have created a problem in the province of Manitoba and that's why we are working collaboratively with the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment to develop a Canada-wide action plan to implement a strategy on zero plastics waste in the country.

In June of this past year, there was a federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting in Halifax where we attended, and Manitoba was pleased to be working collaboratively with all other jurisdictions. I believe every jurisdiction in the country was represented at this FPT table and had all agreed to work collaboratively and find a way to implement this Canada-wide action plan to reduce, to get zero plastics waste. And that means keeping the plastic waste in the circular economy and not having any of this plastics end up in landfill, or worse, in our watershed.

And so under the leadership of Canada we are working collaboratively, and I know Manitoba is a co-chair in that committee to find the—to implement the strategy on zero plastics waste that will have lasting benefits not just here in the province of Manitoba, but throughout our entire country and our waters that border us.

* (16:50)

Ms. Naylor: One of the other concerns with emissions is from landfills, particularly the organics that are in landfills.

Does the minister plan on funding municipal organics programs or implementing a province-wide organic strategy?

Ms. Squires: We certainly do know that when compostable products end up in the landfill, that they do create methane, which is a potent GHG. And in order to substantially reduce the gas coming out of our landfill, we need to find a way to reduce the amount of compostable products from entering the landfill in the first place.

It's been said before that the best way to deal with methane gas from compostable goods is to prevent

them from being created in the first place, and our government certainly agrees with that adage. And so currently what we have is the waste reduction recycling support program funds a composting program and helps communities throughout the province initiate compostable programs in their own jurisdiction.

But we're looking at a plan to reduce even more compostable products. We know that we can certainly do better, and need to come up with a more robust plan, so that's exactly what we're doing to ensure that in the future we don't see the same levels of compostable products entering the landfills at—that we have in the past years.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, it looks like I have a relatively short time, so I'm going to ask several questions at once and the minister can see if she can—what the responses in her—with the carbon savings account, it appears quite possible that there could be savings of energy, fossil fuel use, on an existing building that would be positive, but at the same time there will be new buildings being built, which could actually use more carbon, and so that you could have a net increase instead of a net decrease.

Second, when it comes to agricultural carbon savings, with fossil fuels being used, for example, it's quite easy to measure the total amount, you know, by building or a car, but when it comes to agriculture, the amount of carbon stored in the ground or the amount of nitrous oxide that released into the air needs a more direct measurement or assessment. And so will the Province be prepared to invest in ensuring that that measurement will be made, so that you can actually give people credits for those carbon savings?

Third, there's a priority you have mentioned among many to address the tremendous algal bloom problems. There have been councillors, I believe, who've written to the Province asking for help in pushing forward the interim solution. Will the Province respond to that?

And lastly, with the composting, one of the big problems has been finding a place that—a location where the composting can occur. And the Samborskis have been involved in composting, but there's a major problem in getting a place that's going to be acceptable, and so there needs to be some action, I would suggest, by the Province, in making sure that there's somewhere where the composting could actually be done.

* (17:00)

Ms. Squires: Well, I thank the member for those four questions, and I will try to answer all four of those questions in the time allotted to one question. I do ask forgiveness if I am unable to achieve that.

Let's first start with the Carbon Savings Account and the buildings. And we certainly do know that we need to look at retrofits as well as new builds in order to achieve our target of moving towards a low-carbon future.

I'd like to point out that we announced 20 new schools. Some of them are already under construction. They will all be LEED-certified schools, and I would like to point out that we have the first LEED Platinum school in the country, I believe, that was built in Amber Trails. I think it was the second school to achieve that certification, but that's certainly something that we're moving towards.

All of our new buildings will be built to a new standard that will take carbon emission reductions into account. And working with our existing stock of buildings, we need to move forward and apply retrofits and do initiatives to ensure that there are emission reductions savings to be found in existing buildings. And the growth of new buildings, if the member was wondering, is that being taken into account in our reductions? Absolutely. Our reductions target will continuously be growing in ambition, and we will see those reductions that will be reported through the national inventory, but we will be working in concert with both existing buildings and our new buildings to achieve carbon emission reductions.

In terms of giving credit for carbon sequestration on the ground, we know that enhancing our carbon sequestration monitoring systems will enable us to better estimate our GHGs in the future, and establishing this monitoring system is, certainly, a goal of ours. It's not always easy to determine how many—how much carbon is being sequestered on a particular landscape, and so we are—we did receive advice from our Expert Advisory Council on actions that can improve that carbon sequestration potential, and how these actions could be considered in those future carbon savings accounts.

Ultimately, we know here in Manitoba we do want to get credit for the carbon emissions that we're going to pull out of the atmosphere when we are supplying our clean electricity to jurisdictions south of the border through the creation and implementation of the Manitoba-Minnesota transmission line.

We'd love to get those credits for the carbon emissions that will be achieved when Wisconsin shuts off the coal, or if we get—when we get our power into Saskatchewan, when Saskatchewan shuts down its coal.

And, likewise, we also want to have all of our landowners in the province of Manitoba to also achieve credit and feel that they are—that they're getting results when they want to be a partner in transitioning to the low-carbon future. We want them to be assured of their contributions. And so we're coming up with that monitoring system and working with many people to achieve those outcomes.

When it comes to Lake Winnipeg, let me be clear: the Province sets out targets for nutrients in legislation, and we do expect the City to abide by those—abide by that legislation. They did file a notice of alteration, and we are currently reviewing that notice of alteration. But let me be clear: there is no interim plan that the City has proposed in that notice of alteration.

And so I am working very collaboratively with the City to simply say to them that if you want to put forward an interim solution, please do so and the Province would be willing to take a look at that, as well as the other aspects of their notice of alteration, but that has been received by the department and it is currently under review.

In terms of composting, we do work with many licence holders who currently have composting facilities, and anyone who wants to expand their composting facility, or perhaps build a new one, we are working with them to ensure that they get the proper and appropriate licences. Also working with municipalities, and you can imagine, you mentioned, the Samborski situation. We know that there are certain challenges with composting facilities, and it does require collaboration. So we are collaborating with all licence holders and municipalities.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'd like to thank the minister for the responses so far, and also, before we start, here, I'm looking at Francophone Affairs, just like to thank her staff for being present here today.

Before I launch into the question, I just want to briefly summarize, you know, some of the conversations that I've had a chance to have with folks that are deeply entrenched in the francophone community here in Manitoba. They're concerned right now. They're concerned about what we've seen over the last several years in terms of cuts that have been

viewed as symbolic in terms of this government's commitment to French language services here in Manitoba, and the sense is that a lot of services and programs that the francophone community here in Manitoba have been working a very long time to achieve, and to have in place, are slowly being whittled away. So I think that just underscores the importance of some of the questions that we're going to dig into here today. So I thank the minister in advance for what I'm sure will be a really great conversation.

*(17:10)

I'd like to start by just asking about the Santé en français program and hoping that the minister could summarize the various components of that program.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister of—no, sorry.

The minister is not up yet.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs): While I do appreciate the opportunity to spend some time in dialogue with my critic for Francophone Affairs, I do have to take issue with the opening comments made about our government's commitment to the francophone community.

I would like to remind him that the first—one of the first acts that our government did was introduce and have Bill 5 receive royal assent. That is The Francophone Community Enhancement Support Act which addresses and legislates the ongoing vitality of the francophonie here in the province of Manitoba.

I would like to point out that this bill, a similar iteration of this bill, had previously been on the Order Paper prior to this member's seat in the Chamber—in fact, prior to my taking a seat in the Chamber, where the former administration, the NDP administration, had failed to bring this forward. I believe on numerous occasions, twice, possibly, even three times, they had an opportunity to bring this bill into law and they had failed the francophone community in entrenching the ongoing vitality of that community into law.

And so that was something that our government did right in the outset. It was June of 2016 when that legislation received royal assent and the result of that legislation is that we have now French language service plans from every department and every Crown entity in the province that are—that have submitted these French language services plans to our

government for review. And I do want to thank all the various departments, as well as the Francophone Affairs Secretariat and the staff there for working on these plans.

The plans are robust and very much what many would consider a living document, in terms of how government can continuously evolve its French language services to its community, whether they're in a bilingual centre or not, whether they're in a designated bilingual area or not. It is a commitment from everyone who works in government and everyone who offers government services, their commitment to saying to the public, you have—you rightfully have the expectation of receiving services in both English and French and that is what is being provided.

So not only do we have these living documents, these French language service plans for every department and Crown, we also have an enhanced capacity of bilinguals in the civil service, whether they're in a designated bilingual position or a non-designated bilingual position, we are seeing a growth of bilingual staff in the civil service.

We have also done many initiatives. We held the first forum last year on French language education in the province of Manitoba and are working to implement all the outcomes from that community forum. I believe it was the first forum to be held in that setting—in that manner, to have education officials working directly with the francophone community and people in the francophone education system to learn how we can better achieve outcomes in the area of education.

We've also restructured the Department of Education where there's a direct link into the minister's office on French language education, where there's a director who can provide advice and has regular meetings with the Minister of Education on all things related to the initiatives—the enhancement of French language services in the school system. That is in addition to the establishment of—or the commitment to fund École Noël-Ritchot in the community of St. Norbert, as well as a recent commitment to build a French school in the community of Transcona, along with other, many other things that our government has done on the education side.

We recently signed the Canada-Manitoba Agreement on French Language Services. We were disappointed that that pot of money did not grow from the federal government. It doesn't matter though; we

are continuing to enhance our investment and I'll be happy to elaborate more on the investments that our government has made into the French language community. When it comes to Santé en français they are certainly one of the agencies that received funding through the Canada-Manitoba Agreement on French Language Services and they are in that agreement, and we're happy to continue to work with them.

* (17:20)

Mr. Sala: I thank the minister for the response, and would just request, again, that she answer the question, which was could she summarize the purposes of the Santé en français program, various components of the program?

Ms. Squires: I'm not sure whether or not I should feel flattered or insulted that most of my critics that have asked questions that are outside the purview of my department, and as it pertains to Santé en français, the member will know that Health is its partner in terms of its—delivering its mandate, although I can share with the member that Santé en français does provide a service in the province that also receives funding through the Canada-Manitoba Agreement on French Language Services administered by the Francophone Affairs Secretariat and in terms of establishing—helping them achieve the outcomes established in its mandate to provide high-quality French language services in the area of health and social services.

I can direct the member towards either the Santé en français organization itself or to Health, which I believe was in Estimates already. Although, if he'd like, we can certainly call the Health Minister back for greater conversation about the collaboration between our government, and Health specifically, and Santé en français.

Mr. Sala: I thank the minister.

So I regret that I was unable to get a clear explanation of what the specific components of that program were, but it is clear that this service is delivered half—approximately half the budget is coming from her department. So I think there are some relevant questions to be asked here.

Specifically tied to budgets in '15-16, '16-17 and '17-18, total expenditures for Santé en français program hovered around 550K a year. But in '18-19 they were reduced to \$340,000. So just hoping the minister can clarify why French language health services were reduced by \$200,000 in the last fiscal.

* (17:30)

Ms. Squires: So I would like to point out that this has already been discussed in Committee of Supply in the Health Committee of Supply, and where I believe it was either explained during that committee or in subsequent dialogue, that it was simply an accounting accrual issue driven by the timing of payments. And if the member would like me to provide a copy of Hansard to him, I'd be willing to do that.

Mr. Sala: Thank you, Minister, for the response.

I see we're running short on time. I'm going to move on here to ask some questions about the Bureau de l'éducation française, and hoping that the minister can provide the current vacancy rate for the bureau.

Ms. Squires: Well, I have immense respect for the work that the Bureau de l'éducation française does on a regular basis, and I'm tremendously supportive of the framework or the structure that has the director reporting directly into the Minister of Education. In terms of the overall responsibility and the purview of that department's structuring, that is under the Department of Education, and if the member likes we can recess to call the Minister of Education in.

Mr. Sala: Thanks for the response.

I'm hoping the minister can describe the chain of accountability and how it relates to her office. Is this to suggest that there's no chain of accountability of any kind between the Bureau de l'éducation française and her office?

Ms. Squires: While I do appreciate a question from the NDP on teamwork, I can point out to the member that I work very collaboratively with our Minister of Education—and I'd also like to point out that with the establishment of Bill 5 we legislated a Francophone Affairs Advisory Council. This was something that was never done under the former administration. They never legislated a council to provide advice to government from the community on how to enhance French language services in the community. And so on that Francophone Affairs Advisory Council, the makeup of that committee includes the Deputy Minister of Education, as well as the executive director of the Francophone Affairs Secretariat.

But to answer the member's question, does the bureau report directly into the Department of Sustainable Development? No, they do not.

Mr. Sala: Well, I appreciate that there's some different accountabilities relative to the bureau and Santé en français, So we'll move on to another area

where we'll—hopefully, we'll have absolute clarity around accountability.

And I think it is important for the record here that if we look at—just briefly, although the minister has clarified that she does not have accountability over the Bureau de l'éducation française, just for the record to be clear, that—over the past year, this government underspent the budget by over \$1 million.

So I think there's been some allusions to Bill 5 and some of the support for the French language community, but I think it is important to just ensure that, on the record, we're being clear about cuts to Santé en français of \$200,000, cuts to the Bureau de l'éducation française of \$1 million. These are significant cuts for our francophone community here in Manitoba, who are—as I mentioned in my opening statement—really concerned about some of the direction that they've seen with this government.

Moving on to Translation Services, I'd just like to focus on page 38 of the Estimates book, which shows that 11 positions are being cut from Translation Services.

Why is the minister cutting these positions?

Ms. Squires: I certainly do have to take issue with some of the misassertions in the member's preamble about our government's commitment to the francophone community.

* (17:40)

Perhaps he missed the announcement that we made at École Noël-Ritchot, which was a 30,000-square-foot, eight-new classroom and new-gymnasium project that will provide much-needed facility for students in that area. French-speaking students in St. Norbert will now have a refreshed learning space that will support their engagement and achievement.

And if I could just quote, for a second, Bernard Lesage, who is the chair of La Commission scolaire franco-manitobaine: This is a great day for Noël-Ritchot school community, which is being rewarded for its efforts. We thank the Province for this support and look forward to getting started on this long-awaited project.

Now, let's highlight the fact that it was long-awaited. He—the DSFM had gone to the NDP many times, and each time they went to the NDP and had a meeting with the minister of Education and, perhaps, talked to the Public Schools Finance Board about getting this much needed renovation for

the school in that growing part of south Winnipeg, the answer was no. And year after year after year, the answer was no about this much-needed expansion and new classrooms for students who want to learn in French language.

And so when our government was elected, we made fast work of this issue. We knew that that community had been waiting for an extremely long time. We knew that that community was growing in frustration because of their lack of a funding partner with the Province of Manitoba under the NDP government. And so we were pleased to make that announcement and to be building that new expansion.

We also did just recently announce a new school in Transcona that the DSFM had also been asking for to enhance the French language education offerings in that quadrant of the city.

So I can certainly forgive the member for not being aware of those initiatives. He wasn't in the Chamber at that time, but I'm certain that he will help celebrate the opening of these schools and help celebrate the achievement of the fact that over 15 per cent of our student population in the province of Manitoba is receiving some form of French language education, whether that is through a DSFM school or through French immersion or through other offerings such as the classes that I have attended over the last few years as I endeavour to enhance my French language.

When it comes to the translation services that we offer in the province of Manitoba, we have moved towards a model of creating faster, quicker and more words translated than ever before. That is also an intended consequence, I would say, of Bill 5, where we are enhancing the francophone community in ensuring that our civil service is being available and offering French language services to the community in the language of their choice. And part of that commitment is to enhance the words that we translate more than ever before.

We are also receiving requests that we were unable to keep up with at the rate that they were coming in. And so the new model of offering translation services has resulted in 147,000 more words, year over year, in the first six months of operating under the new structure than under the other—the former structure. That represents an 11 per cent increase in words translated, year over year.

We also know we're going to be able to respond to rapid requests. We know that there are times when government needs to provide translation about a bulletin, a public emergency or a notification, that we need to get translation done on the weekend. We know that this new model will allow us to provide that translation services quickly and efficiently.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the information. I'd just like to ask, will the minister endeavour to provide the analysis that she just summarized?

Ms. Squires: By all means.

Mr. Sala: I thank the minister for the responses.

I have no further questions.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions relevant to this department.

I will now call Resolution 12.2: Be it—RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$66,195,000 for Sustainable Development, Parks and Resource Protection, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.3: Be it—RESOLVED that there be granted to her Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$13,361,000 for Sustainable Development, Environmental Stewardship, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.4: Be it—RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$37,540,000 for Sustainable Development, Water Stewardship and Biodiversity, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.5: Be it—RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,250,000 for Sustainable Development, Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.6: Be it—RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$29,500,000 for Sustainable Development, Fire Extra Suppression, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.7: Be it—RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$21,982,000 for Sustainable Development, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.8: Be it—RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,236,000 for Sustainable Development, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 12.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 12.1.

The minister's staff has left the area, so the floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Naylor: I move that line item 12.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Sustainable Development's (Ms. Squires) salary be reduced to \$1.

Motion presented.

* (17:50)

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Nays have it. The motion is accordingly defeated.

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 12.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$25,793,000 for Sustainable Development, Finance and Shared Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Sustainable Development.

The hour being 5:52, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

INFRASTRUCTURE

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Infrastructure.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much and I'm very excited to be back into Estimates for the Department of Manitoba Infrastructure.

I would like to welcome my new critic, the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), and he has served in this Legislature for many years, has established himself as a—actually, I believe he is the ranking member of the NDP caucus in so far as years in a row served, and he served the Legislature first as a staffer to one of the members, and then as a member of the Legislature. So great to see him here.

A lot of things going on in the department. We've completed some fairly substantial projects over the last year, year and a half. We're almost finished with 59 and the Perimeter which is a marquee project that has been talked about at least for 30 years, and we are looking at all kinds of other little projects. That member might know that we announced the safety review which is in its first of two years of development. That's on the south Perimeter. We've made a lot of changes to 24 different intersections.

We also will be having in due course the south Perimeter functional study, which I'm sure the member will want to talk a little bit more about, so I won't go into detail. That one should be coming forward fairly soon. In fact, we should be announcing fairly soon in the next round of open houses. So a lot of really exciting things going.

I could spend a lot of time going through the various projects, but I think, out of respect for the process and give the opportunity to my critic to start

asking some questions. I will leave my opening comments to that. I don't know if now is the time to introduce my staff—no, it hasn't come yet.

But, before we do move on, I would like to thank Manitoba Infrastructure employees who work very hard, whether it's from the deputy minister's office to the individuals who are out on days like today trying to get construction projects finished and under less than ideal conditions. So I'd like to thank all the staff of Manitoba Infrastructure and let's proceed.

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

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement? No?

The floor is—no. Under the Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for the department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 15.1.(a) pertaining to the resolution 15.1.

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

Mr. Schuler: First of all, I'd like to introduce: Deputy Minister Tareq Al-Zabet; also, Ruth Eden, who is assistant deputy minister, Water Management and Structures; also, Lynn Cowley, director of finance, is at the table; and my special assistant, Bruce Verry, is also at the table.

So, welcome to all of them and let's proceed.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion? [*interjection*] The member for Concordia.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I would suggest we proceed in a global manner.

Mr. Chairperson: Is it agreed to proceed in a global manner? [*Agreed*]

Thank you. It is then agreed that the questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wiebe: I appreciate the opportunity to ask some questions this afternoon. I understand our time is somewhat limited. I understand we're coming to the end of the Estimates process at the end of this week

and I do expect that independent members may wander into the room at some point that may want to ask some questions, as well. So we'll, hopefully, get some time to do all of it.

As the minister mentioned, I am new to this portfolio so, hopefully, you know, some of these questions may be fairly basic, but, hopefully, the minister will be able to shed some clarity and give me some context that, hopefully, will allow me to do my job as opposition in holding himself and the government to account.

I wanted to start this afternoon just, in light of the weather that we're looking at outside of our windows here, and, of course, it was mentioned briefly by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) in question period, that, obviously, flooding is on the mind of many Manitobans. A fairly unique situation to be having these kind of conversations at this point of the year, but, certainly, it is a reality for a lot of communities and not only is it a reality for this fall, but a reality for—potentially for spring 2020.

So we've had some updates with regards to flood forecasting, but I thought maybe we could start just by talking about that—about the flooding situation currently. And where I would like to go with this with the minister is just to talk a little bit more about the Lake St. Martin emergency channel, the situation at Lake Manitoba and understanding where the process is or where the construction project is at with regards to that project.

Mr. Schuler: Do you want to have an update of what all the conditions are right now? We can do an update right now for you, if you want.

An Honourable Member: Sure.

Mr. Schuler: Well, I thank the member for that question, and before we get into Lake Manitoba outlet and a great conversation to have, I would like to advise himself and the committee that we have sent out several notices. I'm sure every time you turn on your phone, you go to the weather app or you go onto any newspaper site app from Manitoba, you'll see there's a warning on it. So not just is there a warning that we might be seeing substantive water or rain or snow, what's particularly troubling is the fact that the ground is saturated, and I'm sure most of us would find that if you go into your backyard you're going to see water standing so that there is now no absorption that's going to take place. Had this kind of a storm come and we would have been as dry as we were all summer,

the conditions would have been slightly different just because of the absorption rate.

So I want to start off by telling the member that Lake Manitoba is at 811 feet, which is in the mid-range of its operating level. Lake St. Martin is 790 feet, which is also in the mid-range of its operating level. Lake Winnipeg is 713 feet, which is average. We went through a little bit of a high period in 2011 and it's been coming down since. So they're all within their normal operating levels.

We were informed yesterday that there was great concern, because at James, and those of you who don't know, that's actually—it's a pipe in the river by James Street—and I've actually stood on the pipe—and from there is where we measure the levels of the river. And as of yesterday by about 3:30, 4 o'clock, we were advised that at James we were sitting at 13.9 feet. And at 14 feet, there's something that's triggered; it's called the rule 4 of the floodway operating guidelines.

* (14:50)

So, the floodway has very definitive operating guidelines, and rule 4 is that when you are looking at a 14-foot-high-level James Street in the city of Winnipeg, 14 feet puts a lot of pressure on the sewer system of the city of Winnipeg. And, at that point in time, you start the procedure of starting to operate the floodway gates. Rule 4 stipulates that you must give 24-hours notice.

So I'd like to thank the department and all of those involved that we got a notice prepared and, by 7 o'clock yesterday, we got the notice out. So we had to—we have to notify everybody for 24 hours so they can prepare themselves.

I'd like to point out to the member that in the floodway, 10 of 11 hay permit holders were contacted; the 11th one was—they couldn't get a hold of him, but they did leave him a message. And a majority of them either had already moved their hay or were going to do it today, and so then it was already too late because of—there's a lot of drop structures putting a lot of water—a lot of the creeks drop automatically into the floodway; the water had gotten too high. So there was probably between four and six inches of water. So, you know, normally we don't have this kind of wet condition in fall, so they let the hay dry in the floodway and I guess nobody saw this one coming. So, again, we've exercised the rule 4, we've given 24-hours notice which means that, starting at approximately 7 o'clock this evening, we can then start operating the gates of the floodway.

So, I'm going to stop there—if the member has any more questions on this and then we can go to Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin channel.

Mr. Wiebe: I think that is helpful information.

I also think—I was quite surprised, to be honest with you, that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) was giving the update in the—in during question period. I know in the past there has been an opportunity for the minister to continue to give an update. Again, very normal to have that during the fall sitting of the Legislature, but in this case, I think it might be helpful. So, not sure if that's going to be something that's going to be provided, at least for the end of this week.

And then—but I do want to, you know, move past that because, again, time is of the essence. And, again, a bit of an update on where—what projects have been completed with regards to the emergency outlet channel—sorry, on the main outlet channel that's being built and just get—start getting a sense of that project, where things stand right now.

Mr. Schuler: Well, perhaps this is something that's best that the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) and I have this conversation not just at committee.

The reason why we shy away from doing ministerial statements on these kinds of things is there was a opposition critic, but there were also a lot of independent members who then would use this opportunity to completely stray from anything to do with the event at hand and would trash the government, politically.

And that's not what these are for. It's offensive to individuals whose livelihood is being threatened. It's offensive to the individuals who have stayed up late at night, all night long. Fisaha, who's one of our hydrologists, he has put a lot of time into this, and to have opposition members get up and just use this as an opportunity to trash talk, politically, the government, that's actually not what it was meant for.

So I would suggest that, you know, these are very serious. They're very important and right now I believe we're complete—we did do a departmental briefing with all the media on all the conditions which I've just explained to the member. And, you know, if we could improve the tone in the Legislature, I think going back to ministerial statements would certainly be something we would look at.

Insofar as the Lake Manitoba channel, the member will know that this is something that—it was actually under Premier Douglas—D.L. Campbell,

Douglas L. Campbell who started the process of looking at what they should do because of the '50 flood and what should be done. And there were a whole bunch of things that were identified and one of the main projects was the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin outlet channel. And the rationale was that, of course, we would do the floodway, and that would take care of the Red River Valley, but there's a lot of water that comes out of Alberta, goes through the Dakotas, through Saskatchewan, Alberta, goes through the Dakotas. And that was the Portage Diversion was then built.

But the feeling was that it's not just that that puts water into Lake Manitoba. There's also other tributaries that drain water from—starts in Alberta, through Saskatchewan and enters Lake Manitoba. So if you're putting that much extra water in, you have to put an extra outlet in, and so those channels had been talked about and it was never done—it was supposed to have been the same time as the one by Portage la Prairie.

So they weren't done both at the same time and as the member will know—he was here for that—2011 is when we had that catastrophic storm, not just was Lake Manitoba way above its operating levels, which we read about today—they're within that operating guideline. Lake Manitoba was way above that operating guideline and then we had the perfect storm and it was wave action and the storm itself that just did so much damage.

And, basically, Lake Manitoba's a very shallow lake, so you had so much water and with wave action it's like a bathtub and the waves just got greater and greater and not just we—damage around the lake but also the northern end of Lake Manitoba, where the First Nations were entirely wiped out. Historical artifacts, the very stuff we have in our homes, all of that was lost. So, although they've now been moved to higher ground and new communities have been established, they've really lost a lot of their heritage.

So, the realization was and the feeling is, from our Premier and our government, that this is a project that we have to proceed on.

So I will get into some of the details for the individual. The key communities from the 2011 flood were the Dauphin River, Little Saskatchewan, Pinaymootang, and Lake St. Martin indigenous communities. The municipalities—

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

Mr. Wiebe: Well, and you know what, I started this session by saying, you know, I'm new to the critic portfolio and that I, you know, maybe I'd like to start at the beginning. I didn't actually mean to start back at 1950, so, you know, I appreciate that the minister is giving some context, but I think we ate up most of the question there just giving the history lesson.

So I'm hoping that we can get into some specifics here and I think that's where the minister's going. So if we could just keep it to the specifics on the projects so far that have been completed with regards to the outlet channel.

Mr. Schuler: Okay, I get it.

This is a project that I'm obviously very vested in and very passionate about it, and we always start by explaining how it came about. So, yes, I got myself a little caught up in the history of it. So good thing the member for Elmwood's (Mr. Maloway) not here because he lived most of it.

Okay, and I'll just conclude by—the municipalities we're talking about are: Grahamdale, St. Laurent, Portage la Prairie, but it basically is Grahamdale that's most impacted. And we did let the contract for the engineering—we—there are two structures.

So, Lake Manitoba is—so there's a 10-foot drop from Lake Manitoba to Lake St. Martin and a 90-foot drop from Lake St. Martin to Lake Winnipeg. So we have to, obviously, design some proper drop structures. Those engineering designs are ongoing.

There was quite a bit of work done already last winter, where they go and they take soil samples. They have to make sure that when we put these structures in place that they hold, that they've got a good footing and they are—those designs are ongoing and they're going to be very important to this project.

The access road to Lake St. Martin, two of four sections are completed. The sections that were completed were roads that already existed, so we were just rehabbing roads that existed already. And on the other two, because they're not—really non-existing roads, they will be caught up in the environmental report that we—that we've provided to the federal government.

Consultation is ongoing and we have spent a lot of time and a lot of energy on engagement and dealing, not just with our First Nations but also with the municipalities, a lot of associations and a lot of individuals. So we spent a lot of time ensuring that the communities, the First Nations and individuals that

are going to be impacted know where we're going with the project. So, leave it at that.

* (15:00)

Mr. Wiebe: So just to be clear, the only projects to date that have been completed are the road projects. The work that's being done to—for the drop structures and other work is still being designed. It's at the design phase. Is that—and I guess, then, maybe the next question would be then, have any contracts been awarded? Is that a design build, or are we designing or are we contracting out to design and then the build is someone else?

Mr. Schuler: Yes, and, again, to the committee, you know, be aware that there's a 100-foot drop in total. So we've got to make sure we get our drop structures right, or else we could conceivably drain Lake Manitoba and that would—wouldn't that be something to have to answer for. So the drop structures are very important.

There were two firms that were each given a drop structure. So from Lake Manitoba to Lake St. Martin, it's a design company called Hatch; and from Lake St. Martin into Lake Winnipeg is KGS; and they are in the design phases. These are very expensive contracts and they will have to be incredibly well-engineered, and that's why they were in the field taking soil samples. They've got to make sure that wherever they put them, that they are sitting on some substantial bedrock so that they can hold the kind of water like what happened in 2011.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, so these are the design contracts that have been awarded. Is this—is it a design contract only or is it a design build? In other words, have those firms also been contracted to do the work?

And I guess the minister mentioned, you know, it's an expensive project. Obviously, each element of it is an expensive project. To date, if the minister could detail—and maybe he can point to a specific line in the annual report or in the Estimates book with regards to how much money has been spent to date on these projects and on these contracts that have been awarded.

Mr. Schuler: Yes. These contracts were signed November 2018 and they're—it was a—it was done by tender. It was a public open tender for these contracts. It—there was a notification that went out that these two companies had gotten them, and they are just design. They are just designing the drop structures.

Mr. Chairperson: Member for Concordia—*[interjection]*—my mistake. I don't believe the minister was finished answering his question. That was my error.

So, Honourable Minister, if you wish to continue.

Mr. Schuler: I would like to direct the member to the Manitoba Infrastructure annual report which you—has in front of him. If he goes to page 92 and B-15 capital investment, he goes to subsection (b) item No. 3 water-related infrastructure, it would be capsulized in that amount. We don't break it out individually; it's just an amount that we spend on water-related infrastructure.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Schuler: I would suggest to the critic that one of the things we have done incredibly well as a department over the last three and a half years is put a lot of information on the proactive disclosure website. And if he wants to go have a look, the contract values of the two roads and who the contracts went to, what the value was. Also, it has the—we also have on there the two companies, Hatch and KGS, and what their contracts were worth. Any contract over \$10 million is put on the—\$10,000 is put on the proactive website. It's all there for him to have a look. We actually err on the side of putting more out than less because it is public information and he could find those details right on the proactive disclosure website.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, so, well, I mean, I appreciate that the minister is pointing me to a website. I also, though, think there's some value in having some of these numbers entered into the official record as we go through this process. So I understand his staff is furiously trying to keep up with where we're going on these things, but any of that information that could be put on the official record, if it's not too much trouble either as a commitment to come back or here this afternoon would be very much appreciated.

I wanted to just further ask a little bit more about these particular contracts, and the minister mentioned his interest in engaging indigenous communities. Obviously, there's a duty to consult, and I think that's well understood. However, I know that in the past there's been a real effort, whether it's within the department or elsewhere, to engage indigenous communities to utilize these projects as an opportunity for them to gain skills, gain employment and really just to use the multiplier that can be employed in some of these communities.

What sort of requirements is the minister placing on these contracts to engage indigenous communities and allow them to maximize their engagement in these projects?

Mr. Schuler: On the public disclosure site, actually I've been at these committees longer than I wish to admit, and, by and large, I would point out to the committee these are here to ask questions and ascertain information that you actually can't find anywhere else. So, like, we've been really good at putting this stuff out there publicly. I would suggest that it does take a bit of research, but it's not like this is information that you've been looking for and you haven't been able to find. So, just on that one, it is publicly available.

So I do want to continue and talk about that on the two contracts that we've actually let and those who are on those two roads, we did have a 10 per cent indigenous engagement. We don't have the exact number. We understand it is far better than 50 per cent First Nations or indigenous engagement and most companies will suggest that 10 per cent is not an issue. They're far greater than 10 per cent when it comes to these northern projects.

In fact, we also are looking at other areas, not just on the construction site itself, but there's camp accommodations management, long-term transferable skills, heavy equipment operating training. We also have a trades program support, for instance, journeyman, carpenter, ironworker. Technical training scholarships, for instance, University of Manitoba, Red River College or Assiniboine College. There's also summer student opportunities, also environmental monitoring. We believe there are a lot of opportunities for the communities there to get involved. I would—don't want to make this too sensitive.

* (15:10)

We—the—my new 'cretic' and I are just getting to know each other, but I would point out that we did give two untendered contracts to—on two of the roads. We felt that because of Operation Return Home, that they did need some hope going back. They were going to brand new communities. They'd never lived there before because their reserve had been wiped out because of the flood, so they were moved.

And we felt that this was part of the Operation Return Home, that they had something to go home to. There were going to be jobs. There were going to be opportunities for them. And I'd like to point out to the

member that his party took umbrage to that and criticized it roundly.

And we, you know, we felt that this was one of those exceptions to the rules, that we would give these as untendered contracts. And I, again, would like to say to the committee that those contracts had more than—far more than the 10 per cent indigenous engagement. It was substantially more than that.

So there are a lot of opportunities. This is a big project; point out to the member it is a \$560-million project. And it is going to be the largest project undertaken by this government, this department, since the Red River Floodway.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I think the term that wasn't used by our caucus, actually, I think it was used by the member's own Premier (Mr. Pallister), in fact, who called it a mess and said that it was the minister who was fully responsible for not tendering that contract and making a total mess of that first step in a very long and very large project, a project, I might add, that we, you know, started under the NDP and was something that was pushed forward.

And I believe the member opposite was quite vocal in the Legislature, criticizing the expenditure on this, as he called it, the final piece in our flood mitigation strategy here in this province.

But, anyway, we don't want to spend too much time in the past. You know, they—we've been talking to some of our new members and we say, don't take the bait. And when—then they see us take the bait. So there you go. We'll give one gimme to the minister.

What I did want to ask a little bit more about these particular agreements that—or arrangements that the minister's quoting here, I didn't hear him use the words community benefit agreements. And is that maybe—is that what he's talking about here, with regards to how this project is being handled?

Mr. Schuler: Before I answer directly to the member's question, there were two First Nations and their partners. And the first First Nation was the—it was—it's the Interlake Reserves Tribal Council, and they're partnered with Sigfusson. And the other one was the Lake St. Martin First Nation, and that was a joint venture as well.

The contract with Interlake Reserves Tribal Council was \$7,670,000, and the second contract with Lake St. Martin and—First Nation and their partners was for \$3,489,573.33. I don't know how we get that specific, but we seem to have gotten that specific.

So, if that helps, at all, to the member.

And then, the member had also asked, although it's on the public disclosure, but we'll give it to him anyway, that on November 20th, 2018—all of this we researched right off the table through the public disclosure website. Thank you, Ruth Eden, for being so fast with the website.

November 20th, 2018, Hatch got a \$33.3-million contract, and November 20th, 2018, KGS got a \$31.9-million contract. Each of them, and we already laid out which drop structures they are working on—so those were the two contracts, and this was all publicly disclosed.

The member then asked about community benefit agreements. No, these are not community benefit agreements. These are built into the procurement in that there has to be a minimum 10 per cent indigenous engagement with the contract. So they have to show that they have at least 10 per cent of the work being done by First Nations.

Mr. Wiebe: So, and I appreciate that the staff is able to pull that up, and, you know, the minister can understand when somebody tells you, go check it out—oh, it's on the website—just go check the website. Well, not to say that I don't believe the minister, but it's always good to have that information here. So I do appreciate it.

An Honourable Member: I don't always believe the Internet, either.

Mr. Wiebe: As we shouldn't.

So, just to return to this, as the minister said so—I mean this is a \$650-million project, plus more, more.

An Honourable Member: \$560 million.

Mr. Wiebe: Five hundred and six—I'm apparently a little dyslexic this afternoon, Mr. Chair, but \$560-million-plus project and, to this point, not using community benefit agreements.

Can maybe just the minister walk through—is that the plan going forward? Are there, you know, upcoming parts of this project going to be using those? Is there a reason why the minister is not using community benefit agreements?

Mr. Schuler: Okay, I think we have to land on a number. It's not 640; it's actually \$540 million. I think—[interjection]—\$540 million, not 560, although we do believe that we are probably going to be looking at at least at 560 or greater amount. The longer this takes, the more expensive these construction projects

tend to be, but, on the other hand, we've also had tenders go out and bids come in, and they've been well under what we thought it was going to be. So we might end up having it come in less than 540. So it could be greater; it could be less. Our preference would be that it would be less and it is a substantive project, and it's simply because it's remoteness and location, and all the rest of it.

It's like building a dam up north. The costs get far more excessive simply because you have to move all the equipment, move all the supplies, move all the workers and that kind of stuff.

So we, however, believe that had this been done 60 years ago, it probably would have been 5.4 million; not 540 million, and if we don't do it today—if we delay it—it could end up some day costing a government a billion dollars. So, when's the best time to plant a tree? Today. So that's what we're going to be looking at.

And, also, with the 10 per cent that we put into the contracts that have gone out so far, 10 per cent minimum—10 per cent indigenous engagement on contracts, and also with the other items that I read for the record, we believe that there's going to be a lot of opportunity for individuals on the north end of Lake Manitoba to access economic opportunity.

And, probably more than anything, what First Nations and everybody basically on the north side—or the north end of Lake Manitoba want—is some economic opportunities and being able to train and get people trained to the point where then they can start bidding on contracts; not just in Manitoba but they can bid on contracts all over the place.

And, as you travel around, as I know the member has, and you speak to a lot of the communities, they want to give training and opportunity to their young people, and get them trained in proper trades and in this respect—the length of the project—you'd almost be able to get yourself from journeyman into some kind of a ticket with the kind of hours that you would be accumulating on this project. So these are very helpful for those communities.

* (15:20)

Mr. Wiebe: So maybe the minister can just shed a little bit of light on the amount, where he's getting the number, the five—now 540, I understand. So we're—I think we're narrowing it—we're zoning in on the exact amount. But of course, as he said, that's an estimate.

So I guess I wanted to get an idea of how that estimate was arrived at. And maybe he could also

include some information about how—what the timeline—he's referenced now a few times about, you know, the timeline for the project. What is the expected timeline for completion of the project at this point?

Mr. Schuler: I do also want to point out to committee that this project is more than just individuals getting jobs and training, which it is going to provide, but it's also going to provide economic security for individuals around Lake Manitoba.

And if the member has been paying attention, he'll know that's one of the things that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) speaks about often, that we've probably missed a lot of economic opportunity—individuals that might have been prepared to invest around Lake Manitoba but were never certain about this kind of an event happening. And certainly after 2011, where a lot of individuals lost their livelihood, a lot of people lost their homes, lost their farmland, lost it for a certain amount of time—some of them are still trying to get on, our—you know, the First Nations communities that were wiped out.

So this 'projek' is going to bring not just the jobs and the opportunity of the construction itself—but that isn't the main goal of this. It's to give stability to the Lake Manitoba region. There's—we have some amazing and beautiful areas in this province that people would like to come and visit, would like to come and see and probably would like to invest in, and always felt because there was this danger of flooding that they were holding back.

We believe that this will then also open up a lot of opportunity for First Nations, for farmers, for communities, for towns, villages, businesspeople, for them to grow their businesses. You're not going to get that under this current environment where 2011—and for those of us who were part of that, I know I went into St. Laurent and we did some sandbagging, and then there weren't enough sandbags and we came back the next time, and by then the storm was building and it was over. And that just—it just puts a real drag on any kind of investment that people are going to make in those communities.

So what this does besides the other things is this then, on a go-forward basis, will attract capital to Lake Manitoba. And I haven't noticed that we're creating any more lakes or any more, you know, rivers or tributaries. What is in existence right now is what there is. So these are great opportunities. And we hope that—and we believe that there will be an attraction of capital to the whole Lake Manitoba region.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Concordia.

Mr. Wiebe: I think maybe the minister was getting the information that I asked for there, maybe.

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

So, member for Concordia.

Mr. Wiebe: So I'm asking another question, I guess, for him to answer the question.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Concordia.

Mr. Wiebe: I'd like to give time to the minister to answer the question that I just posed.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Mr. Schuler: With the costs—and I would ask the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) to bear with me on this one—so the costs are estimated by the Department of Manitoba Infrastructure. So they look at what they think the costs would be for the design phase, for the construction phase. So they come up with a number.

And the federal government has agreed on a 50-50 split on the first \$247 million. Anything above that, then, is the Province's responsibility. We believe that, with the regulatory approvals and the consultations, the federal government has added more onto what they would like to see insofar as environmental studies go and the consultation process. So they've added more on.

And our sense is, is that the federal government should be talking about a 50-50 share agreement on the project is what we would like to see, not a 50-50 split on the 247, seeing as the federal government keeps adding other things on and they're passing legislation continuously on—adding more onto the consultation and more onto the environmental. And, again, we're regulated by those laws. So we have a timeline. So, depending on the regulatory approvals, we believe that this is going to be a two-to-three-year time frame for the consultations, for the design and for the build.

Mr. Wiebe: So, just to be clear, that's two to three years from today. And is the—or is that two to three years from the beginning—from when those contracts were awarded in 2018? I would doubt that to be the case, but maybe the minister can clarify that.

And just to be clear on the cost estimate, was that the cost estimate—minister had mentioned it had gone up at a certain point. What—is that the cost estimate as of today from the department, or is that the cost

estimate, you know, that's maybe a year or two out of date now?

Mr. Schuler: The two to three years is the time frame to build the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin channels. So as soon as we get environmental approval, we get regulatory approval, it will then be two to three years to finish the design and build. So we're hopeful it'll be a year to get the—all the regulatory approvals in place so that we can—or begin with the final design and then start on the build. That is—our wish would be that it would take about a year to get the approvals through the federal government.

And the other question was—is, how did we come up with the cost estimate? And, again, that was an estimate that was developed through some incredibly professional individuals within the Department of Manitoba Infrastructure. It's based on market prices for this type of work, using costs for similar work to expand Red River Floodway and increased for inflation. So they take historical data, they look at what's going on in the world right now, what the prices are, what these kinds of jobs will fetch, and we put a price on it. And sometimes, like with everything in life, some—I would say, usually we're pretty accurate or we're getting better prices.

Once in a while, depending on where the project is, the price comes in over what we thought it was going to be. But the department's very good at its estimating capability, so the department would've, as I said, looked at historical and current data and come up with the price.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, so that's the current best estimate that we can rely on.

Just switching gears again, we talked a little bit about the indigenous communities that are being impacted—I certainly want to come back to that—but the other impact that, of course, a project of this scale has is on the current landowners in the particular area where things are—where the construction is taking place. And I know that in the area of Moosehorn there are a number of landowners that are impacted and their land is being expropriated. From my understanding there was a conversation that was taking place, some negotiations that were happening and that may have broken down.

So I'm wondering if the minister can just give us an update on how that conversation is moving forward and steps that he's taking to ensure that those landowners are feeling a part of the process and any

expropriation that are happening are taking into account their—the value of their land.

Mr. Schuler: I want to go back and to be very clear that an answer that I gave the member and committee—when I said \$247 million was the 50-50 split, I meant 247 was what each side would be paying.

* (15:30)

The entire project—it's—I mean, we usually round these up. So I'll—if you take a \$500 million project, the feds, they would—said they would pay up to half of that. So their half would be—they would pay up to \$247 million; not that they would pay half of \$247 million, rather that the \$247 million is the federal government's half of the share.

So I don't know if I was clear on that. You know, you start to second-guess yourself on what you said there. So I just want to be very clear that up—it's approximately up to \$500 million they will split us 50-50 on, and the rest of it is ours.

And what we are suggesting is with the added regulatory burden being put on, that we would like to see the federal government commit to a 50-50 split on the entirety of the project. And I'd like to point out to the member that the cost does go up every year that we add on because of regulatory obligations. If that process drags on, that certainly adds to the cost of the project.

And the member then asked about land expropriation. The Real Estate Services Division staff are currently negotiating compensation packages. The value of the land will not be available until after negotiations are complete.

And we do know that we do have access to carry out all geotechnical work, so that means that we can go in and do our soil samples and that kind of stuff.

We do have that access, and people have been very accommodating. I would say they understand that this is a very important project, because the flooding obviously hurt them as much as it did the First Nations there, because that's where the bulk of the flooding took place. And they suffered economically, and they are pleased to see that this channel's going forward.

There is a lot of disruption that's going to take place and the member would know—he used to be a government member—that government realizes that there's something called the courts. So they tend to be very, very mindful that they're careful in their considerations and they're careful in their

deliberations when it comes to expropriation. It's not something you take lightly, and you better get it right because if it goes to court, the courts do not look favourable upon governments trying to be—play fast and loose with people. I would suggest to you that the Manitoba government, through various administrations, has always been more than fair with people.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I agree with the minister that I think it's important that the government is fair with people. I guess the concern right now is just, sort of, understanding the timeline that the minister has laid out here, you know, whether that's—ends up being accurate or not.

I mean, I can appreciate that there are other factors, but the reality is—and again, looking out the window here and understanding the impact that this—the precipitation we have now is going to have, potentially, in spring 2020, there is an interest, I think, from all Manitobans to see this project completed quickly.

So, if we're, you know, to take the minister's word that we're moving quickly through this process, land expropriation negotiations that are happening, I would imagine, would have to be concluded fairly quickly.

Can the minister give me a timeline of what they expect for that negotiation to happen, and when do people need to be off their land in order to get this project moving forward?

Mr. Schuler: Okay, so, again, this is one of these teachable moments. We all get to learn something today.

With the entire process, and we started this process some time ago, that currently the government of Manitoba already own—the land. We have the land in hand. We can access the land. It went through the expropriation process, and the member would know that process, having been a government MLA.

Individuals, then, are offered a compensation, and if they don't like the offer that they receive, they can go to the Land Value Appraisal Commission. And there's a whole negotiation process that proceeds, but the government currently has been going on to the land and doing the studies that they need: soil samples and such, and we've had a very good relationship with the landowners. They understand that this is something that's necessary and that's coming, and the government now is dealing with the entire compensation issue with those landowners.

So I would like to point out to members, we can't look out our window and then start to reflect on the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin channel because they're actually two different watersheds. The member is correct to say, in the end it's the whole, but the weather storm—the weather bomb that's coming at us will impact, from what we understand, unless the member knows what's going to happen the next few days, it's basically going to hit the Red River basin. So that's going to be effect for the Red River, the Red River Valley, and the floodway.

Lake St. Martin—Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin channels are all about draining or keeping the levels at their operating level in Lake Manitoba, and that would be what comes down the Assiniboine valley.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I mean, certainly the minister's not suggesting that the incredible precipitation events that have happened in Alberta and Saskatchewan over the last couple of weeks, and we only have to turn on our TVs to see exactly what that was like, would not be obviously impacting the overall flooding situation in Manitoba. So I take his point that it's not those raindrops right there that are—we're talking about here, but certainly I think we all understand that there's been an increased precipitation across western Canada that is going to impact this particular project.

The reason I ask, and I note I still haven't gotten an answer and I'd like to sort of understand. Maybe the minister did answer this, but the timeline for expropriation of land—now he's saying that all the expropriations are complete, but in the previous answer he said that they were ongoing.

My understanding is the people in Moosehorn are certainly not feeling that they're complete, and the folks there are certainly indicating that there have been major communication issues with the government in terms of expectations about timeline to get off the land to be expropriated.

So, you know, again, maybe this just might be an opportunity for the minister to put on the record for the people of Moosehorn, who are feeling like they're not getting the information they need, to be very clear about what—where their status is at, in terms of the expropriation that is being expected of them.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, we're using two different terms here. We're confusing expropriation with negotiations.

So the first step is the expropriation process, whereby the Province of Manitoba expropriates the

land, which is done. The land is owned by the Province of Manitoba.

Then comes the negotiations. That's not done by the department of Manitoba infrastructure. That's done by RESD, which stands for Real Estate Services Division, and that's under Finance. They're the ones that do these negotiations, and those negotiations are ongoing. They are not something that I would be free to talk about here today: No. 1, because neither I nor my department are part of them and at no point in time I'm ever part of those. Those are done by professionals within our department.

So, just to be very clear, the expropriation process is done, and now is the negotiation for the value of the land. We also have agreements with landowners, allowing the landowners to stay on the land until construction starts or until such time as they have figured out how they want to run their operation. Some had indicated they, you know, they were waiting—they want the expropriation process to complete, the negotiations to complete and then they're going to decide what they want to do.

So there are a lot of individuals that have some pretty big decisions to make on their futures and we respect that.

* (15:40)

Mr. Wiebe: Well, as I said, I think the biggest concern that I'm hearing right now is that the communication seems to be lacking, so I'll pass that along to the minister and we can certainly follow up offline to discuss this particular situation more in depth. But, you know, what I'm hearing is 11 months is what people are being told and there's a real concern about the timeline there.

Mr. Schuler: I'm going to ask the member to restate his question again because I didn't quite get it.

But I do want to just talk to him about the first part of his statement. If there are individuals that are coming to him that are saying, you know, they haven't heard anything or they don't feel that they've been consulted enough, please let us know and we will make sure that that is the case, because we always want to make sure that individuals are being given the appropriate information, that everybody knows where this is going. And this is a very dynamic project, it's a very important project, and we want to make sure that we're always communicating with individuals. So I would say to the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), if he has any such information, by all means, share that.

Then he had a second question I didn't quite understand. If he could restate it.

Mr. Wiebe: I think I was just giving the minister a little bit more information. So he could certainly follow up with that. And, as I said, we can talk offline to discuss specific issues that folks are having.

Returning very briefly then to concerns that we're hearing with regards to engagement by First Nations—and I guess these two issues are I guess somewhat related in the sense that folks are feeling that communication is one of the biggest issues that's of concern.

I guess I wanted to ask the minister to give a little bit more context to something that I believe I heard from my colleagues and, in fact, it might have come up in question period, but it's with regards to a portion of the route for the channel that was cleared out—23 kilometres. I believe this was something that we talked about in question period, so the minister should be pretty well versed in this one.

So this was a clearing of a portion of the route that was done, I guess, without, again, any communication to the communities that were affected. Vegetation that, you know, is integral to that part of the province, to the land. And, of course, when we're talking about the integrity of the land, First Nations and indigenous people have a vested interest in making sure that whatever is being done is being done in consultation and with the utmost respect being placed on not only to the land itself, but to them as keepers of that land.

So I just wanted to get the minister's take on what happened there. Where was the screw up? Was this, you know, a lack of communication, a lack of consultation? Or maybe the minister can just give us more context on that.

Mr. Schuler: There are two different issues. I'll deal with one and then the second one.

The member asked about consultations. And I already talked to him. The most impacted communities in the indigenous communities are Dauphin River, Little Saskatchewan, Pinaymootang, Lake St. Martin. So we've identified those as the most impacted.

There are many others. Municipality of Grahamdale, St. Laurent, Portage la Prairie.

And associations; the ones we're dealing with: Association of Lake Manitoba Stakeholders, Lake Manitoba ranchers association, lake-Manitoba Cottage Owners Association.

So to be very clear, following design and alignment of the project, the consultation steering committee identified 31 communities to be consulted by Manitoba, based on proximity to the project, traditional territory, known rights-based activities, previous consultations, community protocols and other knowledge of community land use.

Forty-five stakeholder groups, i.e. Association of Lake Manitoba Stakeholders, communication at open-house events and correspondence—so we've done a lot there as well.

Of the 29 rural municipalities and towns, i.e., RM of Grahamdale, over 16 project-related meetings, communication at open-house events and discussions on using a municipal road during construction of Lake St. Martin emergency outlet channel access road—we've consulted with over 200 private citizens and we've so far spent \$2,000—\$200,000 has been spent on engagement and consultations as for now, which includes consultations related to the interim operation of Lake St. Martin emergency channel, Lake St. Martin access road, Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin outlet channels. We have done a lot of engagement and in—and consultations with the various communities.

I want to speak about the second issue: that the access road for Lake St. Martin channel for field investigations was part of the design process; First Nations communities were notified of this work and that it was being done and why, and that it was required.

So not too sure where this came from or how this came to be an issue in the—it was raised in question period, and there was—I think there was a lot of confusion about this. But it was part of that design process.

I would point out to members, if—you know, I'm not the biggest construction guy at the table, but some of this equipment is very large, it's very heavy and they have to get in. Especially when they're doing samples—they have to do core sampling to make sure that if they're going to put a structure someplace that there's something underneath to hold it stable.

So there—as part of that was that there had to be access roads for the equipment to get in for them to do their work. And that was conveyed.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I mean, I guess there was some confusion, potentially, at a certain point, because we—I think we were referred to indigenous and northern affairs at one point, and then we were referred back to

the Minister of Infrastructure. I believe the letter that came from the communities came to the Minister of Infrastructure, but I could be mistaken about that. So, again, this should be something that the minister should be fairly well briefed on.

And I guess the concern is that the minister has mentioned many times now, you know, consultation, although I don't know that he's using that specific language in the context of the constitutional requirement that his government has. And, obviously, I mean, when we're talking about a project that impacts, as we've talked about many times here this afternoon, so many people—not only, you know, us sitting here around the table in Winnipeg, but impacts the communities directly there—I think there is an opportunity to have First Nations at the table and not just consulted with but actually given consent, allowed to have a real say in this project and a seat at the table. And I guess that's the concern that we have. The minister uses the word conveyed. Well, you know, if somebody's telling you they're going to do something but not asking you to be a partner in that, I think there's obviously some concerns.

So, as I said, this was something that—the confusion may have laid in, you know, whose department this is—this answer needs to come from, but I think it's pretty clear that it needs to come from the minister responsible for this project.

And so I guess maybe if I could ask the minister to be very clear about this particular issue that was brought up by First Nations in a letter that was written to him—you know, was there proper consultation and was there consent from those First Nations to begin this construction in a way that was—I mean, you know, we—I think we—again, I'm not a construction guy either, but I think we can all understand that, you know, certain things need to happen. But if we're sort of putting the cart before the horse in building a project like this, it's not off to a good start. If we're looking at a 500—what are we at, 640—I won't even try the number—multi-million-, hundred-million-dollar project. I'm already confused and I confuse it more.

* (15:50)

Mr. Schuler: I think the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) identified that there was a lot of confusion around this. So you have to get substantive equipment into these construction sites before you construct it, to do your soil samples. It's called core sample. You have to drill pretty deep. You've got to find out what's down there and can it hold the kind of a structure that you're planning on putting in place.

Keep in mind that if Lake Manitoba ended up getting up to 2011 levels, which it should never do with this structure, because this structure is actually going to be built to keep it within its operating levels. It's not supposed to be there to use in the case that the lake gets wildly out of hand. You're not supposed to use it for that. It's supposed to be used to keep it within its operating levels. But, if we had one of these never seen before flood events, water events, and all this water came into Lake Manitoba, the structures have to be able to hold and they have to be engineered in such a way to hold that kind of water pressure, and I think all of us with our limited amount of engineering would understand that.

So the equipment that was going in was substantive. It was big equipment. Yes, there had—letters had gone out. We had notified individuals that the equipment was coming in and what it was going to be used for. Again, probably most of us at this table, maybe a few of us could, but most of us at this table couldn't identify one piece of equipment from the other. So they would have seen this equipment coming in and right away alarm bells went off—they're starting to build the structure, and there was a lot of confusion around what was going on, where this was just the clearing of land to bring in this heavy equipment so we could do core samples, that we could figure out where the best place is to put these structures.

So we did check with CEAA, Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency. They had a look at it. They reviewed it and agreed that this preliminary work, field investigations was compliant with what we were doing to that point in time.

So we went back, made sure what we were doing was on compliance. We had notified everyone. We had done everything according to what we were supposed to do. We were always very respectful, always very mindful of the communities.

I think what it was is a lot of equipment showed up that people had probably never seen before and probably most of us have never seen before, and it's substantive equipment that moves in there, and it would have been a lot of individuals with the equipment. It takes quite a bit of people to work it and something must have started where, oh my goodness, they're starting to build the channel, and that was further from the truth. It was just the clearing was there so that the equipment could get in and do the sampling, and we were in absolute compliance all the way through on this issue.

Minister—the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) is right. You can never consult too much, and if there's a lesson to be learned from this is that we always have to be—we can't assume because we, you know, had a conversation once, that that's enough. Sometimes you have to send a letter; you've got to do some phone calls; you've got to go and visit just so that people know what's going on. And that is something we have endeavoured and we've doubled down on, as a department.

We have dedicated individuals who are out in the field, are constantly meeting with communities and, again, if there's somebody that feels that they have not been properly consulted or they'd like to have more information, I would suggest to the member, send that directly to myself, as minister, and we will make sure we get that out to the field; that those individuals are contacted. And often, it's as easy as sit down for two, three hours, go over the plans, look at what's happened, look what's going to proceed after, you know, this next step, and then people feel comfortable with it.

You know, our preference would be that individuals would come to the department and express those concerns to us and not right away go to the media. You know, the letter coming to the minister at the same time as it hits the media doesn't allow for government to reach out and have a conversation with them, but we understand that this is a big project, and we have to be very mindful that we're always communicating with all individuals around Lake Manitoba and that's what we've endeavoured to do.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I mean, I would suggest—and the minister should know very, very clearly that this is an issue that is not only coming from the First Nations affected there. So, I mean, if he's asking for me to pass along the information of the First Nations that are being impacted, that are concerned about this, I would suggest that he doesn't need me to do that because they've been in communication with him directly, and they've also been in touch with the media, certainly. And I think that's part of their right to make as much noise about an impact—a project that's impacting them as much as this one is.

And, I mean, it's just—I got to say it's very patronizing to suggest that the communities didn't understand what the equipment was and that they couldn't grasp the first steps of a project like this. I mean, that's—I don't think that's helpful for the conversation either. And it's not just me saying this. So, it's not just, you know, us as an opposition saying,

well, you know, look, you know, this is something the minister could do better. But it's in fact, it's a line up now of individuals who are—and First Nations and others that are stepping up and saying that, you know, this hasn't been done properly, not least of which is the MMF which the minister hasn't referenced either.

And the impact, of course, of this is, again, it's not—this is a real—this has a real-world impact on a project like this and the minister would know that because the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, the one that he referenced specifically said that, you know, multiple First Nations and the MMF feel the Province didn't either—hasn't adequately consulted with them or didn't reach out at all. And that was, you know, in the media as the minister said, you know, just this summer.

So there is certainly a concern when a project of this size, you know, hasn't even gotten off the ground in some respects and certainly has multiple years ahead of it in order to get it completed and hundreds of millions of dollars in—you know, that are going to be invested and has such an important impact on the future flood mitigation in this province, that the minister can stumble so hard right out of the gate and set the tone so poorly. And I would suggest that that's happened again here this afternoon in the committee.

So it's frustrating and, you know, I hope that the minister takes this as notice and, you know, understands, not only, again, the words of the opposition here but the words of his own, you know, Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, the one that he referenced earlier that he's working with, that he hears the voices of First Nations, that he hears the voices of the MMF and other indigenous peoples in this province and the environmental impacts that we're having, and sees that this needs to be done correctly. And there's no better time to start than right away.

Mr. Schuler: I would caution the member for Concordia, I guess: be careful. On this project, we've made it very clear and we put on the record a lot of the consultation that's taken place. And what I suggested to him if there are individuals who feel that they haven't been consulted, or they feel that they don't have all the information, he could pass those names along. We will ensure that, if they haven't been, that they will be.

There might be individuals who feel that they might be impacted that are not part of the scope of this project, and we will still reach out to them and consult with them. That we'd lay it out for the committee the major First Nations, the major communities, the major

stakeholder groups—those are the ones that we're focusing on. And then we have a secondary list of First Nations, for instance, further north, like, we have a comprehensive list of individuals that we consult with.

* (16:00)

If somebody feels that they haven't been properly consulted with, we will go back, make sure that's something we've done and contact them. And this is a Manitoba project and we are taking it very serious.

The consultation process, I would suggest to the member, when the Floodway was first built, was way different than this project. And even when he was in government and they did the renovation of the Floodway, the consultation then was much different than this project. I would suggest to him there would have been a lot more consultation that would have had to have been done in—with the new kind of federal law and the new kind of federal regulation that's coming out.

So, in total, we've identified 31 communities to be consulted. And again, we've identified over 300 individuals that we consult with as well. And it's something that we've endeavoured we're going to do. We've met with the Manitoba Metis Federation, myself personally. We've had great conversations with all the groups.

Please don't be confused with consultation and disagreement. And we understand that we are going to consult with a lot of individuals and they're still going to—some of them might still disagree with the outcome. We understand that. We—but that won't stop us from consulting. We will continue to consult with all the communities, whether they agree or don't agree, but we will listen to them, we will listen respectfully, and hopefully we can come to some kind of an agreement.

And, as far as the equipment is concerned, I would suggest to the member opposite that—I wouldn't get into that kind of talk. I think it's unbecoming. There was—I indicated there was a lot of equipment that went up and there was a concern that all of this equipment was coming and that it was the start of the building of the structure, and that's what I was referencing. So I'd be careful with that kind of thing.

But, anyway, back to the consultation, yes, we've—we understand that a project this size can no longer be done like it was done in years gone by. You have to spend a lot of time speaking to those people that will be impacted.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I think it is important that we're all very careful in how this is presented. And again, I would suggest that the minister continues to be patronizing to those communities that are affected, and again, to suggest that this is, you know, something that we're bringing forward without, you know, without real-world impacts that are being seen, I think, is not accurate. And the minister knows that. This isn't something that we're making up on the fly, here. This is concerns that he's very well aware of.

Just wanted to switch gears if I could, Mr. Chair, and—but also staying on the same theme of consultation with First Nations and understanding of particular communities' needs.

Is it the government's intention still to divest itself of northern airports and associated assets in the coming years?

Mr. Schuler: The government of Manitoba announced in June of this year that discussions with First Nations regarding the transfer of ownership of northern airports have resumed with the intent of establishing a First Nations-led northern airport authority.

We believe that ensuring northern communities will have independence in relation to their air services and be in control of critical transportation services is important. We believe that there is a lot of expertise around, and this a really good economic opportunity but, again, they're discussions right now.

Mr. Wiebe: So what specific steps has the government taken to further this goal?

Mr. Schuler: As of June, we are beginning the discussions with First Nations and with communities in northern Manitoba.

Mr. Wiebe: So to this point, no assets have been divested. Has any, you know, capital changes happened?

Maybe the minister could just delve into that just a little bit deeper, give us a sense of where those negotiations are at. Have any steps been taken as those negotiations are ongoing, or are we just waiting for those negotiations to actually begin?

Mr. Schuler: Again, we announced in June that we were going to begin the discussions. And since then, we've had a provincial election. So there wasn't much opportunity to make a lot of announcements, and the discussions were interrupted during the election period.

I'd like to point out that Grace Lake Airport was devolved and it's working quite well. So out of all the airports, one has been devolved, and it seems to be working very well.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, so the minister says it's working quite well. Maybe he could just share some of the data that he's using to back up that claim.

And I guess, you know, going forward, obviously, you know, there needs to be some sort of metrics used to, you know, to assess whether there is a benefit or a negative when it comes to service and quality and cost.

So I just wanted to get a sense of what the mechanisms that the minister is going to use to ascertain those would be.

Mr. Schuler: Well, I—on April 26th, 2019, I—I'd like to put this on the record.

April 26th, 2019, there was a press release put out that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) announces provincial government sale of Grace Lake Airport. Premier announced on Friday that the Manitoba government will be selling the Grace Lake Airport. The Province is transferring ownership of the airport, including 373 acres of Crown land, to Beaver Air Services Limited Partnership, Mississippi Management Ltd. and Mathias Colomb Cree Nation.

The transfer of the Grace Lake Airport to a community-based company owned and operated by a First Nations entity means the real benefits of this agreement will stay in the community for a long time, Premier said in a news release. The sale supports the continual use of the land as an airport under indigenous and community-based ownership.

We look forward to continuing work with the government and our partners to keep the economic benefits of this agreement right here at home, said Mathias Colomb Cree Nation Chief Lorna Bighetty in the news release.

The agreement included a fair market sale price at the appraised value, requirement that Mathias Colomb Cree Nation secure an airport operating certificate from Transport Canada and that the airport be made available for public service delivery, including medevac, and the air ambulance services.

And I should point out that came from CTV Winnipeg.

* (16:10)

And I'd also like to put on the record for the committee all federal regulatory approvals were met.

And the member wants to know the success or how do we gauge the success. Well, first of all, this—to the member, this was all public. This is—there's nothing secretive about this. The success is that it's still open and there are flights coming in and out, and the community seems to be very pleased with it. I mean, he could check with the community, see what their thoughts are on it, but this is one of these important steps of giving economic opportunities to communities so that they can develop the North into the booming community that in some respects it is, and it should continue to be.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the minister previously asked me to refer to a website and then, you know, and then in this committee, spent time reading off of a—I thought it was a news release but the minister's saying maybe it was a news article telling us about the change. I think we understand that.

What I'm trying to get at here, though, the minister once again used words like seems to be working well, obviously, you know, and suggests that I should talk to the community. It had occurred to me that the minister should talk to the community and should be in constant contact with the people affected, and if the minister's intention is to sell off these assets that affect northern communities, it would occur to me that it should be very, you know, tightly controlled, that the communities should be in constant contact or the minister should be in constant contact with the communities, and that we should be sure—that the minister should be very sure—that the service that communities are getting is better, and that the costs are lower and that there's a real benefit.

You know, there's been multiple times now, again, I think members from the opposition have brought this to the minister's attention in the last Legislature, to say that there's a lot of concerns in some of these communities about the Province's role and how they see themselves going forward.

So, you know, I think that the minister needs to be a little more specific than the community seems to be happy with the arrangement, and it needs to be very clear that there's been a benefit to that community, and that all communities going forward, there's some sort of mechanism for feedback or assessment, so that we know that the steps that the minister is taking—and that those would be made public.

So I'm wondering if the minister has put any thought into that and any kind of sense of how to receive that feedback, or proactively try to seek out that feedback and, again, to how to make it public so that people understand that the steps that this government is taking are actually a net positive.

Mr. Schuler: Each time a minister or member of our caucus goes through that community, we're told how pleased they are with it. Manitobans who fly through there and have a great service being provided, they're pleased with it. The only one who seems to ever be negative about any of this, because, evidently it's an NDP mantra that you wouldn't want others to, you know, get economically forward and develop their own economic opportunities, the only ones that are negative towards that are the NDP.

Yes, they're pleased with the negotiations; they're pleased with the airport. This is a great opportunity for the North to take control of their own economy and move it forward. I think it's very exciting. I think it's real exciting that we have individuals in the North who are willing to stand up and start running these for themselves. And this is one of these projects that we think have been a long time in coming. We've made sure that we negotiated, that it would be something that would be provided for a long-term basis.

Member opposite was in a government that sat for 17 years and never got any of this accomplished, and this is a good news story. They're—you know, as much as the member tries to spin it as a negative story, this is actually a good news story.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the minister's right, in 17 years, the previous government did not privatize essential services in this province, and that is something that we're certainly proud of and that I think is appreciated by the Manitobans that rely on those essential services.

And these communities—these communities—are uniquely impacted by these kind of changes. This isn't, you know, a decision to privatize one mode of transportation and, you know, understanding that other modes of transportation are available. This is it. This is the way in and out of the—some of these communities. There's no other option, and that means not just for people but for goods and any other needs that they have, medical needs, any other things that a community might be in need of. This is it. This is the only road into town, so to speak, and so I think Manitobans have an expectation that that is protected first and foremost by the government, and that's the

concern that's being brought forward by some of these communities.

And, you know, the minister might, you know, try to brush past that, but I think the impacts are real. It also, you know, speaks to the minister's carelessness, I would suggest, in talking about flood-fighting equipment here in this province. And we've had an opportunity to talk about that in the Legislature over the last few days. But you know, whether it's the Amphibex machine or it's other flood-fighting equipment, I think Manitobans understand that when it comes to these essential services, there's a role for the government to play to ensure that they are there, that they are working, and that they are there for them when they need it.

So that's the concern, and so, you know, this is just one piece of a larger puzzle, not to, you know, not to go over a conversation that we had in question period, but I think there's a real concern by communities any time the minister takes these, you know, these sorts of essential services and talks about privatizing them.

So, to that end, I guess I wanted to get a little bit more information on, you know, this minister's fascination with privatization, and, you know, ensuring that—or not ensuring that those flood-fighting equipment and that sort of thing is ready for Manitobans.

I understand that the minister has appointed an independent—what they call an independent adviser to review the acquisition of flood-fighting equipment. This was done last year, I guess one year ago in October of 2018. I wanted to know, I guess, how much has been paid to this independent adviser, and can the minister give me an update on what the adviser has found to this point or when we can expect the outcome of that report?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I would suggest to the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) that he—maybe he stop patronizing members of the North, that somehow they are not capable of running their own airports. I think that's really unfortunate because we've had communities come and say this is part of their self-government initiative, that they would like to be in charge of their own airports, it's very important to them.

The member for Concordia talked about the role for government to play, and I think in his mind he views the role that government should play is that it should own everything in society: every bank, every

business, every farm, everything. And I'd point out to the member for Concordia that's been tried before; in fact, it's being tried right now in Venezuela, and it is a catastrophic disaster.

So we agree that there's a role for government to play. We just don't think it's the role of government to own everything in society and that's the role it should play. We believe that there are services that should be provided for—by government that can be put forward by private industry, by First Nations, by communities. It doesn't all have to be the government of Manitoba that owns everything and runs everything. And that's where we just disagree with the member absolutely. We totally disagree with him. There is a role for government to play, and that means making sure that the services are provided. Doesn't mean the government has to own it all.

* (16:20)

And in the case of the airports, there is a case to be made that there is an economic opportunity for First Nations, for communities up north to take their own economic future in hand and build a strong and dynamic North. We all recognize that the figure on top of this building, the Golden Boy, faces north because that's where the economic opportunity was always felt was going to be for the Province of Manitoba.

And yet we have the member for Concordia who sits in, you know, sits within the city of Winnipeg and, I hope, occasionally he goes to some of these communities. They would like to have the same economic opportunities as people in the city. They would like to be able to access those kinds of opportunities and that's—they have a government that's doing it.

In so far as the Amphibex program goes, I pointed out to the member his previous government went with a private corporation, and now we're reviewing that. And what the member is saying is that we shouldn't review the private corporations set up by the NDP by going to the private sector to see if somebody else can do the same job or better job for a better price. It's testing. I mean, we do that all the time. We're testing the market to see if someone else could step up. And, in fact, the group that's in charge right now wants to put in a bid for it as well, and that's the way it works.

And I understand that the member for Concordia, philosophically, is incredibly to the left of where most Manitobans are and would like to see it all owned by the government, run by the government, done by the government. I point out: if you want to see how that

works, go to Venezuela and see how well that's working for them.

Mr. Wiebe: You know, it was just a year ago when this minister was—before the previous member—previous critic for Infrastructure, that he went on and on about how this isn't ideological; how they're just looking for best value for money; how, you know, the opposition was the one that was being so ideological and the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), at that time, asked them—the minister said, well, you know, Lifeflight for instance, some real concerns about the contract. And the minister assured, no, no, we're going to go through it with a fine-tooth comb; we'll make sure that service is better and that the costs are less.

Well, even some of the preliminary concerns that the member for Elmwood had at that time—and the minister acknowledged those would be a negative for Manitobans—ended up coming to be.

And yet the minister stands here and says, well, it's not important for these essential services to remain public. I think it is and I think most Manitobans agree that there's a role for the private sector, but there's certainly not a role above and beyond the role that the Province has, that the government has in ensuring that those services that they receive are better.

And that goes to my question which the minister, for the record, has not answered and cannot answer, apparently, for some reason. He suggests I should go up and talk to the members of each community to ask them if their airport—is your airport better? No, it isn't? Okay, well, have you talked to the minister about this? Well, their door is shut. I think that's probably what they would say.

Instead, I would suggest that it might make sense for, if the minister's making these massive changes to essential services, that he actually talk to those communities and have some sort of mechanism for feedback to ensure that those services are, in fact, getting better. And then, you know, some ability, if the contract isn't living up to what the expectations of those communities would be, that he has an ability to make changes. And I don't see that being the case.

Specifically, when it comes and our—we're sort of on two tracks. I'm going to try to focus back in on the northern airports. What I'm trying to get a sense of are what communities have approached the minister to ask for their northern airports to be divested and to attain further control. Maybe he could just supply a list of those communities that have approached the government and asked for control of their own airport

and participation in the northern–Nation, First Nations airport authority.

Mr. Schuler: I appreciate the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), and worked with him, and we've worked across from each other for a long time. And I just think it's rich that he spent a lot of time talking about how we should do engagement and consultation better. And then he was incredulous when we suggested that maybe he do a little bit of engagement and consultation. And he felt that that was—I don't—beneath him; or he's far too important for that or he doesn't have time for that.

Yes, one of the things members of the Legislative Assembly should be doing is going out and speaking to the communities, and not just to his political supporters. He should speak to the First Nations who are very excited about taking on economic opportunities in the North. And it's time we get over that thinking, that unless it's run off of Broadway it's not good enough.

And I would make the counter argument that the least we could do is take what's done here on Broadway and go test and see if the market could do it better—and frankly, in this case, First Nations can do it better. And they can. And they're good at it. And they're smart. And they are going to build northern Manitoba. And they are going to build an economy for northern Manitoba, and they don't need the—450 Broadway to tell them how and when and where and what and why.

I don't understand how the member could find this to be incredulous. Like, yes, he should go out there and do his own engagement and consultation.

And as far as the other airports go—you know, I would suggest to committee, one of the things, maybe—the previous government did it. They would go into a 'negotiation' with the group and they would, first of all, show them their entire hand. Show them what their position was and then they would start negotiating.

Well, we're not going to do that as the government. The conversations, discussions, negotiations we are going to have, (a) will be private. We won't show our hand. We'll—going to have those conversations and we won't do it at committee, or through the media or any other means. We will do it the 'appropriate' way.

I want to address one other thing. We've always been very clear that when we look at these services, it's safety and then it's the best product for the best price. That's what Manitobans demand of their

government, and that's what they, for the second historic mandate, the—it's the largest back-to-back majority government in the history of this Province because people want to see that their dollars are being respected, that they're getting the safest, the best product for the best price. And if we not going to get that, we won't do it.

But it's becoming of us to at least test the market. Least go out there and see if there aren't individuals who can do the same thing, as safer or safer, better product for better price.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I can assure the minister that we have many people who are listening to those northern communities. In fact, we have four MLAs in the North who are listening intently to the concerns of those northern communities.

I would suggest, you know, maybe the minister wants to send one of his northern MLAs out to one of those communities to have a chat. Oh wait, there are no MLAs for the government in the North anymore. And, hmm, it's all NDP MLAs. And I guess part of that reason—I think it's partly the hard work of our existing MLAs who have brought these concerns, over and over again, to the minister's attention.

* (16:30)

And, you know, I get the sense that certainly our members, the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey), who's asked this question many times; the member for The Pas who's asked this question many times—they certainly feel that the minister isn't taking the northern community seriously and taking this issue seriously. But I would suggest that the—all of the people who voted for the opposition in this last election in the North certainly agreed with them and saw that there wasn't representation from the government, that they weren't listening.

Now, I'm just—I do want to get that list, though. And I'm not sure, I may have misunderstood what the minister was saying, how this was part of an ongoing negotiation in terms of the divestment of public assets. And he's—I guess he's telling the committee that he can't tell the people of Manitoba what assets he's planning on divesting when it comes to northern airports and equipment before the deal is done. So is he suggesting, then, that we just got to shut up and go along with the plan? And if we don't like it, too bad?

I mean, I'm just very confused by this. Usually, you know, a government would—especially in this case, so proud of how much economic development the minister says is going to happen and how people

in the North are going to benefit from this, that he would be very proud to tell us what assets are on the table and what with—the status of the negotiations.

So I see the staff may be working here. I'm hoping that they're going to bring something forward that's substantive. I'd like to know what assets the minister is planning on divesting or is hoping to divest when it comes to our northern airport infrastructure.

Mr. Schuler: Well, Madam Speaker, one of the things I don't think the—

Mr. Chairperson: I'll just caution the honourable minister. I would rather be referred to as the—Mr. Chair, not Madam Speaker.

Mr. Schuler: I'm always the last to know. I apologize, Mr. Chair. I will endeavour to refer to you as Mr. Chair.

I would like to point out to the committee that I doubt any member of the NDP proudly went door to door in this last election and talked about how their leader signed something called the Leap Manifesto. What the Leap Manifesto is—it's a document that says there should be no mining. Leave it in the ground. And I doubt—I doubt—any of them went door to door, including the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey), went door to door and proudly talked about that their leader signed the Leap Manifesto, that maybe their leader didn't understand what the Leap Manifesto was all about. But, then, again, I think that's par for the course. I doubt the leader of the opposition—well, I'll leave it at that. I would suggest to you that they didn't campaign on the Leap Manifesto, that all mining should be left in the ground.

Insofar as negotiations are concerned, negotiations are best done at the negotiation table, and not done through the media or any other means.

Mr. Wiebe: So, again, about a year ago, the government appointed Mr. or Mrs., I'm not sure, Mital, as an independent adviser to review acquisition of flood-fighting equipment and security services.

The question—well, I guess there's a couple of questions. I guess what I'd like to know is the status of that review and what the costs are incurred on this report to date, and I guess what the expectation is, or what the contract was for for the completion of that report.

Mr. Schuler: The member's absolutely correct. On October 2nd, 2018, this from a press release which also came off the public disclosure site: Province names independent adviser to review acquisition of

flood-fighting equipment and security services. That—The Manitoba government has appointed Umendra Mital—incredibly well-educated individual—as an independent adviser to review the acquisition of flood-fighting equipment and security services. And this individual comes with an extensive history in the fields of government, engineering, and is a registered professional engineer with a master's in applied science in mechanical engineering. Anyway. Very, very qualified, and I would point out that this was—the individual was not doing the report but the individual was giving advice to the department on various aspects within the department and we are pleased with the services that were provided.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, so the minister talked about that in the past tense. Does that mean that the work is done?

Mr. Schuler: We have used this individual extensively for advice within government, and should we need any further advice, we will turn to this individual for further advice. I would point out this individual—and I would suggest the member goes to the public disclosure site; this is an incredibly well-educated individual with a lot of experience, and if we need some advice, we always try to get the best advice possible, I think.

The member has heard the Premier (Mr. Pallister) say that we shouldn't believe that all the best advice is contained within this building, or within this province, or within this country. We look around, we get the best advice possible, and we listen to that advice; we educate ourselves. The world is changing very quickly, so we appreciate the advice that was given, and if we need—or as we need advice, we can turn to this individual for advice.

* (16:40)

Mr. Wiebe: Okay. So what's not available on the public website, as far as I can see, is what the exact nature of the work was. What are the deliverables that were asked of—by this adviser?

So I'm just wondering if the minister can provide some information about what the recommendation was that this adviser made and, you know, they were hired to do an audit, or like a review, and then make some recommendations. So I'm trying to understand what exactly those recommendations were.

What was the deliverables that came out of that review?

Mr. Schuler: It's all laid out in the press release, which is available on the Public Disclosure site.

Mr. Chairperson: If I may just interject. Typically about 4:30, we've had a 10-minute break. It's 4:40 now. Is it the will of the committee to just have a brief recess? *[interjection]*

So after this question, we will have a brief 10-minute recess.

But—the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe).

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, well, then maybe after this question or once we've finished this thread, if we could.

So, again, what's available on the website are the terms of reference—or, you know, I mean, a version of that, I guess, you could call it—information about what the consultant would be doing, but what it—I guess, we don't get the information on what the consultant or the adviser, the recommendations that were made or the information that was provided.

And so I think that's what we're trying to get is—you know, and I can understand there's, you know, a level of detail that the minister could go into or could not, but I guess I'm trying to get a sense of what did we get from this adviser? What was the work done? I guess, how long were they doing the work for and what was the deliverables that were offered to government, with regards to the work that was done?

Mr. Schuler: Yes. The press release, which is on the Public Disclosure site, lays out what the contract was supposed to provide, and that was provided.

Mr. Wiebe: Right, and so now I guess I'm asking what was the outcome? What was the advice that was given? What was the review? What details were given? Like, just give me a little bit more here on what exactly we got from the amount of money that was spent.

And I still haven't gotten an answer to that, so I'd like to know how much has been spent and what was—what did we get from the work that was done?

Mr. Schuler: Asked and answered. It's all in the press release, which was put on the public disclosure site.

Mr. Wiebe: The minister was happy to start reading off press releases earlier. Maybe he could point to exactly what the amount is that this adviser or consultant was paid.

And so I'm not asking what the terms of reference were. I'm asking for what was the deliverable. So again, I think it's pretty straightforward stuff. If the minister could just tell me exactly what kind of advice did this member—or this adviser provide?

Mr. Schuler: The terms of reference are the deliverables: ensure value for money for the expenditures incurred for flood-fighting equipment and security services; determine the effectiveness and fit of the equipment and services acquired to respond to flood events in the target years; and provide independent advice as to whether the findings warrant additional investigation by other authorities.

Mr. Wiebe: So did it warrant additional investigation by other authorities, and what was the cost for the consultant from the government?

Mr. Schuler: Well, the member should know that the government gets advice from a lot of sources. This was advice that was given, and it was given to the minister, and the government will act on the advice that's given from a lot of different sources and government moves on from there.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, okay, so maybe we do need to take a break at some point so maybe the minister can consult with staff and maybe go talk to his boss down the hallway and find out if it's okay if he tells me a little bit more.

At the very least, though, I think it's incumbent on the minister to give some information about the cost. I was hoping to delve a little bit deeper into that, but maybe we could just start with what the consultant—the adviser was paid. How much was the contract for?

Mr. Schuler: I would suggest that the member go on to this wickedly new thing that's just come out. It's called the Internet. Al Gore invented it a while ago. And he will find the Free Press article that talks about all of this,—all of this is public. Province to probe past procurement practices independent adviser hired to look into Tiger Dam negotiations. And Umendra Mital, an independent adviser and engineer, will be paid \$120,000 for his year-long review of the Province's procurement system dating to 2008.

And it—we wanted to ensure that we had an expert who was impartial and through Mital also has professional experience working in Manitoba.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I'm glad the minister's learning all about this along with the rest of the committee on—by googling it.

So I guess I'm trying to get a little bit more detail. This adviser would have been embedded in the department. There would have been a certain number of resources that would have been allocated to complete this kind of work.

So I'm just trying to understand the other costs, the impact that an investigation like this might have taken outside of the initial contract, what sort of financial impact would there have been within the department.

Mr. Schuler: Well, I think one of the costs that are problematic to government are the fact that untendered contracts went to supporters of the former, former, former minister, and they went to—great to see the Leader of the Opposition here because he was a great—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I think, you know, I just wanted to point out that I think we're not supposed to mention the presence or absence of any members in the—and the clerk was about to say it, but I jumped in, I'm sorry to the clerk.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) is correct in his point of order. However, in referencing the very rule he wished to penalize someone else on, he broke another rule in reflecting on the clerk. So let's continue with the minister's comments and—or maybe it's time to take a short recess.

* * *

Mr. Schuler: So the impact within the department was a fact that once Steve Ashton went out and gave untendered contracts to his friends and provided a product that was, at best, mediocre, and that was the Tiger Dams.

*(16:50)

And, unlike our government, which gave untendered contracts to First Nations who were just going back to their communities that they'd been evacuated from, that they had faced one of the worst things that can happen.

Their entire livelihood, everything they owned, all of it was destroyed by a terrible flood and we felt that there was an importance to give them hope and opportunity, unlike the NDP that was just trying take care of its political friends and they gave untendered contracts.

It didn't make it on any public disclosure site, didn't make it onto any MERX, absolutely nothing. Nowhere could you find this and even within the NDP, there was a lot of problems because it had to, at some point in time, would have had to have gone to

Treasury Board and there would have been, I suspect, some kind of pressure to approve it.

That cost was not just a political cost but it was a financial cost to the government of the day, and I would like to point out that our government did it differently. We gave a untendered contract to a First Nation that was looking for hope. It was something that had gone to a community that needed the work and surprising the NDP fought this. They thought it was a terrible idea. They did not feel that First Nations should be given hope. They didn't feel that those First Nations should be given an opportunity.

We announced it publicly. We announced it at The Forks that it was going to be an untendered contract. We announced that it was going to go out. It was all announced publicly. It was all made publicly, unlike the tiger tubes, which were made secretly by the minister to his political friends and, more importantly, to his political supporters and donors, and that is still and was a terrible problem for government. That kind of thing shouldn't happen.

So, was there a cost to government? Absolutely. There was a huge cost financially to government. It was a substantial contract and I would suggest that there was also a huge cost to the NDP government.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, and I appreciate everybody is hoping for a little break but I'm—I guess I'll put on the record that the minister didn't provide that number but I do see the staff working away, so I'm hoping maybe that's something after the break that we can come back to and get a bit more clarity, and then we can move on.

Mr. Chairperson: The committee is recessed for 10 minutes. We'll return at about 5:03 or four, somewhere in there.

The committee recessed at 4:52 p.m.

The committee resumed at 5:01 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Thank you to the minister. I had some questions related to—somewhat related to the pace of infrastructure spending. There was a report from the Parliamentary Budget Office that took a look at how the federal funding was rolling out, and it showed that lots of—that basically all provinces seemed to be pulling back, in a sense, on some of their infrastructure funding. If I—let me just see if I can find it here. There's a table

here that says comparing provincial capital spending 2017-18 and comparing it to the change from 2015-16, and it appears to be that the Manitoba—that it dropped by \$642 million.

So this is something that the PBO has acknowledged, so, and I know that when it came to the federal infrastructure agreement, I believe it was signed last May, but the announcements about intakes and so on happened, I think, in June this year.

So could you just talk about why or explain why it is that there was that long of a gap between the agreement being signed and the intake process, that it seemed to take more than a year for the intake process to open up?

Mr. Schuler: I would say to the member that there's a lot of confusion, and there's often a lot of confusion desired around infrastructure. So, for instance, there are different programs that provinces can tap into.

There was one program that was discussed the other day that we've only tapped into 10 per cent of it and wasn't that unfortunate, except they didn't point out it's a 10-year program and we're in the first year of a 10-year program; we've already tapped into 10 per cent.

And it's a real difficult place to be in because there is this thing called a federal election, and we just went through a provincial election and I—far be it for me to be a critic of provincial election campaigns; there's not always 100 per cent truth in election campaigns. And I would suggest to you that federally, although we have accessed 10 per cent, it didn't lay it out very clearly that we're in the first year of a 10-year program.

And, as we set priorities, as we move forward, I would suggest to the member we've completed some pretty big projects, and now we're starting to look at what we want to proceed with insofar as new projects are concerned.

One of the things that our department has been looking at is a lot of repair and maintain, so it's not necessarily the \$240-million to \$260-million projects. Perimeter and 59, which was a very important project, very needed, very necessary, the highest traffic intersection in the province. It was necessary, but it also took a lot of room out of the budget, out of Manitoba Infrastructure.

So now, as we go forward, we wanted to take a bit of a pause on big projects and spend a degree on repair and maintain. And I would point out to

committee there is, I believe, an \$8.2-million or \$8.4-million expenditure which is—it's just small stuff, like, you know, communities have been asking for culverts and ditches and extra gravel being put on and that kind of stuff.

And the department is going to take eight—I think it's \$8.4 million and we're just going to do those kinds of projects. And those are necessary as well. So you—you know, you obviously you need the big projects, and we're all for those as well. But you also have to do some of the repair and maintain.

So, as we look at this, the rollout of this 10-year plan, like, absolutely, we want to tie into it. We've now completed a lot of big projects. Now we're ready to assess what we want to do on a go-forward basis, keeping in mind the federal government also has to agree to what we're suggesting we'd like to spend money on. So it is a process. It's very easy to get up and say, look, they're not tapping into this huge amount of money when it's a lengthier period.

Also, on the \$540-million Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin channels, I mean, with a lot of this we have to do environmental and other regulatory consultations, First Nations consultations. Then we have to get across those hurdles.

So to say that, you know, well, we haven't tapped into that—the federal government's component to that is just shy of \$250 million is accurate. But we haven't done so because we have to first get through the environmental consultation process on what we're planning on doing. So it's true, but it doesn't tell the whole story.

Mr. Lamont: I mean, just to be clear that the figure that I'm quoting here is from the Parliamentary Budget Office, which is, it's non-partisan, it was set up by, I believe it was set up by a Conservative government as a sort of an imitation or based on the model of the Congressional Budget Office in the US. And I used to work at Western Economic Diversification, I think around 2005-2006, and I was on the Infrastructure secretariat, so I—in a communications capacity, but I—so I have a bit of an understanding of the requirements.

And, yes, so just to be clear, as far as I understand, that the—just because I think the government has sometimes been slow to—not always your department, but often Manitoba has been among the last provinces to sign on to deals in various kinds of ways. But it did seem to me that I'm—and just correct me if I'm wrong, that there—this—the Infrastructure agreement was

proposed and signed in May 2018, and then the intakes were announced in July just—or sorry, June, I believe just before the election blackout.

So I'm just trying to understand, what would take that delay, and recognizing, look, that's it's a, I believe it's a \$1.1-billion program that stretches over a number of years, so that there's only a certain amount that can be accessed. But the actual intakes for people to be able to apply to these different sections of money: one was green infrastructure, one is northern roads, another one is transit. They just—I'm just trying to understand why that there would be a gap between the signing, which was I think was in May 2018, and the intakes being announced a little more than a year later.

* (17:10)

Mr. Schuler: I would say to the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) we always have to make sure we're talking about the same program.

So, currently, we're talking about PTIC, which is Provincial Territorial Infrastructure Component—National and Regional Projects. That's—*[interjection]*—that's two different programs? *[interjection]* It's evidently the same program, but it—only the federal government could make it this complicated. I mean, the name itself just can exhaust you.

In—within that program, we have an allotment of \$290 million, of which \$49 million has been approved for projects for 2019-2020.

Mr. Lamont: Yes, I think it's the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program that I'm referring to, I believe. Let me just double-check.

Mr. Schuler: That program would not be covered off in this Estimates. You would have to bring that up in next year's Estimates. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Member for St. Boniface.

Mr. Lamont: Yes, because I think there had been—again, it was the Parliamentary Budget Office that are—that were—and it was not just Manitoba. It was lots of other provincial governments that were—it seemed to me that as the—or it seemed to the Parliamentary Budget Office that as the federal government was investing, that the provincial governments were stepping back, in a sense, although some municipalities were stepping up in response because of their needs.

And there is—I mean, I think the Manitoba's Infrastructure budget—Infrastructure deficit is—I believe it's—is it \$9 billion for the City of Winnipeg and something like 15 for the Province as a whole?

But there are also some major challenges, just because, I mean, I've heard this directly from some businesses who were concerned about the impacts—I mean, there was one person—I talked to someone in rural Manitoba who was working with a highway worker who said, look—who claimed, I think, perhaps, jokingly, at least, that he'd been told to fill potholes with gravel. And he said, look, I'm Conservative, but I'm not that Conservative.

That there—that these shortfalls or the fact that this money isn't being spent has a couple of impacts. One is the—one is clearly that there are areas of Manitoba that very much need this investment.

We talked to farmers who are—have driving grain trucks that aren't full because the roads are so bad, and the same applies to areas up North where basically you have to travel with a truck that's only half-full, which means you're wasting money on fuel, on—it's a waste of fuel, time and everything else.

But the other is that—and I don't know the—is—if this is a budgeting or an investment issue or if it's a procurement issue. There was a story in the Free Press about Munro Construction, which ended up going bankrupt. And they said partly it was that they—*[interjection]*—oh, they did not go bankrupt? *[interjection]*

Okay, well, no, no. I didn't mean to—I mean, I didn't—they—that they—sorry, that they decided to shut down business. They decided to end business and go on an auction. So I'm not making—*[interjection]*—no? All right, well, that—then of—I'll say—if the minister could explain how I'm wrong about this, I'd very much welcome it.

Because it would the—but the—it was suggested that Munro was having difficulties because of cutbacks and of lack of investment in infrastructure, as well as competition. That was what was covered in the—that was what was stated in the Winnipeg Free Press.

Mr. Schuler: Yes. Hugh Munro Construction basically divested itself of a lot of equipment. They've decided that they're not going to participate that much or at all anymore in the construction side of it but, rather, they want to segue into being more of an aggregate company. So they want to get into the gravel, sand business. That's where they view to be a

real opportunity within the market, and Colleen Munro, the owner, is very much in business and is a terrific businesswoman.

There was a lot of equipment—if you read the article—that had been acquired by her father, and they had a lot of equipment sitting there. So they did a big auction and divested themselves of basically their construction side of the business so they could focus on the aggregate side.

Mr. Lamont: Thank you, thank you very much for clarifying that. I certainly didn't want to suggest in any way that they were to blame for their situation, but it was—and this is from the article—said that Colleen Munro has decided to make a dramatic transition out of the road-building business, is selling off more than 1,200 pieces of equipment.

And—but it was suggested in there that part of this reason was that there'd been—that there had been cuts to the infrastructure budget. But also that there's been a huge amount of competition. Said—Monroe said low prices and competition from out of province is making it tougher and tougher to maintain her workforce. Let's catch up to 350 during the peak June to October work season, and the industry dynamics have forced Munro's huge equipment sell-off is not unique to Hugh Munro Construction.

And I've heard that this is a concern. So I—and part of this is not just a question of spending but also a question of procurement. I recognize that there's a question of value for money. But if you look at some trade agreements, there are also recognitions that local procurement is valuable. Even in the EU, which is a free trade zone, in part because when you spend at a local—with a local business, that those dollars tend to stay in the community in a way that they don't if you're hiring people from out of province. That you'll have workers who are here and aren't paying taxes here; they're not staying; they're not living and so on, so.

I was just wondering if you could comment about if you had any concerns, or if you've heard more concerns like this from Manitoba's construction industry about insecurity that's come from paring back on infrastructure funding.

Mr. Schuler: The member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) started off, first of all, talking about federal programs and acquiring or accessing those programs. I would suggest to the member there's a reason why there's a lag time between it being announced and then when money starts to flow, and it

has to do with what kind of things qualify for these projects.

So, for instance, it could be all green initiatives; it could be urban projects. Like, they'll put a whole bunch of qualifiers on. They can sometimes split the project up into components, so 300 million will go towards this. It could be urban transportation projects, that kind of thing.

So then, keeping in mind that we do have a five-year capital plan, we budget accordingly. We're already budgeting for our next year's budget, although we're still debating this year's budget, and we're always trying to, you know, be at least a year, if not two years, ahead of where we're going,

So the Government of Canada comes up with a new program. They put new money on the table but they put very clear qualifiers, what qualifies for that project. So, often, we have to go and we have to say, okay, you know, somewhere we've always thought about doing this project that would qualify.

I would suggest to the member opposite a lot of the projects he identified where, you know, a shovelful of gravel on the road—those kinds of roads would not qualify. Like, RTAC-ing roads—I don't think we've—not in my lifetime as a politician have I seen an RTAC program come out by the federal government.

I mean, it—you know—it—we are elected officials at this table and if there's one thing elected officials like to do, is open up those really shiny, big, beautiful projects and drive antique vehicles on them, and that kind of stuff—vintage vehicles; it's just the nature of the beast, if you may.

So we always have to be mindful that we have to put projects forward that the federal government would approve because they have certain conditions that they want you to meet in those projects.

So I think my time has run out. I don't know how much time I've got left here.

* (17:20)

The other question was, insofar as where the construction industry is. I would suggest you it's very competitive right now. Across North America there aren't a lot of big projects. Keeyask is one of the larger ones that's almost complete. The big hydro dam in Quebec is, I believe, ahead of us. They're almost complete and Site C would be one of the other big projects, and I think they're almost halfway through that one.

And those big construction projects then pull a lot of construction workers, and then the market gets tighter; whereas right now there's a lot of capacity in the market right now. So it's just the nature of where things are, even within the United States. There seems to be a lot more capacity to take on big construction projects.

Mr. Wiebe: Just speaking to the overall strategic Infrastructure budget, we know that every year since 2016 that budget has been underspent, so maybe I'm answering my own question here, but I just want get some insight from the minister. Is it the expectation then that, once again, that this year, that that budget would be underspent, again?

Mr. Schuler: Well, Mr. Chair, the budget has been underspent during the NDP years, 15 of 17 years, and the only time it wasn't underspent, when they actually went over, was right before an election year. I could point out to the member, '99—the budget, it was for 100,000 and the spend was—\$100 million; the spend was 98, and every year they underspent except for an election year.

I would point out to committee that as fun as it is to make politics out of that kind of stuff, it's a very difficult thing within Manitoba Infrastructure to underspend without overspending. So if the budget is set at \$100 million, or in our case since the NDP, we've upped that to \$350 million, you start your construction projects, you let a whole bunch of contracts go.

Periodically, a company will suggest they got stuck because of weather events up north and they can't bring their batch plant down to the south, so they'll let that \$10-million contract go into next year and they'll complete it next year; and that means that you've now underspent by \$10 million. We do try to get projects out. I would point out to you that the weather we're seeing outside will cut our construction season short.

So we can't force construction companies to go out and do work normally to, I think, the first week of November is stretching it. I believe the latest that asphalt can be laid is approximately the end of October, and this kind of weather will impact our budget and depending on what happens this weekend, it's very hard to lay asphalt down when it's snow—when it's snowing because it cools so quickly.

I would like to point out that we were within 1 per cent—2018-2019—of our actual budget, and we

try as much as possible to spend exactly up to our \$350 million without overexpenditure.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I think the minister claiming that, you know, that there's no capacity for the industry to take more construction projects and deliver on them, I think is, you know, based on what we've heard from the industry, is certainly not true, and, you know, the minister has now, you know, committed to increasing the budget.

So I guess what I'm trying to understand is, you know, specifically on the budgeting, that, you know, the ministers underspend every single year. He claims, well, we can't—we're trying to spend just right up until that amount but, you know, the construction season is short and we can't find enough projects to do.

Well, I think there are probably enough projects that Manitobans could tell him about that need to be done across this province. In fact, I hear members around the table who have projects that they're looking to get done but now that the budget has been increased, is that an acknowledgement that there is an impact to cutting those budgets to underspending budgets and not meeting those expectations, either of the industry or of Manitobans?

Mr. Schuler: When addressing a question by the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont), I don't know if the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) was paying attention, but the point was that we are, right now, in a market of overcapacity of construction, not undercapacity. And I think I made the point that because we don't have a lot of large projects going on in North America, certainly within Canada, that there are a lot of companies that are looking for work.

So we have far more capacity than we need right now and so I—to be very clear, I wanted to make sure the member understood it was the opposite of what he had put on the record.

Insofar as the spending goes this year, the member is absolutely correct, we decided that we would invest for Manitoba 150, and we did a whole bunch of legacy projects. I would like to point out to the member if he walks outside the front of the building and walks down Memorial Boulevard, which really was a disgrace, and it needed to be done and we did that as one of our legacy projects. It is a provincial road. It is the one road within the city of Winnipeg that the Province of Manitoba actually owns.

And I'd like to for the record make it very clear, not that I'm going to throw any of my colleagues under the bus, it is actually owned by the Department of

Finance, not by Manitoba Infrastructure. And simply because we have so much infrastructure, we don't have heating capability in this building, it all comes from across the street. Thus, Memorial Boulevard. We have a whole piece of land that was purchased for this building, for this site, and so that piece, the first block of Memorial Boulevard is ours. It's open.

I'd like to suggest to members of this committee that this is again, something about the city of Winnipeg, but we started after they began their project and we finished it four weeks before they finished theirs. It's open and it's a great project. And the next legacy project that we'll also be working on is the fountains, which is now under construction as well.

And so the Manitoba 150, the \$45 million was meant to be a legacy project fund, and so this year we will be spending not quite \$400 million—it's not \$45 million, it's \$46.95 million, to be absolutely 'exast'—exact in additional projects, and I think Manitobans are well served by that fund. So that was over and above the \$350 million.

I do want to clarify one point that when we get to this point in time where already we're into October and a construction company says it is too cold to lay asphalt, that usually applies to every construction company. It doesn't mean that one construction company, it's too cold for them, but it's warm enough for others.

When the construction season comes to an end, we live in a winter city, when the weather turns like it's turning right now, that's the end of it. Hauling mud right now to try to build up a berm, a dike, a road, a ramp, anything like that, would be terrible, at best. Your equipment could barely handle it and plus you know that we have to till a lot of this soil to get it—the moisture content down. If you put a lot of mud down, it has a lot of moisture content, that's when you get those severe dips in roads.

So there does come an end to the construction season, and, unfortunately, it looks like it might be a lot sooner than later this year. And once that construction season ends we can try to get contracts for hauling gravel or hoarding gravel for another project, that kind of stuff, but you cannot do asphalt or concrete when it gets this cold. And it's very difficult to run heavy equipment on our gumbo when you have this kind of weather.

So, the member was trying to play a little cute with his statement on the record. Let's be very clear, this is a winter city, and when winter hits, that ends

the construction season. And, if that money has not been expended because they thought they had an extra three weeks, well, in that case those three weeks, those dollars then go into the next year's budget.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I've got to say, I don't get accused being cute in any way very often, so—and I can appreciate that members around the table are upset with that, but I'm fine with it, I can assure you.

I guess the concern that—and, you know, other members around the table are reminding me that, you know, we're very glad that the minister is able to walk down Memorial Boulevard without tripping, but there are a lot of other provincial roads in this province and highways that have been chronically underspent on by this government since it took power. And, you know, there's a real impact to that, obviously, in terms of the overall infrastructure deficit that we face in this province.

But I guess what I'm trying to get at from the minister, and maybe this is something his staff can help him shed some light on, is exactly what—the multiplier that his department uses when calculating the impact of these infrastructure projects has on an economy.

* (17:30)

So, here in the province of Manitoba, we, as I said, we have a significant infrastructure deficit. We understand that doing infrastructure projects helps alleviate some of that deficit, but that's not the end of that investment. That investment, of course, goes a lot further than that.

So what is exactly—within the department, what is the multiplier that they use when calculating the impact that infrastructure projects have on the economy?

Mr. Schuler: The member's absolutely correct.

Our government has committed to \$350 million. Case—in this case, we're almost at \$400 million, but we will never recover from 2001-2002, when the provincial government spent \$93 million on infrastructure.

We will never recover from that: 2000-2001, \$98 million; 2002-2003, \$111 million grossly underspent. If we would've spent at least \$300 million or \$250 million every year for all those years, we would be in much better shape.

We can't undo the damage of the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) and his government, but we

are going to do the best we can to build roads and build bridges and structures and flood protection, the kinds of things that should've been done. He's absolutely right; they should've been done and we're trying to get them done in some very short years. But we have spent far more than ever was—and again, 2001-2002, \$93,771,000 on infrastructure.

We will never, ever recover from that dismal expenditure on infrastructure. We will never recover from that year. *[interjection]*

Mr. Wiebe: Well, despite the scattered applause—I think perpetrated by the opposition whip who is making sure everybody was—or, sorry, the government whip making sure everybody was clapping in—appropriately for that one.

But we—I guess what I'm trying to get specifically from the staff that are at the table, if we could just get the multiplier.

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

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

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard (Fort Richmond): I just want to point out that we are not to refer to the presence or absence of members at committee or in the Chamber.

Mr. Chairperson: The member is correct, and I would remind the member for Concordia not to—and all members, not to reference the absence or presence of any other member in the House.

* * *

Mr. Wiebe: So, I just wanted to ask the minister what role will PricewaterhouseCoopers play in the service delivery review program within the Department of Infrastructure?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to thank the member for that question. Once in a while, he actually gives me a government question, appreciate that.

The department is looking at best practices for infrastructure. The review—*[interjection]*—the review engages employees and stakeholders to strengthen and deliver sustainable programs and services that benefit Manitoba, including: contributions established; government vision to streamline service delivery; spend smarter—I'll repeat that—spend smarter; get value from infrastructure spending and modernize alignment to the public service

transformation strategy; visibility into business functions of the department; alignment between divisions and across department.

And the member asked a question and he asked how we justify, basically, spending money on a project. Like, what is the multiplier effect of that, or as we would call it, return on investment?

And I'll give him an example. For instance, Paterson food is going to be investing almost \$100 million; we are going to do some roadwork for them—approximately \$900,000—and there's going to be an economic powerhouse built. It's going to be an oat-crushing plant: 70 high-paying jobs, huge investment in the economy and so we will repair—do some roadwork at the intersection of 6 and the Perimeter, but the other side, and we'll ensure that the road is up to a good condition. And that is a huge multiplier, a \$900,000 investment and we get a \$100-million investment and 70 good-paying jobs.

Mr. Wiebe: Does the minister anticipate job losses within the Department of Infrastructure as a result of the service delivery review?

The question was—in case the minister didn't hear it—does the minister anticipate any job losses in the Department of Infrastructure as a result of the service delivery review?

Mr. Schuler: No.

Mr. Wiebe: Is there a timeline associated with the work that PricewaterhouseCoopers is doing with the Department of Infrastructure?

Mr. Schuler: This is a pretty substantive project that they're undertaking. We would see this being something that wouldn't—conceivably wouldn't necessarily be completed until sometime next year.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay—sometime next year. If the minister can give me any more detail, that'd be appreciated, but I guess the question I wanted to ask was, was there any particular sectors or programs or areas of the department that PricewaterhouseCoopers is examining in particular as part of the review?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I mean, I pointed out to the member that spend smarter is one of the things that we're looking at, and I think Manitobans want to know from their government that they're getting good value, a good product, safe product, from the infrastructure that's being invested in.

And we would like to put ourselves forward as a very modern, service-orientated department. I would

suggest that the leadership team we have right now within Manitoba Infrastructure, and I want to thank all of them, Deputy Minister Tareq Al-Zabet and we've got Ruth Eden, and we've got Larry Halayko, Jeremy Angus, are the—and Larisa Wydra, who are doing a great job, and they are the senior management team of the department, and we certainly appreciate the way they have been conducting business.

And one of the things that we felt was lacking under the previous government was the customer service side; that whether we say yes or no, we can do so, but we have to do so in a customer-friendly fashion. And that was not something that was present under the previous government. So, in all of our correspondence, in all of our dealings with the public, we have to do it in a very respectful and a very friendly fashion and, yes, we want to see a department that's modern, that's reflective of society, and we know that price-water-cooper will be providing us with that.

* (17:40)

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I'll give the minister another run at that. Maybe he should avoid trying to name staff at this late of an hour in the committee or this many hours into this afternoon's committee. You know, I think we can all appreciate it's sometimes difficult to do that.

What I guess I'm looking for is just, you know, I mean, there's a lot that the minister says, value for money, and I think he's shown that he's willing to even take on some of those areas of provincial government services that most Manitobans would say are kind of off limits, are things that you don't touch, sacred cows, you might want to say. And the minister has said, you know, that they aren't; they, you know, we're—they're willing to take those on and privatize where they feel it's necessary.

But I guess that's why I'm trying to get a sense of, you know, where does this begin, where does this end, not that the minister might have, you know, the decision in mind at the outset; I wouldn't certainly want to accuse him of that, but I think, certainly, there are some areas that maybe, in the initial discussion with PricewaterhouseCoopers, there would've been some initial, you know, areas that might've been mentioned or talked about and wanted to get a sense what areas could the department modernize and make better, provide better service delivery through a privatization model. What would those be? What would those look like?

Mr. Schuler: Well, we want to be careful that we don't start doing the work of the consultants here at this committee. We'll wait to see what they come up with, what kind of recommendations, but it is a transformation study. We want to see what kind of a department we have and what should the department look like going into the future. I would suggest to the member opposite the world is changing very quickly.

Suggestions have been coming forward; perhaps we could be looking at some kind of a microchip being embedded in our bridges and then the trucks being able to speak to the bridges and it being conveyed that the bridge is too low for the truck to get underneath and the truck is then disabled rather than spending hundreds of millions of dollars on bridges that are being struck by semi trucks.

There's a, you know, awful lot of things that are going to be coming at us, and are we ready? Are we prepared as a government, as a department, to embrace those changes that are coming? So we view this as a—being a very exciting and interesting time that we live in, and we want to make sure that we as the department have transformed ourselves in a way that we can adapt to these changes that are coming.

And I would suggest the member in probably his household is sensing there's a lot of different changes coming. I was informed a while ago that cable TV is for old people, so we promptly cancelled it because no old people in our household. Then I was told that a landline that was also for old people, so we cancelled the landline because we don't have any old people in our household. I mean, it's changing so much and the TV on the wall, nobody watches TV in the house.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

Keep going.

Mr. Schuler: It—everybody sits on their laptop and their hand-held device and watches and does whatever. So we have to make sure that as a department we also reflect a generation that's going to be coming. What is the next generation going to look for in infrastructure? What are they going to look for insofar as the department, and are we prepared to 'embress'—brace those kinds of changes? We better because those changes are coming.

So this is very transformative. Are we ready to be a modern, very nimble department? And that's what we have to be as a government as well because changes are coming at us, and they're coming fast and furious and we want to be prepared for those.

Mr. Wiebe: So \$800,000 was spent, or is going to be spent, on this service delivery review. Maybe the minister can just give me a sense of what the terms of reference were, what exactly was asked, you know, and if maybe a little bit more specific than, you know, this vague notion of the future coming fast and furious and examples from the minister's own home life, maybe something specific to the department.

And we started off okay there with a chip and a bridge. Maybe a couple of other examples might be helpful. And the staff looks like maybe they want to help out too.

Mr. Schuler: Well, first of all, I would like to point out to the member that he's the one that liked to go back to the future. I mean, he's the guy that would like to control all the levers of the economy. In fact, he doesn't think that First Nations or people in the North should have any ability to run their own airports or any kind of business.

So, yes, actually, embracing what's coming at us, embracing the future is something important that wasn't done for 17 years under his watch. He sat with a government that went further and further backward, that was so ideological, couldn't see their way forward. And we are going to be a very modern, forward-looking government. And I did give him some examples, and he thinks those are really funny. And, well, good on him.

I'd like to point out that the PwC contract that was granted. That entire bid was on MERX. It was available publicly. And it had all the terms of references on it. The member should avail himself of it. I understand, and if he gives me one moment—*[interjection]* And MERX is a public site. Anybody can look at the document, and he can have a look at it and read what their mandate is.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, you know, and I appreciate that there's, you know, I guess, that the minister might have limited knowledge of some of the innovations that his department is—or is looking at implementing, some of the challenges that are coming forward.

Again, he's focused on what's going on in his own household. I do find that funny, Mr. Chair. I kind of, you know, I—well, you know, I guess the minister is trying to personalize this. But what I'm hoping to get is actually to get some information from the staff, which have taken their time to sit next to the minister and who I think are quite intelligent and able to convey a lot of information to us as public officials.

That's what we're looking for here in this committee. That's what we came here for.

And, you know, again, I mean, it's all a bit of a laugh, and I appreciate the opportunity to spend so much time with the minister. But what we had hoped for was to get a little bit more information.

So just one last opportunity, maybe, even the minister could fake it just by turning to his staff for a few moments. Maybe they can have a conversation about the Netflix situation in his household or whatever they want to talk about and then he could pretend to give me an answer, unless he really wants to try to give the committee some information they don't have. I'll give him one more opportunity.

Mr. Schuler: I would suggest that the member's maybe gotten a little too tired for committee. Perhaps he should hand over the questioning to somebody else.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, you know, I guess this has certainly been par for the course in other committees, and I know I'm not alone in some of the frustration here. I think we have a number of other questions that we had hoped to get some real insight into and really dig into some of the information that, you know, that the minister should be willing to give to the committee. Unfortunately, once again, this afternoon we are—we're not able to get all the information we wanted to get.

* (17:50)

I was sort of musing and joking here with my colleagues that maybe we could, in the future, just ask for leave to ask the staff directly, and they could just cut out the middle man, and—so to speak, and we could get some really quality answers here. But I would imagine that's not parliamentary, or whatever. There's probably something in the rules about that.

Although anything can be done by agreements, so maybe the minister will keep that, take that under advisement.

So, with that, Mr. Chair, I would like to—oh.

Do we need to start the process first, or I can move the motion? *[interjection]* Right. Think we'll just move to the next section. Oh, look it. And with that, Mr. Chair, there are no further questions.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions relevant to this department.

I will now call resolution 15.2.

Resolution 15.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$32,033,000 for Infrastructure, Highways, Transportation and Water Management Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$148,785,000 for Infrastructure, Infrastructure Works, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,237,000 for Infrastructure, Emergency Management and Public Safety, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$439,760,000 for Infrastructure, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$432,459,000 for Infrastructure, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 15.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 15.1.

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

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Wiebe: I move that line item 15.1.(a) be amended that the Minister of Infrastructure's (Mr. Schuler) salary be reduced to \$1.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I think I'll just take this brief opportunity to once again thank the staff that took their time to be here with us this afternoon, and it is always appreciated to see the staff come out. They

have very busy jobs, I know, and they have a lot of work that needs to be done. And they spend the time here to ensure that we can get some of the information that we require, really, as opposition members, to do our jobs well.

And despite whatever political stripe anyone might be, I think most Manitobans understand the role of the official opposition to be just that; to be an opposition that is effective, that offers a counterweight to the government and give some context to some of the changes that are coming forward.

The frustration, I guess, you know, lies in and this is why, you know, I'm happy to bring this motion forward, although there was some discussion around the table that maybe a dollar was too generous. I, you know, I'm not going to identify any members that might have been suggesting that, but it was certainly a discussion around the table, off the record.

And, you know, I think this reflects the frustration, as I said before, that not only that I feel this afternoon but I know other members have certainly felt in other departments when dealing with ministers who don't seek that advice, don't seek to convey the information that's being asked in an honest and forthright way. Not to suggest that the minister was not honest at any point but in a forthright way, certainly.

So I think there's a real concern here, and that's part of the reason why we're happy to bring forward this motion, and you know, again, based on the chatter around the table, I think this could be a much closer vote than some are expecting. So we'll have to see how this one goes. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

The motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 15.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,091,000 for Infrastructure, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2020.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Infrastructure.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Growth, Enterprise and Trade.

The hour being 5:58, is it the will of the committee to call the clock 6 p.m.? *[Agreed]*

The time being 5:58, committee rise—6 p.m.—excuse me, committee rise.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Education and Training.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education and Training): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do have an opening statement but, first of all, I want to welcome the new member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare), both to the Assembly—I think I did that once before, but I'll do it again because you're only new for your first session and then after that, all the gloves come off.

But I do want to welcome him and congratulate him on his election. I appreciated his statement yesterday where he had some of his mentors—I think he described them in the House. I thought that was really nice, and nice to be able to do as a new member.

This is no reflection on this current member for Transcona, but I was quite fond of the former member for Transcona as well, Blair Yakimoski. You probably know Blair from the community. A really solid individual. I really appreciated getting to know him during his time as MLA. He was a former grocer

in the community of a store that used to be Penner Foods. You probably might remember Penner Foods. And I worked there as a teenager and a little bit beyond my teenage years, so I had that sort of nice connection with Blair, and while I will certainly miss him, I don't wish any ill will to this member in his role—maybe until it comes to the next election, and then we'll be on different sides, of course, on a number of issues.

* (14:50)

This process, though, I hope on Estimates, is not so adversarial. I always found as a critic—and I was a critic for a long time; longer than people should be critics—but I enjoyed the Estimates process. I learned a lot in it. Learned a lot about the departments, and I thought it was a slightly more civilized version of question period, but also maybe a more thoughtful version of question period, so I hope this member feels that way too over the next two hours until he's ready to pass the Estimates at 5 o'clock—or maybe not, but whenever he is willing to pass the Education Estimates, I hope he does enjoy this opportunity that we go through.

There's a lot of very interesting and exciting things happening in the Education and Training Department. I also often say I'm also responsible for immigration—gets questions in question period. It's not an official part of the title but is an important and exciting part of the department as well.

There's no doubt, on the immigration side—I'll start with that a little bit first—that it is probably the portion of the department that, while overlooked, can truly have a transformational effect on individuals and on communities. You know, I've seen communities like my own, which have grown from a population of about 9,000, I want to say, 20-some years ago to probably closer to 20,000 now, might be in the 17,000 range. It's—the Statistics Canada always lags the growth of the city of Steinbach, but a significant portion of that growth has been through immigration.

And I've had the opportunity to become friends with, as my family has, so many new Canadians who have come to Steinbach. We have a significant Filipino population that have come into the community. Couple weeks ago I was able to start the Filipino Basketball League off in the area. They have eight teams, I believe. In fact, they were just featured in the—in an online edition of Kids Sports Illustrated. I saw it yesterday. So, if you have the opportunity to go online, you can read a little bit about the Filipino

Basketball League that's happening in Steinbach. But just a wonderful addition to the community in terms of how they have enriched our community, really added to a lot of the events and are a truly treasured and valued part of Steinbach. Not just the Filipino community, of course. There's many other areas from which there is immigration that is coming to Steinbach.

There is also a couple of smaller communities to the southwest of Steinbach. One I think is referred to as Winkler, and another maybe as Morden or something like that. Not growing at the rate that Steinbach is, but still wonderful communities in and of their own right. And I enjoy visiting those communities, because even though we have a friendly rivalry, I think the emphasis is on friendly because there's so many connections between those communities.

In the K-to-12 system, the member will know, because it's been really well publicized, and I'm sure as a former educator and administrator in the education system he's talked about the K-to-12 review that's happening—something that hasn't happened in Manitoba for decades. And so, I've heard from Manitoba Teachers' Society, other organizations that the review is welcome because it's been so long since it's been done.

Now I know that when it comes to reviewing anything—and the education system, like the health-care system, is a big system, and any kind of review emits some degree of uncertainty, but the uncertainty, I think, is well worth it when you are looking to improve a system that maybe hasn't had that sort of thorough look over decades.

Sometimes these systems are a bit like a house, you know. You might start off with a home, and then you add a room and another room and another room and another room, and it sort of grows but maybe doesn't grow in the way you would have expected if you were building that house from anew. And I think that the education system maybe can be a bit like that. I mean there's been lots of good additions that have happened, but are they well aligned and are they the way you'd want to have them established if you were starting it from new?

So I really look forward to the results of the K-to-12 education review, which we expect to have back early next year. We've got good people on it doing good work. I don't—the member might ask me about what information I have about the review and that would be next to nothing, other than I understand

that they had really good turnout when it comes to the hearings they had across the province, but online, significant number of intakes, people bringing forward ideas. So I think that's wonderful. It means that people are interested and that they're engaged.

When it comes to labour market and workforce development issues, which also rests within my department, a good deal of training that's happening, and we as a government have committed to trying to move people from welfare into the workplace. We know that the vast majority of people who are on some form of government assistance want to be self-reliant, to be able to get into the workforce, get a good job, build for their families. We know that's the case. And for the vast, vast majority of them they simply need some assistance, a hand up, and my department through many training initiatives working with the private sector, working with many organizations across Manitoba provide that.

And we get some of that funding, of course, from the federal government. We might argue, though, when we look at where that money is shared between jurisdictions, we might see a disproportionate amount of it might go to Eastern Canada. We'd like more of it to come to Manitoba. I don't begrudge Eastern Canada or what they might get in terms of funding, but certainly we think that Manitoba could do a little bit better when it comes to the federal share of funding when it comes to training. And, ultimately, it benefits everybody in Canada when we have that.

During the election there was a number of commitments that were made from our government, including new schools. We have seven new schools that are either already under way in terms of construction or well under way in terms of design and planning. But we committed to another 13, so that brings the total to 20. And I think if the member looks back historically that would be a near-record number of schools for any new government. So that's a significant financial commitment when it comes to ensuring that students are in the proper learning environment.

No question when I went to elementary many, many years ago at Elmdale elementary school in Steinbach, there were portable—we called them huts back then, they don't call them huts, I don't think, anymore; maybe certain generations will still refer to them that way. But those new portable schools that they have within the division are quite good and are certainly well constructed, but they are not the ideal situation when it comes to a young person,

particularly in our weather, and we're going to get a demonstration of our weather, I understand, in the next 72 hours. It's not an appropriate place for students or teachers to be able to be taught in.

So we know there's many communities, and there are many more, who would be looking for additional infrastructure when it comes to education, and we're pleased as a government that we can start to chip away at that, the infrastructure deficit that exists in education. We're starting to chip away at that, and so that's a very positive development.

Many things that we could talk about. I only have a minute left I think in my opening statement, and I know the member will ask about universities and colleges. I spent some of the best years of my life in university, at the University of Manitoba, where I was pleased to be able to be in the then-faculty of management, it's now called the I. H. Asper School of Business, I believe, and then Robson Hall at the law school and took my arts degree also at the University of Manitoba.

So I really enjoyed that experience, and I was fortunate enough to be able to go to university and to really develop a love of learning. Not that I didn't have that as much in high school, but I think in my university years I truly developed a love of learning and continuing education, and so I know that the member will have many questions regarding universities and colleges and I look forward to his questions.

So, with that, Mr. Chairperson, I want to wish the member well as he engages in his first Estimates process. I hope he finds it rewarding and informative and interesting, and while we may not always agree on issues, whether here or in question period, I want the member to know I enter this relationship that we have as minister and critic with respect for him and his role and I wish him well in it.

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

Does the official opposition critic have an opening comments?

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I indeed to have some opening statements and comments. I want to thank the minister for welcoming me to the Chamber and to this process. I know that the member also spent some time in Transcona in his past campaign and got to know the neighbourhood quite well.

I will also say that it was one of the single hardest things I ever did in my life, is put my name on the ballot and go against a well-liked person in the community, like you said. And again, what a challenge and what a race right down to the wire, as they say.

It's an honour to be in here, of course, and it's an honour to serve not only the residents of Transcona, but also the residents of Manitoba, right, which is the reason why we're here.

* (15:00)

I look forward to discussing the Estimates for Education and Training and learning through this process. As you know, I'm an educator myself. I will have a lot of questions about the K-to-12 review and—as well as post-secondary education, as the minister himself alluded to.

I'm also looking forward to learning more about the workforce—our workforce development and other aspects of the department. As an educator—as a citizen, I'm also quite concerned with the summary spending for education in Manitoba has seen a reduction year over year, according to Public Accounts, and we're going to drill down and see why it—what's going on there.

And some of the results of some of these cuts are clear: there's a squeeze in our K-to-12 schools that are facing hard choices between larger classes and making necessary repairs; the declining funding of post-secondary institutions, who in turn now have to increase tuition at rates that are the highest in the country; and our workforce development is also feeling the squeeze in places like the apprenticeship program.

So like the minister, I look forward to our dialogue. Right? Not just our discussion. There's a dialogue meeting that we're going to communicate. Discussion often is a much more—if you look at the definition, a side-to-side type of thing. I look forward to a dialogue, where we're learning from each other as opposed to trying to tear each other down.

So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Under the Manitoba practice, debate of the minister's salary is the last item considered on the department—of Committee of Supply. According to—we now shall defer consideration for item 16.1(a), contained in resolution 16.1.

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

So could the minister please introduce his staff in attendance?

Mr. Goertzen: I have with me at the table today Grant Doak, who is the deputy minister for Education, a long-time and distinguished civil servant here in the province of Manitoba who I'm honoured to work with. And equally honoured to work with David Yeo, Ben Rempel and Colleen Kachulak, who represent our—collectively, our divisions of advanced education, immigration and our K-to-12 system.

Mr. Chairperson: Could the official opposition—honourable member from Transcona introduce his staff in attendance?

Mr. Altomare: Certainly, Mr. Chair—is that correct? [*interjection*] Good.

I'd like to introduce our policy analyst—our amazing policy analyst, Chris Sanderson.

Can I just ask a question? I didn't get—I only got Grant Doak, David Yeo, Ben Rempel and—

Mr. Goertzen: Probably my poor dictation. It's Colleen Kachulak.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the committee wish to proceed through this—the Estimates of this department through—chronologically, or have a global discussion?

An Honourable Member: Global.

Mr. Chairperson: Global discussion. Is that agreed? [*Agreed*]

Okay, we'll have a global discussion.

Thank you for—it's agreed, then. Questioning on this department will proceed in a global manner, with all resolutions to be passed once the question has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Altomare: Just to start, we'd kind of like to delve a little bit into a vacancy rate for the department as a whole.

Can the minister break that into the seven divisions in his department?

Mr. Goertzen: Sorry, can the member just break down which divisions he's—he was looking for?

Mr. Altomare: Divisions such as admin and finance, Immigration, Policy and Planning, support to schools,

K-to-12 Education, Post-Secondary Education and Workforce Development.

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

So I and understand why we don't have that breakdown, specifically by the departments or the portions of the department that he had requested, we can provide him the global number in terms of the vacancy. The vacancy rate is slightly above 18 per cent currently.

For context, the member will, I'm sure, know that when it comes to staffing—and I used to, of course, ask the same question he did when I was a critic, each and every year, and I—now I'm going to give him the answer that the ministers used to give me when I was a critic, and that those are—they fluctuate. It's a snapshot at a given moment in time. But if he, you know, asks me in a month from now, the number could be significantly different because if you move around, of course, based on people's individual choices in terms of their careers or other things that are happening strategically within the department.

So that's the current rate. It wouldn't be radically off of past numbers. But it's a rate that isn't set in stone or set in any particular reason, other than it moves at different times because of a variety of different factors.

Mr. Altomare: Thank you, Mr. Minister, for that number.

Can the minister undertake by providing us a number for each division sometime later on in the process that can provide a little more clarity on what's happening in each one of these divisions?

Mr. Goertzen: It would depend what the member means by later on in the process. We will be in Estimates, I believe, for today and tomorrow at most because of the Sessional Order. So if he means by tomorrow, that's probably unlikely. If he means sort of before he goes up for re-election, I'm sure we could do it before that, if he's—I do think that there are rules, though, in the Assembly, that require us to provide answers in a prescribed period of time. So whatever that prescribed period of time is, I suspect we can do that for him.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank the minister for being willing to provide those numbers. I mean, it would have been great for tomorrow, but I understand that it could take a little bit of time to get to that.

I have a—we have some more questions. There was a whistle-blower 'complaint' put forward under the purview of Manitoba Ed.

Can the minister provide a little more information as to whether this has to do with the departments or K-to-12 schools or our post-secondary institutions?

*(15:10)

Mr. Goertzen: I'm advised from officials that the only way that I would be normally advised of a whistle-blower's complaint is if the whistle-blower was complaining against me individually. I've not been advised. I've not—I'm not aware of what the member is speaking about in terms of the complaint, and officials indicate to me that would be the normal process.

Mr. Altomare: The reason that we brought up the question regarding a whistle-blower complaint is that it was in the annual report, and we're just seeking further clarity as to what was going on there.

Mr. Goertzen: And that's fair for the member to raise that. I don't have details on that. It's not something that has been provided to me nor do I understand that it should've been provided to me.

I do think, you know, the process of our whistle-blower legislation, which has been strengthened under our government—it had had several iterations under the former government—is an important process; it provides for those who are in the civil service and otherwise the opportunity to bring forward concerns or complaints without fear of reprisal. And I do believe under the whistle-blower legislation there is protection specifically against reprisal, and so that's an important part of the legislation that was strengthened under our government and also under various iterations under the former government.

It's not—it's a relatively recent, sort of, model. I believe it came in in the early 2000s. Mr. Doer brought it forward. Premier—former Premier Doer brought it forward when there was a series of concerns about how whistle-blowers were being treated, I understand, in the government at the time writ large. But it's not information that I've been provided in the detail that the member's asking for.

Mr. Altomare: The annual report says that the process for purchasing buses, school buses, was transferred to the Manitoba Association of School Business Officials. Can the minister explain how was this process working before and how it's going to work now under this new arrangement?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare) for the question, as I often say that during this process, not just the critics who learn about some things in departments; ministers learn as well on certain aspects. It might not always come to the forefront without questions like the one that the member opposite has asked, and so I appreciate him asking the question.

So my understanding is, under the previous process for the procurement of school buses, there would be a discussion with the appropriate officials within our department with a handful of selected school divisions, who would put forward their recommendations for the various options or specs that they believe would make for appropriate and suitable school buses within their divisions, but then by extension within every division in Manitoba.

And then, as government does for a competitive bid process for smart shopping, as the Premier (Mr. Pallister) likes to often say, it would go to a bid through our MERX process. It goes on the MERX website, which lists tenders from across Canada for government procurement, and on the MERX website it would then list the specs and the requirements that those handful of school divisions in co-ordination and collaboration with officials the department had identified as the appropriate ones. A bid would be made by whatever company felt they could fulfill those requirements and then purchases would be made.

There was a new process that has been established, as the member references from the annual report. This was recommended by the association of school boards in Manitoba, where they were looking for more flexibility within this process and went to something referred to as a menu bid process whereby there are, I guess, some basic or some standard specifications that are built into a bid for—or an offer for the purchase of school buses, but then school divisions, based on what they believe are their individual needs, can add on to those basic specifications. I think that's where the term menu probably comes from. They could—they can pick and choose a little bit in terms of what they think would be—suit their divisions and their students and their requirements based probably on geography in the areas of the province that they're serving, and, although that probably isn't the only limitation.

And so there's now more flexibility in the bid process, as requested by MASBO, and my understanding is that this has been in place for

approximately two years, and officials indicate that the response has been positive so far.

So I thank the member for the question. It is illuminating, I'm sure, for both of us.

Mr. Altomare: I'm just going to move on to a memorial foundation that's well known in the province, named after Helen Betty Osborne.

What is the current status of the Helen Betty Osborne Memorial Foundation and are the awards being made—are awards still being made from this foundation?

Mr. Goertzen: This was a question that was raised in question period prior to the election, so the member opposite may not have seen it, but it's still a pertinent and valid question today.

There's no question that the Helen Betty Osborne foundation and the grants that flow from it are important, both in terms of her memory, but also in terms of ensuring that those who need the support are able to receive the support.

My understanding is that at the time that we came into government, there was significant challenges and problems when it comes to the board—that there weren't—meetings were not being held, there wasn't proper reporting, such to the point that the foundation was in danger of losing its charitable status, and there are significant consequences that come with the loss of charitable status, the most clear is that, I believe, Revenue Canada takes back the assets from the registered charity.

* (15:20)

So there has been a new board that's been appointed. I believe the chairperson of that is Leilani Kagan, a lawyer in Winnipeg of some renown and, I think, a well-respected lawyer. And they're working to ensure that the foundation is put onto a solid path and ensure that the awards and the assets are secured and that the awards continue to be issued in the name of Helen Betty Osborne.

And I regret to say that for a few years, as a result of, well, I'll just say under the years of the NDP, the last few years, the foundation was not operating as a charitable foundation should. But we certainly believe in the upholding the memory of Helen Betty Osborne and ensuring that those funds go to the young people who need it. And that work is well under way being led by good people.

Mr. Altomare: Can the minister provide a bit of a timeline or some kind of an outline as to when the foundation will be disbursing with some of these funds and awards?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for both his question and his concern when it comes to the health of the foundation because it certainly was a concern of mine, and I believe it was a concern of the former minister and also the justice ministers within our government as, I think, at one time, the foundation was connected to that department.

So we are working with the Winnipeg Foundation, the newly appointed board of which I think I mentioned Leilani Kagan being the chair of that board. It's our expectation that certainly within the year, there'll be issuance of the scholarships in memory of Helen Betty Osborne. And then that's something that, you know, for our government that was important see—to see that re-established. You know, very disappointed to see sort of what had happened to the foundation. Quite concerned about the possibility of losing the funds that were within the foundation as a result of the potential loss of charitable status.

And it's a lesson for all of us, I think, and I don't mean this in any sort of partisan way, but it is a lesson for all of us that when good things are set up and for good reason—and if I remember correctly, the Helen Betty Osborne foundation bill before the Legislature was passed unanimously by this House. I was in opposition at the time, but I don't remember any negative votes to the bill or any negative comments.

So, when good things happen, it's not enough. You can't just sort of have that sort of initial good intention and then just hope that everything goes well and not ensure that there is follow-up and continued assurance that your good intentions are fulfilled in the way that you wanted them to. And so I appreciate the member opposite pointing out both the concerns that existed around the Helen Betty Osborne foundation and this government's good work to ensure that it returned to the place that it was intended to be, a proper and fitting memorial for Helen Betty Osborne.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank the minister for that answer.

Just one final question regarding the Helen Betty Osborne memorial fund. Does the minister know when was the last time funds were disbursed from the foundation?

* (15:30)

Mr. Goertzen: I'm certain, for the member, that I can get him the question before we're done—or, the answer to that question before we are done today, but in the effort to continue to allow him to ask questions, if he wants to move on to his next one, when I get the answer, I'll return to this and provide it on the record for him.

Mr. Altomare: Yes, that would be fine. Certainly, we can move on.

I was about to retract my last comment saying I had a final question, but I guess if we're going back anyway, then I can ask my other one later.

So I can continue?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, you can continue.

Mr. Altomare: In question period today, we were talking about adult education and how much the numbers have declined—not only the funding numbers, but also the graduation rate.

And because of this decline in positive outcomes for adult learners, as detailed in the department's annual report, the number of ALC courses completed have decreased by 2,401 compared to the baseline year. There was a decrease of 779 from the previous year, from 10,636 in 2016-17. And the number of high school diplomas awarded decreased by 196 compared to the baseline year. There was a decrease of 149 from the previous year, from 1,207 in 2016 and '17.

Can the minister 'sedsh' some light on—as to why this has been occurring?

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

The issue on the reduction of numbers when it comes to those obtaining graduation out of the adult learning centres is attributable, at least in part, to the fact that there are less people who are presenting to the adult learning centres, looking to complete their high school education. So the reduction in the number of those who are graduating is comparable, at least in part, to the number of people who are presenting, looking to complete their high school graduation.

I understand that there is an uptick, or an increased number of individuals who are coming to those adult learning centres for studies after they've graduated, so post-graduate high school. So they're looking for additional training beyond their high school diploma.

Mr. Altomare: Volume 2 of Public Accounts records quite a large decline in funding for adult education centres as follows: in 2017-18, it was \$1.1 million—

and I'm rounding it, right—to this year, in '18-19, it was down to \$313,000.

Can the minister provide some insight as to these reductions, and can he do so in light of deteriorating outcomes within adult learning, particularly in terms of the numbers of adult learners graduating with a high school diploma?

Mr. Goertzen: I'd be happy to hear from the member specifically which page that he's referring to. Our understanding is for the year 2017-18, as an example, the funding that went to adult learning centres was just over \$17.5 million; in 2018-19, it was \$17.486 million. So there was a slight reduction attributable to the fact that there were two less adult learning centres in the province, so the funding on a per-adult-learning-centre basis is essentially the same. So I know the member is—must be looking at something in particular; if he could just give us clarity in terms of where exactly he's looking at that.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank the minister for providing those numbers.

Once we know where this has come from, we'll come back to that and further delve into it.

But, based on some of this—these pieces, there are—we know that a high school diploma's very important for people to be successful in today's economy—not just high school, of course, even more and more training.

What are some of the proactive measures or some pieces that the department is undertaking so that we're drawing people back in so that they can be productive members of society later on? Are there pieces that are being undertaken, or are there just, you know, hoping people show up?

Mr. Goertzen: I mean, I think there's—the member's right and I would agree with him a hundred per cent on the issue that obviously if we can ensure that young people are achieving their high school diploma, that puts them at least on the right path. Now, we both understand that here's often a much greater expectation when it comes to education these days to fulfill one's life's dreams and aspirations, and—whether that is a university or a college or some other level of training beyond high school, but as a base minimum, he's absolutely correct. I mean, much of that starts with a high school education.

* (15:40)

And so there's sort of two different parts of the stream, I think, that one can look at. The member is

focused on those who haven't obtained their high school degree and then end up going into an adult learning environment, talked about how that funding has essentially remained the same. It—those adult learning centres remain there to help support those individuals. Are there different models that can be looked at to make it more desirable for individuals to go there? Should we look at outcomes? Are the outcomes what we had hoped they would be? I think those are legitimate questions and legitimate things that I think need to be explored and I'm sure are being explored as we look to increase those outcomes.

On the other side, though, is I think that, you know, on the—to ensure that those who are coming out of the K-to-12 system are getting their high school diplomas is probably how you'd want to try to reduce that need.

And so how are we doing a good enough job of graduating individuals? Most recent statistics that I've seen is that Manitoba's had some improvement, modest improvement, but still on the right side of the scale when it comes to high school graduation. And so that, I think, is positive. You know, there's still the question of ensuring that what's contained within that high school diploma in terms of learning is still equipping young people to be able to go on to post-secondary education if they choose or other fields of endeavour if they choose.

But, certainly, on the K-to-12 system, we want to ensure that those individuals coming through those systems were able to obtain their high school diplomas. As an educator, the member will know clearly how important that is. When it comes, though, for those who aren't, who haven't been able to obtain that, for whatever reason or circumstance, that somebody wasn't able to get their high school diploma, the adult learning centres still remain there at the funding level essentially the same as they have been in the past.

But I recognize that, you know, we do have to look at different ways and different models to ensure that people feel, you know, welcoming and feel they can go back to a post-secondary—or into a adult learning centre, because not everybody will feel comfortable, necessarily, walking into a door or a physical building. You know, they might come from an environment or a background where that's intimidating or maybe not their natural course of activity or life, and so we do have to look at a variety of different models to ensure that people can feel comfortable.

And as the world changes in terms of technology and different ways to train and to reach people, I think that those opportunities exist. But that is, you know, obviously, something that comes with some degree of time.

But I think we're focused on both ends of the spectrum: ensuring that those who are going through the K-to-12 system have the best opportunity to leave that system with their high school diploma and then ensuring that those who don't, for whatever reason, are able to still be able to get that at a time in their life when it seems they're best suited to do that.

Mr. Altomare: I just want to ask the minister: Has there been any research undertaken by the department as to look into some of the best ways to reach some of these reluctant adult learners that may be out in—out there in Manitoba needing some support?

Mr. Goertzen: There's always ongoing research within the department when it comes to looking at best practices, whether that's adult learning or other parts of the field.

If the member's asking have we, you know, specifically gone out and hired a consultant, for example, to do that kind of work, I mean, that's not at the stage that we're at, although I wouldn't say that I'm closed-minded to that sort of endeavour. But certainly within that portion—part of the department there is an ongoing effort to ensure that best practices are applied and to ensure that those who want to obtain their high school diploma and who weren't able to, have that opportunity.

Mr. Altomare: I just want to go back to what we were talking about earlier when it came to the funding of—decline in adult learning.

In—page 97 of the annual report records an absolute reduction to adult learning and literacy grants of \$770,000. Why is this listed in the annual report, and how come it went down by this amount of money?

Mr. Goertzen: Going back in time, I will go back to the question on Helen Betty Osborne that the member asked about 15 minutes ago, I believe.

The question that he asked was when was the last time scholarships had been distributed. The answer to that question is 2016. The problems that began with that foundation began, I gather, in or around 2012, 2013. There had not been an annual report submitted, from my understanding, by the foundation since 2012 and 2013. And that would have been at least in part the genesis of the concerns when it comes to

charitable status. Because, the member will know, that to maintain charitable status, there's a variety of requirements that Revenue Canada would require, and, no doubt one, of those would be an annual report of funding.

And so, sadly, under the former government, for whatever reason, there was not the ability to produce or have produced by the foundation an annual report since 2012, 2013, which resulted in the suspension of distribution of scholarships in 2016.

And I'm pleased to say that our government is well on track to having fixed those historical problems with the foundation to properly moralize and properly honour the life of Helen Betty Osborne and have distribution of awards in the next year.

And in terms of the question that the member just asked, if he could just repeat it again, because my memory at my advancing age is failing me.

Mr. Altomare: I'd be happy to repeat the question.

Page 97 of the annual report records an absolute reduction to the adult learning and literacy grants of \$770,000.

Why is that happening, or why did that occur?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for his patience with my faulty memory.

The reduction is based off of a \$20-million line item. So, while \$770,000 is no small amount to our household budget, or I'm sure the member opposite—in the overall scope of the program, it's not an unusual variance; it's based on activity in the program itself. And so there's been no change to the program, but it is driven by the number of individuals who are accessing that program. And so, when there is a reduction in the number of people who are accessing the program, there's naturally a reduction in the money that flows through that because we fund based on activity, not on a block fund.

Mr. Altomare: There is still, nonetheless, a decline of a significant amount of money, especially too, when you look at it in the light of a 12 per cent decline in the adult graduation rates. And it's not acceptable that these kinds of things continue.

* (15:50)

So, again, I'll ask: is this going to be one of these permanent cuts or is this just something that we're going to continue to see coming out of this part of the Education budget?

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate the member's question, and I understand why he is asking it.

I want to assure him that it's—there's not been a change in the program or any specific desire to reduce the line item there. It's simply based on activity. And—so, when these adult learning centres—they're providing, you know, their costs or their billings to government, it's provided based on the activity that they've had, the teachers that they've had. And the government pays out as a result of that.

I'm not sure, you know, what the alternative would be. If the member opposite is suggesting that we just send money to organizations who haven't had the—any activity occur, I would suggest that that's probably something that, you know, the Auditor General of the Province would have an interest in and probably not in a positive way.

I mean, we have to respond to the activity that happens within organizations and the stuff that they send us in terms of the cost. And to just simply, you know, send out \$750,000 of taxpayers' money where there's no attached activity to it, simply to avoid an uncomfortable question in Estimates would probably have us up in question period for a very long time because it wouldn't be considered within the parameters of how government should operate.

Mr. Altomare: Again, I just want to continue to seek some clarity on this.

With regards to my earlier comments and numbers, I was referring to part 2 of Public Accounts, transfers from Education to the line adult learning centres, and saw a significant decline. Now, that may be due to an accounting change or some other reason, but I am hoping the minister can shed some light on the adult learning centres funding in Public Accounts volume 2. Again, the numbers are \$1.1 million in '16-17, \$1.1 million in '17-18 and now down to \$313,000 in '18-19.

Mr. Goertzen: I think all I can do for the member is just to repeat that there hasn't been any changes to the program or how we look at funding that particular line item. There are things that are based on activity and within the context of government there are, for a variety of reasons, times where the activity is higher or less in a particular area and while it might stand out to the member as to be something nefarious or devious, it certainly isn't intended to be that way from government.

And again, if it's based on activity, one can't fund non-activity without, you know, having some difficult

questions from taxpayers. So, there hasn't been a change to that line item when it comes to the program or how it's administered. It's simply funding following activity.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank the minister for continuing to help us with coming to some understanding into some of these numbers and how they flow through, and with his support people that are present.

Also, in adult education, there is a currency—there's a current vacancy rate.

What is the current vacancy rate for skills and employment partnerships that's also a part of the adult education portfolio?

Mr. Goertzen: I believe we'd undertaken to get the member vacancy rates earlier in this Estimates process. We can endeavour to see if that's available as part of the breakdown that he was looking for early in the Estimates. We will provide that in the same time frame as committed to before.

Mr. Altomare: So, going back to my previous question, this is just a branch of the division, so—and it's a smaller branch. Would it be possible to get those—to get that current vacancy rate for skills and employment partnerships?

Mr. Goertzen: You know, I'm not certain. If the information's sort of readily available, I'm happy to provide it to the member, as it would be available through a freedom of information request but I'll—will endeavour to provide that to him, if it's readily available.

I, you know, obviously don't intend to sort of, send staff walking around offices and counting heads in offices to see who's there. They've got lots of other things to do. But, if it's something that is provided or available and already calculated, we will provide that.

Mr. Altomare: Just want to move on to student debt and how important it is to make sure that we support students as they proceed in post-secondary education. The annual—*[interjection]*

I'll try that again. Hang on a second. There.

So the annual report shows continued growth in student debt, in addition. And volume 2 of Public Accounts shows a significant decline in Manitoba student loan remission from \$13.2 million in 2016-17, dropping to \$1.3 million in 2018-19.

Has the minister stopped forgiving student loans, and how does he explain this decline?

* (16:00)

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question. So we have shifted our focus as a government, and we think appropriately so.

Previously, students would go through their chosen course of studies. At the end of their studies, they would then have a portion of their tuition forgiven. And so it would be remitted or not have to be paid. Now we're changing our focus to provide greater historic bursaries and scholarships at the beginning of a student's academic career or the beginning of their academic year based on their performance in their academic studies or based on their need.

The member will know that we've changed the matching funds and we're able to lever more donors' funds. But, as a result of that, more government funds, more taxpayer support for public education's at a record level. We also committed during the last provincial election to increase that even further.

And so, while he sees a reduction on the back end of the forgiveness side once individuals who have gone through their academic career, he will also see, I would say, a more than comparable increase on the front end when it comes to scholarships and bursaries.

Mr. Altomare: I'll just go back to that number in 2018-19, that \$1.3 million number.

I just want to drill down now. Is that—are we forgiving that debt, or is that bursaries, now?

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

So, that amount that he cited is the legacy of the loan remission program, there's timing issues. That would be forgiven as part of the old program.

As I already mentioned we are now providing that support up front, which I think is—not only is it more advantageous to students in terms of the overall dollars that existed before for scholarships and bursaries, but I also think it's a more reasonable way, and maybe a more comforting way, for students to see that money up front and to see that they're getting that support at the beginning of their academic year or at the beginning of their academic career.

Mr. Altomare: So, just to be clear, this is just bad debt, then, that's being cleared off the books?

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

It's not bad debt, it's part of the old program, where some tuition was forgiven at the end of the program. So it's—the student loan was forgiven at the end of the program. And so we now are providing support up front as opposed to forgiving the loans on the back end. But that's just the legacy part of that program that hasn't worked through as a result of timing, but it is not bad debt.

Mr. Altomare: I know the minister mentioned that now they're sort of front-loading these pieces with bursaries. And just a—well, one question right now is: How are we following up with to make sure that we have a high retention rate of these students as they progress through their post-secondary studies?

Mr. Goertzen: The department wouldn't maintain, I understand, the stats when it comes to retention of students, if I understand the member's question correctly. It may be that the individual institutions do, colleges, universities, as part of their own sort of metrics and analysis in terms of the courses that they're offering. And, obviously, it would vary, I'm sure, although I'm speculating, but I think with some degree of certainty, from faculty to faculty.

And so, you know, when I was in the faculty of arts a few generations ago, there would've been significant movement in terms of, you know, the people who were coming in and out of that program, and some might not have completed the program or gone on to do other things. When I was in the faculty of commerce, as it was known then, the I. H. Asper School of Business now, far less so, but there certainly was movement from year to year, but those were individuals who were sort of dedicated to a certain program.

And then during my time at Robson Hall I can probably think of less than five students who would've left in the three years that I was in the program despite the fact that there was a 200 per cent increase in tuition at that time, approved by the NDP government. It's a significant increase in tuition that was approved by the NDP at that time, but despite that there was, you know, very little attrition of students. They stayed through the course of that study.

So, you know, it would vary, obviously, based on the course of study because there are just some faculties that lend themselves more to students, I think, trying to determine what it is they want to do in their studies, whereas in some faculties they've already sort of determined, I think, the course of their life. Maybe it didn't work out that way for me, but for most of those who are going into those faculties, and

so the retention rate would be different depending on what the faculty was. But that information would be maintained, I think, within the statistics of the individual universities or colleges.

Mr. Altomare: According to the minister's annual report, university enrolment and university graduation have declined over the last two years. Province's population is increasing. I know that we're quite a popular destination for university students, especially those that are from outside the province.

* (16:10)

Can the minister provide some insight into this and what steps he's taken to address it?

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

Again, I think when you're looking at numbers, whether they're going up—and I understand international students, that the numbers that are enrolled have generally been going up over the last number of years, and then you might see a decline overall or in certain institutions when it comes to domestic students at any given time. I mean, in the discussions that I've had with those who are involved in postsecondary education, I mean it's difficult to read too much into a one- or two-year variation, particularly if the variation isn't that large and if it isn't specific to a particular institution from year to year.

Obviously, institutions have their own sort of recruiting-of-student efforts and their own way of trying to attract students into their individual faculties or into their individual courses of study. And they would, you know, be better positioned perhaps to determine exactly why some of that works and some of it doesn't. And I'm sure that it is a mix, where there are some faculties at any given time that are, you know, well desired and there's a desirable probably wait-list to get into some of those faculties, and it's highly competitive to get into those faculties, and others where at certain times it isn't so much the case.

So, I don't—I've not heard from any of the universities or colleges where they feel that there's an alarming trend in terms of the numbers when it comes to those coming into or out of the individual faculties.

I mean, I think probably the better guide is, as opposed to looking at, you know, one year or—compared to another year, is to look at that global effect of, you know, maybe a decade or more. And I understand, you know, over the last 20 years we've seen a 40-some per cent increase of students going to postsecondary. And so that overall trend that we've

seen over the last 20 years—even though I'm sure if you looked within that 20 years at the various institutions, you'd find some—at some points where that number's gone down at the institutions, some has gone up, but on the overall trend of the last two decades it gone up fairly significantly over that time.

And I think that that's generally positive, although we also have to understand there are—as times change, there are different ways that young people or those who are looking to do postsecondary education might look to do it differently at their time in their life, depending on what's happening in the world more generally, or with technology.

And so difficult to know if that trend will continue for the next 20 years. But of course, the member knows as well as I do that looking at numbers in isolation often doesn't give you the picture that is required when you look at something over a much longer term.

Mr. Altomare: Well, I guess we can go and look at that 20-year, 10-, 20-year trend and say that the students were being supported quite properly by their government, be it through student loans and support in that way.

But we've seen in the past couple of years that the graduation rate has gone down. And I wanted to know if the minister has considered that the rising debts and lack of support from this government is presenting a concern to prospective students and kind of helps explain the declining enrolment piece?

Mr. Goertzen: The member knows that I raised it or spoke about it in a previous answer to one of his questions.

There is a historic level of support when it comes to scholarships and bursaries in the province of Manitoba, and I think that that is appropriate. So it reaches to those who are, you know, the most in need. It reaches to those who are performing at exceptional levels within their course of studies, and I think that that is appropriate.

Now, you know, the member, I'm sure, will have questions over the next couple of days about the issue of affordability of education. Those are appropriate questions to ask, and I don't begrudge him asking those questions, but I'd also say to him that a university education has value; it is valuable and there is a cost to obtaining that value.

And so there's always a balance. How do you try to find the appropriate balance to ensure that students

are able to obtain a post-secondary education and to pursue the occupation that they're looking to pursue, but not graduate from university with such a burdensome debt that they aren't able to either complete their course of studies or to be able to properly get into life the way they would like to?

But it's a balance, and I know that there are some who will advocate for free tuition for all and that there shouldn't be any cost to education, even though it provides a value, and there'll be some who say that there is too great of a subsidization on public education from the public purse.

I tend to fall sort of in the middle of that and say that there—we need to be able to support people who are going into post-secondary education; we need to be able to provide them the support that they need. But there is a cost to it.

I know that when I went to university—and I would say to the member opposite, I grew up in government housing. I come from a family of a—my father died when I was young, so my mother raised my sister and I as a single mother. We were fortunate to be able to get into government housing, and I'm always grateful for the fact that those supports were provided by government writ large and that I was fortunate to find a decent job, I mentioned before, at a company called Penner Foods and was able to save enough money to go to university and did well in university and was able to access some scholarships.

So I feel very much a product of a lot of different supports that existed, whether that is, you know, from a government housing perspective from when I was much younger, to being able to find, you know, good employment in an economy that was successful in the community that I grew up in, to be able to get academic support when I was in university. So I'm well attuned to the need to have support, but I also understand that where something is valuable, it can come at something of a cost, both whether that is in terms of the work to obtain it or the economic cost.

And so I'm not being dismissive of the member's question. In fact, I'm quite thankful for the question because I think it's a good line of discussion about where do you find that balance between being able to ensure that people can reach the level of education that they want, but not at the cost of not being able to have a reasonable cost for something that does have value. And I would say post-secondary education does have value.

* (16:20)

Mr. Altomare: I recall my own piece too when I was, you know, lucky enough to go to post-secondary in the early '80s.

I was also lucky enough to actually get work that paid a decent wage and was able to, of course, save enough money to pay for my own education and make it through without any student debt and, you know, I considered myself quite lucky.

But there are many people that weren't in the same position that I was in. We have people that live in poverty, we have people that require support from their government and we have individuals right now that is—you know, they are a significant amount of barriers as to getting access to post-secondary. I mean, when you have to make a decision between child-care and paying for your grocery bill and paying for rent, I mean, what's left to pay for your post-secondary tuition and fees associated with that?

Again, I come from—I wouldn't—I would say a background that was quite lucky and quite fortunate to have that, Mr. Chair. But as governments know and as, you know, the governments are here to support and to provide services to people and to ensure that we reach our—not only our goals but also, you know, we want to be contributing members of society.

Bursaries and scholarships exist be—so that we can have these opportunities brought forward to people that have significant barriers. And these are just single stories. Again, I can refer back to my experience and to the minister's experience, absolutely, you know, we were lucky. But what are we doing now to ensure—and I'll get to my question, what—and I—just going to continue a little bit of some rhetorical pieces.

Governments, and especially a provincial government, its—one of its No. 1 jobs is to provide education opportunities for its citizens, especially those that have significant barriers. Again, I want to ask: how are these bursaries being disbursed, and are we ensuring that the bursaries that the minister is talking about are reaching those individuals that have significant barriers and that have had difficulty making it through to the end of some post-secondary studies?

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate the member both giving some of his own personal recollections and his own personal history, which I think is helpful sometimes for the context of discussions that we have.

I mean, I often share my own personal background and my father's struggle with addiction which

ultimately cost him his life because I think it's helpful in the discourse and the discussion that we have and the perspectives that we have and why do we come to the table with certain perspectives.

And I think everybody in this Legislature has their own experiences that they come with—some positive and some which they might consider negative. But they bring those experiences into this building and that informs how they approach issues and how they look at issues. And the fact that we have 57 members who probably come from a variety of different experiences and a variety of different backgrounds, I think, is sort of the brilliance of a democracy like this, because it ultimately allows for all of those different experiences hopefully to shape decisions, which would, you'd think, would most of the time result in sort of some of the best decisions that are—can be made in a democratic system. So I do appreciate the member raising that.

He specifically asked, though—and mentions himself—the importance of bursaries and scholarships. And I appreciate him doing that because that is been the focus—has been the focus of our government, to try to ensure that there is more scholarships and bursaries available than there has been in the past. And the numbers bear that out that that has been successful, maybe even more successful than we would have imagined when it was first announced by the previous minister, my friend from Portage la Prairie.

And I remember him answering questions in this House from the former critic, the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), who said that they would never be able to be met—those goals. And not only did the member for Portage meet those goals, but he blew past it because that's sort of the person that he is in terms of being able to be successful in many different things.

So, absolutely, those scholarships and bursaries are important. They are needs-based. I mean, they're assessed on the—when it comes to the bursaries, on the basis of need, and they should be.

Now I know the member talks about, you know, the hardship of tuition increases, and I would never diminish that. Of course every increase is going to be difficult.

I reminded him before that, in my last faculty at the University of Manitoba, the former NDP government approved a 200 per cent increase to the tuition in the faculty that I was attending at that time. I didn't hear hue and cry from the NDP at that

time. They obviously had reasons for that decision. But a 200 per cent increase was not insignificant, I would imagine, for students who came after in that faculty. But, clearly, there was a decision made based on what they thought was appropriate and—in discussions with the faculty at that time.

So this isn't a discussion that is somehow in isolation to one particular political party. This is—has been an issue under a lot of different governments, trying to find where that proper balance is.

Now, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that one of the things that our government did is we put in legislation that Manitoba must have the lowest average tuition out of any province in western Canada. That's legislated. That didn't exist under the previous government. And so that is true now, that we have the lowest average tuition in—out of any province in western Canada. And, in fact, we have one of the lowest tuitions out of all provinces in Canada.

And so, while the member may speak about hardships and challenges that students have, I would say to him, respectfully, that those hardships exist more distinctly in British Columbia, where there is an NDP government. I would say they exist more distinctly in Saskatchewan where, for many years, there was an NDP government. Or they exist more distinctly in Ontario, where there was a Liberal government for many years.

And so this isn't necessarily a partisan debate, and it's not limited to one particular party. Every government of every stripe, I think, struggles with trying to find where that right balance is between ensuring that young people have the opportunity to go to post-secondary education if they so desire, but not to do so with such a financial burden that it inhibits them or inhibits them after their graduation. I think that our government has struck the right balance between having a historic level of scholarships and bursaries on the front end, putting a legislation that we will have the lowest average tuition out of any province in western Canada, and we still maintain one of the lowest tuitions in all of Canada. And I think that that is the appropriate balance.

Will it be the right balance for everybody? I'm sure that it won't. Will there be some that have—say we've gone too far or some to say we haven't gone far enough? I'm sure that there will be on either side. But I'm confident and comfortable in the fact that I think we've struck the right balance.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank the minister for continuing to shed some light on some of these pieces.

Last year, this government cut the ACCESS program—specifically thinking of the one that was on Selkirk avenue that, you know, had bursaries and scholarships for students, you know, that required support the most, that are indigenous people, are young women, are people from low-income families and are people that are single parents.

The question I have is, how have we replaced the supports that were cut from programs like ACCESS?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, as I've mentioned, we have historic levels of funding for bursaries in the province of Manitoba.

I recognize the member opposite talks about the need to ensure that those who need support receive that support. I would harken back to a time not so long ago when we were talking about the Helen Betty Osborne foundation and their scholarships and remind him that it was his former government—the—many of the colleagues who he sits with in caucus—who allowed the Helen Betty Osborne foundation to fall into such a place where it wasn't reporting, where it was going to be losing—or, losing charitable status, where it wasn't able to put out bursaries. That happened because there wasn't an annual report produced for four years under the former NDP governments.

And so I don't think that his colleagues and those that he sits with in caucus would feel good about the fact that some of those who needed those scholarships most weren't able to get it. Quite apart from the fact that I don't think it was respectful to the—to honouring the legacy of Helen Betty Osborne.

But we have, when it comes to—well, I see members opposite who, you know, who obviously don't like the fact that it's important to remind them how that foundation—what happened and that it required our government to come in and ensure that it was stabilized and could actually be providing bursaries. And I know that that will upset some members, and it should. And it did—it upset me when I found out about it.

* (16:30)

So I'm glad that they're upset from that perspective, not because of how it came about. But I would say that our efforts in terms of putting more money into bursaries, I think has been welcomed by students

and we will continue to provide those efforts and those supports to those students.

Mr. Altomare: So that I'm following this piece, I think I asked, like, what has replaced some of these ACCESS pieces; not the Helen Betty Osborne Memorial Fund.

So I'll go back and I'll ask that again. I know we had the ACCESS programs—even thinking of the one that was on Selkirk Avenue.

What has replaced some of the support for people that are—have an indigenous background, that are young women, that are single parents? Is there anything that's been put in place that has replaced some of that money that's been removed?

Mr. Goertzen: The member wonders why I talk about the Helen Betty Osborne foundation. He raised in his question that those who are, you know, the most vulnerable, why weren't they getting funding?

Well, the issue, in terms of reason why—when it comes to that particular fund—that bursaries weren't able to be issued under that foundation was because it had fallen into disrepair.

Mr. Brad Michaleski, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

That happened to be during the years that the NDP was in government, even though they passed a legislation. So it's a legitimate question to ask, but it's also a legitimate answer to give that there's no question that those funds that were not being provided could have gone to those who were certainly in need.

I've answered for the member that we have taken an extraordinary effort to increase the amount of bursaries in the province of Manitoba. Those are a-need-based funds that are going to people who are the most in need. We made a commitment during the election to increase that even more. I didn't hear, and I won't say this to the member individually, but I would say collectively for the NDP writ large, I didn't hear whether or not they support that or not. I know that his colleagues who were here prior to us—prior to the election voted against the scholarships and bursaries initiatives that were within the budget. They all stood up and voted against it, and so I suppose that that means that they may not support it. They may not want to have bursaries for those who are most in need. I would find that regrettable.

I hope the member takes a different course. He'll have an opportunity, I suppose, in the not too distant future to vote on a budget appropriation. I think on

Friday he'll have that opportunity and we'll see whether or not he actually wants to support funding for bursaries or not. So he won't have to wait long to demonstrate whether or not he is in support of the words that he is putting on this record.

Mr. Altomare: I just—I looked up and I saw somebody else. *[interjection]*

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): So we've been asking the minister now, for a few minutes, to clarify and really spell out what extra supports, in lieu of the cuts to the ACCESS program, that students of indigenous ancestry, single parents, low-income families are receiving.

The minister, you know, references a, you know, a very super important bursary, the Helen Betty Osborne memorial bursary, and, you know, we're excited and looking forward to this bursary being dispersed again, but we haven't seen that dispersed in the last few years.

So what has been replaced with the cuts to the ACCESS bursary? How are these students getting the supports that they need, in terms of lifting themselves out of poverty, because many of these groups are in poverty situations.

And I actually graduated from an ACCESS program. I'm very proud of graduating and, you know, getting some support from government, which actually, you know, has a ripple effect in families. It didn't just affect me. I was the first one to, you know, graduate from a post-secondary institute. My son, right behind me, 28 years old, graduated—first one to graduate from high school.

That had an effect. He went to post-secondary, graduated and is now working at Boeing. My other son graduated from high school, is working in the trades. My daughter's now in grade 12, will be graduating, you know, this school year.

So it's not only about, you know, making sure that people contribute, but it's making sure that the people that are most vulnerable, that don't have the ability to contribute because they don't have supports—and I think of people who come from the North, who come to Manitoba here, to Winnipeg, to seek post-secondary or even to come here to get high school schooling, that often are living with homestay families that don't have a support system to help them.

So I'm going to ask the minister again, and I know that, you know, he talked about his own story and how, you know, it was difficult for his family and he

lived in social housing and his mom was a single parent and certainly he struggled to get through high school and he had some barriers as well. But you think of the legacy that—and the hardship and the barriers that are put in place for, you know, these families that don't have a role model in their family. Like, I didn't have anyone that went to—that finished high school. I didn't have people in my family that I could look up to go, oh, hey, look, someone's an educator, or look, someone's working in the trades, or—I had a lot of people that were on EIA, that that was what the norm was.

So these bursaries were set up to help people, and I'm not saying to give them a handout; it's a hand up to actually help lift them out of poverty. And we're talking about \$3,000 per student. In the last session we had, you know, a couple dozen ACCESS students in this very gallery that were calling on this government to reinstate that funding so that they can continue their program. Many of them were single parents, you know, moms of three, dads of two, didn't know if they were going to be able to continue the program. And I can tell the minister that a couple of them have had to leave the program for now because they don't have the same support. They can't pay their daycare for their kid to go to daycare. They're now having to find money to purchase their own books. And, you know, they're not asking for much; it's \$3,000 per student.

And this system on Selkirk Avenue, this education system on Selkirk Avenue, was set up by the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba for a reason. And the reason was because that's—there's so many people in that area that are living in poverty, and they wanted people in that area to see that that's a place of hope and education transforms lives.

So, again, I'll ask the minister: What has he done in terms of supporting these students to ensure that they're getting the supports that they need above the \$2,000 that each student is allotted from this bursary?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for both her question and for her comment. I appreciated hearing her own experience, and I've heard some of it in this House before, but it's always good to hear it again and with a little bit more context this time. I know she talked about her own children and the success that her own children are having, and I think that that's a credit to her, and I certainly want to acknowledge that.

There's no question that those who are around you and the ability to see those who succeeded in

post-secondary education is no doubt an indicative factor in the success of the next generation. And, obviously, this member has been able to be that example for her children. I often say that with my own mother—my mother didn't graduate high school; I won't tell you what grade she obtained, but I often say even though she didn't graduate high school, she's one of the most intelligent people that I know. But for her it was very important for me and for my sister to be able to go to post-secondary education.

* (16:40)

When I graduated the first time from the University of Manitoba, my mom came to me and she said—she hugged me after and she said that felt that she'd graduated with me because she didn't have that opportunity. It was a very sort of meaningful moment for both of us—certainly was for me; it's something I'll always remember.

When I graduated the second time from the faculty of commerce, she came to me and she just said how proud she was as, you know, of my achievement and we shared that moment. And then when I graduated from the faculty of law, she hugged me and as only a mother could say, she whispered in my ear, she said, now it's time you go and get a job.

So she was very supportive at the very different levels of my post-secondary education, but also very wise. And she's a very wise woman, and I'm happy to say she's still alive today and I still benefit from her wisdom.

But the member opposite asked, you know, what are we doing for indigenous students. I'm happy to say to that member that the level of bursaries that we have in the province of Manitoba have increased by 47 per cent since 2016. If the member's wanting to go back to a day prior to 2016 and wants to see bursaries reduced by 47 per cent, that would bring us back to the level that the NDP had when it came to bursaries.

In addition to that—and she mentioned specifically indigenous youth or young people—I'm pleased to say that there is an additional top-up on the bursaries of \$1,500 that's eligible for indigenous applicants to the bursary program. So there is a specific amount of top-up or support that's available for indigenous students. So, both on the overall level of funding is significantly higher for bursaries, some 47 per cent, and I'll give credit again to my colleague, the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) who was instrumental in stewarding that into existence, and

then there was an additional \$1,500 top-up on top of that, as well.

And I will just return very quickly, because she began her question by talking about—she was disappointed about there not being disbursements out of the Helen Betty Osborne foundation 'til 2016. She may not have been here when we had that discussion, but I would remind her that was certainly in part because annual reports hadn't produced for four years prior to that when not her, but her colleagues in the NDP were in government at that time.

Mr. Altomare: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to your support duties back into the Chamber. It's good to see another face, and I'll hopefully get a chance to actually introduce myself to you.

So, as the minister says, there's nothing like the pride of a parent having the opportunity to congratulate their child on graduating and on, you know, making it through a rigorous course of studies and wanting to endeavour to be a contributing member of society and wanting to do all those good things that we want all of our graduates to do and all of our Manitoba students to do.

ACCESS—a question I have for the minister right now is: Can we get the financial support that ACCESS students, per student, had two years ago and what are they receiving right now?

Mr. Goertzen: Of course, the ACCESS program still exists and there's still students who are receiving funding from the ACCESS program. In addition to that, there are more students than ever who are receiving bursaries as a result of this government's historic effort to increase the level of bursaries and to leverage from the private sector additional dollars that are not all just taxpayers' dollars, but from the very generous Manitobans who want to give back in that way.

So I can say to the member that ACCESS funds are still being provided to students. There is more bursary dollars available in the province of Manitoba today than there's ever been before. There's a commitment to having more bursaries in the future as a result of the commitment that we made in the election. And so however he wants to calculate it and however he wants to slice it, there will be significantly more access to bursaries to students based on their needs than there's ever been in the province before and certainly than there ever was under the previous government.

So I'm happy to continue to speak about this because this is a good news story for students, that they have more opportunity to access these bursaries than they ever did before. That doesn't mean that paying for university or college or other post-secondary programs is going to be easy. I would never suggest to anyone that it—that that is an easy path necessarily, but it has to be an available path and a manageable path. And I think that the balance that our government has struck between—on the one side, ensuring that we have the lowest tuition in Western Canada on average, and on the other side, ensuring that there are supports for students who need that support or who are achieving at such a level that they deserve that support, is the right balance. I'm not going to, again, say that it is going to be easy for every student, but I think for those students who go down that path, it is worthwhile.

And for those of us who have done that, including the member opposite and including members who spoke previously, it's a worthwhile and ultimately something that pays off dividends in ways that are beyond occupation and beyond income, but certainly can include those things, but I think more than that, it has a benefit that is measured in ways that don't include a dollar sign in front of it or a title behind one's name.

Mr. Altomare: I'll ask the question again. Dollar-wise, a student that was in the ACCESS program two years ago, what was the average amount they received compared to what they are receiving now?

Mr. Goertzen: There are more dollars available today in Manitoba for any student who needs—who qualifies under the needs-based testing for a bursary, whether that's ACCESS or in combination through the MSBI program, than there's ever been in the province of Manitoba.

I'm sure that there are some—many students who had previously and may be continuing to draw funding from ACCESS who are also eligible and may be drawing funding from MSBI as well, and they should be assured that not only are those funds available today and additional support is available today, there'll be more support available in the future. And I think that that's a good news story.

The member opposite will have the ability to vote in a couple of days on that increased support when he votes on the appropriation, when we do not only the vote on these Estimates, but on the overall appropriation for government. He'll have the

opportunity to show that support or perhaps he'll do what some of his colleagues have done and vote against students and vote against that support for students.

* (16:50)

I hope he doesn't go down this path. He's young enough, in terms of his political life, that he doesn't need to be cynical or jaded. He can take another way and decide to vote in a way that maybe not all of his caucus will vote. That's not to suggest that they are cynical or jaded but, if he has the opportunity, and he will in a couple of days, I hope that he stands up and votes for students because there's more supports than there's ever been before.

Mr. Altomare: Well, I like being called young; that was good. But I still want to drill down to the actual numbers per student. I understand the program piece and I've had a great—and we've had a really good description of the program that the minister's just been talking about for the past little while, but, specifically, numbers per kid, per student—not per kid, sorry—per student in the ACCESS program.

Are those numbers available and can they be made available to this committee?

Mr. Goertzen: There's 47 per cent more funding available for bursaries for students in the province of Manitoba than there ever was. In the previous NDP government and certainly since 2016, that would amount to millions of dollars more that are available.

If the member opposite wants me to get the exact number of the millions of dollars more that are available to students now through scholarships and bursaries than there were in 2016, I can certainly provide that to him and probably by tomorrow.

Mr. Altomare: So, under the Manitoba student loan remissions, it dropped from \$13.2 million in 2016-17 to \$1.3 million in '18-19. That's a drop of nearly \$12 million.

Can the minister point me to a different line in his department which has increased to offset this cut because if I'm hearing it properly through the bursaries versus the scholarship piece, there should be something that's offset this.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Goertzen: So, again, for the member, when it comes to the remission issue, that is a legacy program. In terms of the forgiving of student loans, it is, you know, being reduced as that program moves on.

As we move to the new initiatives of providing support up front for students through bursaries and through scholarships, you'll find throughout the supplementary—the SIRs, you'll find different places, but in particular I'd refer him to the education and training appropriation, under post-secondary education and workforce development. He'll find within there a section on Manitoba bursaries and funds and he'll see an increase that exists for '17-18 into '18-19 of some \$3 million.

But he'll need to go back to the previous SIRs that shows the increases we brought in this new funding arrangement and the new matching funds from the private sector. So he'll continue to see an increase in the millions of funds when it comes to the bursaries and he'll see that in that line item. And if he goes back to previous Estimates books, he'll continue to see that increase.

So, on the one hand, yes, there's the reduction on the older program of the forgiving of the loans, but he'll also see the increase of the scholarships to benefit students and bursaries.

Mr. Altomare: On page 117 of the annual report, it says that new apprenticeship applications decreased by 230 from the previous year, a decline of over 10 per cent.

Can the minister explain why that is?

* (17:00)

Mr. Goertzen: Just want a clarification from the member. He is referring to the High School Apprenticeship Program, is that right?

Mr. Altomare: We're looking at the page 117 of the annual report. It's the pink one.

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

It's a good question, and I don't know that there is, you know, a clear and defined answer. There's been no change to the program that would account for it. There's been no, sort of, systemic change in how the program would—operates in terms of why there would be a reduction. Of course, when you look more historically, the numbers have generally gone up.

You know, one could speculate that in a good labour market where employees are—or, employers are looking for employees, that perhaps people might be less inclined to go into apprenticeship because, you know, it's easier to find more accessible employment immediately and sort of immediately get into the workforce—into a job that somebody might like.

And so they might not be looking around as much in terms of their longer term future, because they can see that future more quickly right in front of them.

So that can be part of it. And we're in—we are certainly in an economic environment where there is opportunity for people when it comes to the labour force.

I do think part of it is a reduction in high school apprenticeships which, you know, is also difficult to define in terms of the exact reason. Is it because students, as they are today, don't find these trades as attractive to go into? They're finding other options or looking for different—they're looking for different opportunities.

It is one of the things that we've talked about during the campaign in terms of expanding the availability for apprenticeships. And maybe that also means looking at the type of apprenticeships, then, that we are offering for students, the kind of emerging labour markets that we have both today and what we could expect in the future. So it feels more irrelevant to young people. I think that could be a part of it.

So I think there's probably a combination of factors; it wouldn't land on one particular reason. It's certainly not—it's not because the program has changed in any way or because there's not a desire to have people in the apprenticeship programs. But I suspect it could be a combination of external macroeconomic factors when it comes to the labour market generally.

But then, also, I do think we do need to do a better job of looking at the high school apprenticeship. And we talked about it during the campaign and how do we ensure that we get more students into the apprenticeship programs, and what does that look like for modern students? What kind of apprenticeship programs are they interested in? What does the future hold for them in certain occupations?

Obviously, we think of trades in the traditional way that me and you might think of trades, but there's a lot of other high-tech areas that could also lend themselves to apprenticeships that maybe we don't—haven't explored fully.

So it's a good question that doesn't have a particular defined answer, other than it's not because anything systemic we have changed with the program.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank the minister for that answer.

Talking about good labour markets, good labour markets keep people in the province. Right? And instead, we had an outmigration level of almost 10,000 people.

How can we—I want to ask the minister, how can programs like the apprenticeship and workforce piece help keep people in the province, and what is the minister doing to ensure that we can cut that outflow of people out of Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, good labour markets also attract people to the province. And when it 'kubs' to net population growth, Manitoba has been particularly successful.

I could point to a micro level and say that we've attracted more doctors in the last year than in the history of the province of Manitoba, and more so than any other province in Canada. That's a very particular niche market that I know the member isn't talking about, but it's symbolic of the fact that we are attracting people at the highest levels of profession.

But, when you look at the overall population of Manitoba, we continue to grow. So I recognize the member is talking about some people who have chosen, for whatever reason, to leave Manitoba, but he shouldn't turn a blind eye to the fact that there are more people who are choosing to come to Manitoba. And the net effect of that is good for the province of Manitoba.

* (17:10)

And, if he doesn't believe me, he can check out the number of housing starts, he can drive around south Winnipeg. I'd be happy to take him in my vehicle; we could go to Steinbach. There's growth all around the city, in every part of the city and I can assure him this isn't like Las Vegas in 2008—I'm not comparing Steinbach to Las Vegas at any time in its history—but it's not like Las Vegas in 2008 where they were building developments when there was nobody living in them because it was all on speculation. These are homes that are being built because people have ordered them and there are real people moving into that home—those homes, and that growth is real.

So the population of Manitoba is growing, and I think that as the member indicates that's indicative of a strong economy and also people who are looking at us and saying that they believe that there's a strong future for the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Altomare: So, if I'm hearing the minister correctly that the Province is going to look into making sure

that we don't have a decrease in the applications in the apprenticeship program and that we're going to ensure that we continue to attract people to these very important jobs. Is that a correct assumption?

Mr. Goertzen: It is desirable, obviously, that we attract people into apprenticeship programs, particularly young people. We need to make sure that the apprenticeship programs are relevant to them, relevant to the economy that we have today but also the economy that they are going to be graduating into and then living and working into for the next—or for the remainder of their lives, or for hopefully many decades yet.

So there's no question that, you know, we talked about it during the campaign, we want to renew and expand apprenticeship and particularly for young people who are in high school. We think that that work experience is important. We do see some models already within the public school system where there is an emphasis on work placement and on apprenticeship and we know that that benefits young people.

And students, I've had the opportunity to visit some of those programs, I've been to some high school programs where they're training people on—or young people on aircraft mechanics and what that would be like for as a potential future. That seems very exciting and interesting and certainly I think that the students who are involved in that, the ones that I spoke to, found it to be beneficial. So there's no question that we want to ensure that the apprenticeship program is both enhanced but also relevant and important for those who are involved within it.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank the minister for that answer.

If I'm hearing him correctly, it sounds like the government is going to be proactively engaged in making sure that we have more applications into this program and that the program expands from the current number. Would that be a correct assumption to make?

Mr. Goertzen: All I really heard the member say is that we are a proactive government, and I agree with him, we are a proactive government.

Mr. Altomare: Well, great, I mean, I love that. I also want to say that I want to thank the minister for being gracious in response and in understanding my inexperience in this process. But we'll go on to a different question.

There's been a concern that the Province was setting up to cut the number of veterinary seats it purchases from Saskatchewan from 15 to 10. My understanding of that this would be reduced again in 2020. Can the minister confirm that?

Mr. Goertzen: Confirm the member is incorrect. We are not reducing numbers.

Mr. Altomare: Just for clarity, you're not reducing the number from 15 or is it number 10?

Mr. Goertzen: Fifteen. And I appreciate the line of questioning that the member is bringing forward. There's been some confusion and some misunderstanding when it comes to this file. And I understand people are, you know, they'll hear bits and pieces of information and maybe fill in the blanks when it comes to what they fear might happen.

My understanding in this is that, of course, we have a long-standing arrangement with Saskatchewan in terms of the veterinary clinic. There was a decision made by Alberta, I believe, to withdraw their support, their funding from the veterinary college in Saskatchewan. That obviously upset the economic model on which it was based, but there were other issues that were involved there, too.

We have to ensure that when we're paying substantial dollars to fund those seats—those 15 seats—as we are, that we do the best that we can to ensure that those who are in those seats and getting trained come back to Manitoba, right. I mean, we're not necessarily looking to train vets for the rest of Canada. And so there is a challenge with that, and obviously, you know, we've seen different sorts of arrangements when it comes to medical professionals—in the human medical profession—and those sort of arrangements in trying to ensure that people are working in the places where the need is the greatest.

So our staff in our department have done very good job of working with the college, with the other provinces that remain—particularly British Columbia and Saskatchewan—to try and to find a model that's both sustainable, works for Manitoba, works for the college, ensures that we're getting good results for that, so we're not just training vets for Ontario or for other provinces; and that work has been ongoing and I think has been good work.

So we're not reducing the number seats but I don't want to leave the member with the impression that there aren't challenges there. There are challenges there. It's a high cost program. We want to ensure that we're getting vets into—coming back into Manitoba

from those seats and we need to ensure the economic model continues to work when a province such as Alberta, which is no small province, decides to pull out of the college and the arrangements—has been the historical arrangement there.

Mr. Altomare: So just to make sure that I'm understanding this correctly: it used to be 15; it will continue to be 15?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes.

Mr. Altomare: So, then, when will there be another review of this number, and is it going to be in the next year, two years, or is this something that's going to be maintained—this number 15—for the foreseeable future?

Mr. Goertzen: Difficult to say. I mean, I don't—you know, we're not planning for an immediate review but, you know, I don't think there was—people were planning for Alberta to pull out of the model, either. So, you know, we've been working with Saskatchewan. Staff have done a good job of doing that work. We've committed to the 15 seats.

I'm sure the member would like me to commit for 20 years. You know, I don't suspect I'll be here in 20 years and so it would be unfair for me to make that commitment to the member. It's difficult to foresee things that could happen.

We're committed to ensuring that we have vets in the province and doing our part in terms of helping those who want to pursue that profession to get trained, and at this point, and for the foreseeable future, we have the 15 seats which are secured in Saskatchewan, and that model continues, although without Alberta, I understand.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank the minister for that answer, as I know of a number of students that benefited from that program and a number that have actually come back and have served the province well and continue to service the province well as veterinarians. It's something that we, you know, as a province do take some pride in.

I just want to move to the Curriculum Support Centre and some of the pieces that have been going on there. The inclusion support piece was cut by 20 full-time equivalent positions; 19 of those were related to the closure of the curriculum resource centre.

Can the minister tell me what the other position was?

Mr. Goertzen: Sorry, if the member could—*[interjection]*—yes, I know, I totally take blame for that. I just noticed that the Bombers traded for Zach Collaros and I was interested in that, but please repeat the question. I want to fulfill the answer to that.

Mr. Altomare: If I can—I don't want to put this on the record either, but I'm not a big fan of Zach Collaros—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Altomare: —especially—I mean, all it's going to take is just one—anyway, you know what I mean when I'm pointing up to—so, I'll repeat the question.

* (17:20)

Inclusion support at the Curriculum Support Centre was cut by 20 full-time-equivalent positions, 19 of those were related to the closure of the curriculum resource centre. Can the minister tell me what the other position was?

Mr. Goertzen: So, we will—and we don't have the information right in front of us. We will endeavour to provide it to the member possibly tomorrow, if not within the time frames that we are required to do so.

I can say to the member there were no individuals laid off. When it comes to the change with the Curriculum Support Centre, they were—they found employment otherwise in government or in the department. It may be that one position had been vacant at the time, and so there wasn't an individual assigned to it, but we will determine that and provide the information tomorrow.

And I will stop looking at the Bombers newsfeed now and listen intently to the member opposite for the next 40 minutes.

Mr. Altomare: Well, I certainly appreciate that. In my previous incarnation in my previous work I was always used to people paying very close attention to what was going on, especially when we were running our staff meetings and David'll know this, David Yeo, especially when we're talking about school planning and—*[interjection]* Oh, I'm talking about not only teachers but also students. You know, it's quite amazing when, you know, when we talk about having presence and stuff when you walk into a room sometimes as a principal, people actually stopped, right? And kind of—which is something that, you know, I don't want to joke about because, I mean, the important piece is there is when you get to know your students, get to know your staff, you can have amazing impact and amazing positive results in our schools.

Going back to the curriculum resource centre, is there a plan in place for the building, or is the building just going to become something that the government sells or puts on the market?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question. So the building, as I understand most buildings in government, unless they're attached to an RHA or some entity outside of government, is owned by Accommodation Services which is housed in the Department of Finance. I've not heard of any particular plans they have for the space that occupied the Curriculum Support Centre, although it's a multilevel building and there are other activities and other people who are on the other floors. So there's no immediate plans to dispose of the building because the majority of the building is still being used and occupied with the Department of Education.

Mr. Altomare: I just want to continue with some of the curriculum support pieces. When you're a large school division like the Winnipeg School Division, River East Transcona School Division, we have access to a tremendous amount of our own resources and—available to our teachers and staff.

Has the minister thought about, you know, what about those smaller school divisions that don't have resources available and that relied heavily on the curriculum resource centre for their support pieces that they used in their classrooms?

Mr. Goertzen: I mean, I think that there was obviously, you know, differences of opinions at times when it comes to how heavily the support centre was used. So, clearly, I've heard from some—and you might be, you know, articulating their view—that the use had significantly—I read in op eds in rural newspapers from a current teacher who indicated that they weren't even sure that the support centre had even been open in the last many years because there was never any discussion about it. It was never brought up on PD days; it was never really utilized, and that was in a rural division. So I think that there were different experiences, as one might expect in a large system.

Certainly, the view of—our view was that the ability to provide online resources for rural divisions would be equally as important. I think we're looking to provide—and I hope you'll hear in the coming days or months additional support that'll be provided for online resources that'll help those who were in rural divisions access educational support. But there's no question that the utilization of the—of that particular facility wasn't universal and that it was mixed, and we

feel that we can use those resources in a way that is better. The resources have been distributed within the education system, so they still are available for those within the education system, and we hope to have more online resources available for divisions as well.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank the minister for that answer.

I just want to follow up a little bit more on how those resources were distributed. Did more go to the North? Did more go to the rural pieces, or did—or do we even know exactly where those resources got to?

Mr. Goertzen: Just to go back and answer the previous question so that we don't leave that hanging for—to be answered in the future. The one position that the member was asking about that wasn't identified was an admin secretary position, known in government as an AY3 position. The position had been vacant at the time, and so it was eliminated. There wasn't a individual who was eliminated; it was the position had been vacant.

Mr. Altomare: Oh, thank you. You recognized me before I put my hand up. I like that. I love the difference. I'm used to that—no.

I just want to go back to—thank you for the answer regarding that other position, if it was cut from the Curriculum Support Centre.

Can you, Mr. Minister, just talk to us about how the resources were distributed throughout the province, either it was the North, rural, mostly in the city, et cetera.

* (17:30)

Mr. Goertzen: So I understand from officials it's a bit of a mix in terms of the distribution of resources. Some of it was put online so that it would be more accessible more easily for school divisions in the province as a whole. Some of it remains in the facility. So for example, the disability resources, alternative formats are still there, as we indicated at the time of the change that they would still be available there. There are also still homeschooling resources that are available there, as well, and other resources went to school divisions.

So it is a bit of a mix between some resources, as we committed to, remaining within that facility, available centrally; some resources being placed online so they're available more quickly and more accessibly across the province. Some resources remaining for those who have special needs, to have

those resources, and then for those who have alternative forms of education, like homeschoolers.

Mr. Altomare: As I understand it, there were tens of thousands of resources at the centre and, you know, and they're a valuable resource.

And so again, I just want to ask is—if we have a—do we have any indication as to who benefitted the most from receiving those resources?

Mr. Goertzen: So I want to assure the member that none of the resources have disappeared. They either are, you know, maintained within the Department of Education or they've gone to school divisions, they've been placed online—I think it's—online. I think it's important to, you know, reiterate for the member that, while I understand that people, you know, access that centre in different ways, that on average there's one or two people who would walk into the centre a day.

And so, you know, again I'm sure the member will be quick to tell me that, of course, those are during school hours; they're not during the summer, of course, and I understand that and so I accept that, but it does speak to the fact that people were accessing the information in different ways. And so we provide the ability now to access much of that online or the resources are housed within the department or they're housed within individual school divisions.

So there was not a steady stream of people coming into the centre. The resources are still available within the education system and we expect to have more resources available online in the future so that there'll be more uniform access and more accessible ways of getting that material.

I also understand that of the many volumes of resources that were available, only a small fraction would have been ever accessed or utilized by teachers, either because they were considered to be out of date or not that popular. So it's not as though—I don't want the member to think that if there were, as an example, 10,000 books and 9,999 books were out on—out being utilized all the time. Only a small fraction would have been utilized because, as one would expect, some of the resources just simply fall into disservice because of age or appropriateness.

Mr. Altomare: Most of—from the way—when I was in the school system, most of our teachers ordered resources from there and then they were delivered by our couriers and then taken back. There wasn't any actual physical need to go to the library to pick up the resources. They were just ordered and then shipped.

Just moving on to the bureau éducation française: it was underspent last year by over \$1 million. Why was that?

Mr. Goertzen: So I think that the member in some ways makes the point that the need for a physical location to access resources isn't actually that critical because there are different ways that people can access different resources.

So I appreciate him bringing that forward that, you know, whether it's online or in accessing it through other school divisions that might have the resources or through the central distribution that still exists for alternative formats and for homeschoolers, that that still exists. But I think the member helps to make the point that the reliance on a physical location simply didn't match the need of modern times.

So I appreciate him bringing that forward and we will endeavour to answer the second part of that question if the Chair would give us a moment and turn off the mic.

Mr. Chairperson: The Honourable Minister.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question, and it's an appropriate question. I think that BEF is an important part of the department and the work that is done and certainly in providing French language education. Primarily officials would indicate that, as one would expect in a department where 80 per cent of costs—and this would be true across government, I suppose—relate to staffing. Primarily, the variation in the fund that he's speaking about would be as a result of vacancies. There's been significant hirings, I understand, recently, and significant efforts to ensure that those positions get filled. There's—the positions have not been eliminated. There is an active effort to fill those positions with the right people and to do the important work that that part of the department does.

Mr. Altomare: What was the vacancy rate in the bureau in '18—in 2018-2019?

Mr. Goertzen: That's not information that I have on hand. I think we'd committed, though, to get the vacancy rates as was asked for at the beginning of this.

But I'll say to the member, I mean, we don't want to have a significant level of vacancy that would be beyond sort of one what would expect when you have people coming and going within departments. So there's been good effort made to fill the positions at BEF.

* (17:40)

When I've met with representatives within the francophone community who particularly, you know, whether it's DFSM or others who have an interest in French education and we made a commitment to ensure to do our best to fill those positions. But it's also about filling them with the right people, right. So we want to make sure that those efforts don't just, you know, fill a seat but ensure that the right person is coming in there. So there's been gains in terms of positions that have been filled recently. There's more to be done for sure, but we're committed to filling those positions.

Mr. Altomare: Funding to—for the bureau éducation française was cut, actually cut last year in absolute terms: \$474,000 loss on salaries, \$119,000 loss on other expenditures, \$109,000 loss on assistance. If the bureau éducation française is important to the minister why are these cuts continuing?

Mr. Goertzen: I think the member is maybe falling into the trap that some of his colleagues in his caucus do sometimes and always equates funding with quality or funding with outcomes. That simply isn't always the case and—because if it was, then the solution to every problem in government, whether it was in Education or in Health or in any other department, would simply be to add more money and we've seen that that hasn't always—that certainly hasn't been the case where those problems have been solved.

So, whether it's education, the pure addition of money doesn't solve many of the challenges that exist within health care. It doesn't mean it can't be part of the solution at times, but I think the member opposite is trying to draw a linear connection between the amount of funding within the division and the outcomes.

So we're driven more on outcomes and ensuring that we have the right staff doing the right things at the right times and the right places. Sometimes that will result in an overall reduction in funding that can be used in other places to drive better results somewhere. But I don't think it would be my job as a minister if—it wouldn't be a responsible way to act if I just made the decision that every solution was driven by a 3 per cent or a 4 per cent increase in funding without actually looking what are the reasons why we may not be getting the results in any part of the education system that we want.

And so this would be a common theme for the member, as we go through question period and he asks questions about various levels of funding. I think I

will always return to him and say that the issue is about outcomes and not just about money.

Now I don't want him to take away from that that I don't think that there are times when there needs to be—then there needs to be funding. There's no question that there needs to be funding. We talked about MSBI before and I think that providing additional funding, record funding, within that part of the support from education does yield good results and so that investment has been made. But it's always an ongoing effort within government to see whether or not you're providing the right level of funding for the outcomes that you have.

So, when we look at, for example, education we see that we have among the highest per capita funding per student in Canada, and yet we don't have among the highest results for students. And it's not because they're students—and the member knows this as a teacher—former teacher and principal that it's not because our students aren't able to achieve. They certainly are able to achieve. They're among the best—they should be among the best students in Canada.

And so what are the reasons, if we're providing record levels of funding or—compared to other provinces generally, why are we not getting those results? And so whether it's this part of the department or other parts of the department I think it's because we have to ensure that we're getting the best results and that won't always be driven by the bottom line in terms of funding, it will be driven by the outcomes.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank the minister for that answer. And just also the bureau éducation française is seen as something quite important by the francophone community and I just—listening to the minister I think he understands that importance and wants to make sure that not only is the funding level going to be adequate, but also that the support, the piece that the francophone community sees as important is also seen as important by this government.

My next question refers to some of the positions that are vacant in the department of Ed. There are currently two positions posted on the Department of Education and Training website and there are 165 vacancies.

Why aren't there more postings instead of just the two that we're seeing?

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

I mean, those—there are human resource matters that happen within the department. There are issues of timing in terms of when they put out applications. There are decisions that are made whether or not, you know, some positions will be filled internally or whether some will be posted. And so those matters are left to—for those who are dealing with issues of personnel. I trust that they do it in a way that they ensure that they are getting the right people in the right place. I'm sure there are different times when you'll find more postings publicly. There might be times when some of them are being filled internally because there are good people in place.

I understand there are more that are going to be posted relatively soon, so stay tuned for that. Sure the member's not looking to apply. He's got three and a half years of other things to do, but if he knows good people, we're always looking for good people. So he's got lots of connections in the Department of Education, and I hope he—or, sorry—within the department with—I hope not too many in the Department of Education, but within the education system, and I hope that he encourages the people he knows in the education system to apply for the opportunities that are coming available.

Mr. Altomare: Well, I want to thank you, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank the minister for that answer. I hope it doesn't take three and a half years to see 163 positions posted. I hope it can be done certainly sooner than that because, obviously, if there are those many vacancies, there is that much need.

I'd just like to move on to a second piece or another piece here. According to Public Accounts, the Healthy Baby Prenatal Benefit program has been reduced. In '15-16, it was \$1.6 million. In '16-17, \$1.5 million. In '17-18, 1.5, but a little less. And then in '18-19, down to \$1.39 million. Can the minister explain the reductions?

*(17:50)

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question. He will know that that program exists under the Healthy Child initiative of government, which has been in government for a long time, but has been in different places in government. It originally began in the department of Family Services and it is returning to the department of family services. And so I'm sure that that question could be raised within that department.

It might simply be, again, an activity-based issue. I don't know. But it may not be anything more than

that. But because we no longer house—or will be no longer housing the Healthy Child portion of government in Education, it'll be within Families. And I would say that I support its move to Families. I think it made sense. It started there, under government. It—there's a lot of connections, obviously, with the Department of Families, not just by virtue of its name but by virtue of much of the programs that it delivers.

And so I think it's—it is appropriately placed there, and I think it'll continue to do the good work, and better work than it's done in the past.

Mr. Altomare: Can I ask the minister, when is this move taking place—or when, sorry—when did that move take place to family services?

Mr. Goertzen: It is moving over as part of this budgetary process.

Mr. Altomare: According to Public Accounts, volume 2, assistance to Sierra Leone refugee resettlement through Education has declined by nearly \$40,000, and—in '16-17, it was \$113,000 and now, in '18-19, it's down to \$80,000.

Can the minister explain that difference?

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

If he could be specific where he's looking at that. I—department, of course, indicates that we've increased significantly funding for refugee and immigrant settlement as part of the new funding we announced several months ago, but he may be looking at a particular line item, or that—if he can just refer us to that.

Mr. Altomare: We're referring to Public Accounts, volume 2.

Mr. Goertzen: So, I think part of the challenge that we're having is the member's looking at Public Accounts which reflects actual expenditures. You know, we're looking at departmental Estimates and the variations are often fairly minor but they're, again, driven by activity, right? So you'll have, you know, based on the number of refugees, based on the requirements of those refugees, you know, based on whether or not they have other supports within the community because they belong to a certain type of community that might have more sort of community connections and then they rely less on government support. The program itself hasn't changed. In fact, it's only been enhanced. We continue to provide budget for the level of support that we believe is appropriate.

It has not been reduced, but there are times if you're going to be looking at Public Accounts, where you'll see overexpenditures because the activity drove it to overexpenditures.

So you might see MSBI which sometimes has been oversubscribed because it's, you know, it's driven by activity. In this case, you'll see perhaps a slight variation that's decreased not because the program has changed, but because maybe the volume of refugees has changed or the nature of those refugees have changed such that they don't require the level of support that others might've required.

Mr. Altomare: I'll thank the minister for that answer. Part of the things that kind of stood out for us when we were looking at that is that \$80,000 number seems like a relatively—I mean, because it's a hard \$80,000. It just seems to be like an arbitrary number.

So is the minister saying that's what the support is going to be at for '18-19 and anything any further?

Mr. Goertzen: There hasn't been any reduction in the budget. It is support for immigration refugee support. They will be as printed in the 2019-2020 SILRs.

But, again, when you get to the actuals, sometimes you'll see that number has been overshoot by a little bit or undershot by a little bit, depending on, you know, whether or not the estimates for need were as accurate as we could get. Department officials through their experience and through their good work will have, you know, do a very good job of trying to estimate what the need is.

But one can recognize it when it comes to refugees, whether they are, you know, entering

through an airport or whether they are crossing an unguarded border, an unsupervised border, it is difficult to estimate what their need is always going to be.

And I think there's also a reality, and I've seen this within my own community, not on the refugee side, but on the immigration side, that when you get more people from a certain community who come in, they actually tend to need less support because they tend to support each other over time. And so that's just sort of a reality that is difficult to budget for. But it's also a good thing, right, and to have that.

But, when you look at actual expenditures to budgets, you're going to have slight variations because it is difficult to exactly land on this specific number that may be coming into the province or the level of the support that they might need.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank the minister for that answer.

It'd be great to get what the actuals were for that budget line for '18-19 as compared to what was budgeted for '18-19 in that—

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 6 p.m., the committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Speaker: The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, October 9, 2019

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