

**Third 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**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen	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, Hon.	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, Hon.	Southdale	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah, Hon.	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	Assiniboia	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan, Hon.	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	McPhillips	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon, Hon.	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	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Fort Whyte	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, October 8, 2021

*The House met at 10 a.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.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill 239—The Protest Buffer Zone Act  
(COVID-19 Restrictions)**

**Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** I move, seconded by the member for Notre Dame (MLA Marcelino), that Bill 239, The Protest Buffer Zone Act (COVID-19 Restrictions), be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Ms. Fontaine:** I am proud to introduce Bill 239, The Protest Buffer Zone Act (COVID-19 Restrictions), to ensure the safety and well-being of Manitobans seeking care and those health-care providers working tirelessly to provide it.

Not long ago we saw the aggressive acts of anti-vaxxers protesting outside the Health Sciences Centre, harassing patients and staff, deterring many from seeking the care they need.

Bill 239 will establish a buffer zone around health-care centres, personal-care homes, schools, child-care centres and post-secondary institutions following suit with Quebec, Alberta and BC, whose governments have brought forward similar legislation.

I look forward to the unanimous consent of this bill.

Miigwech.

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

**Bill 75—The Path to Reconciliation  
Amendment Act**

**Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations):** I move, seconded by the Premier, that Bill 75, The Path to Reconciliation Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Today our government is proposing amendments to The Path to Reconciliation Act that will affirm in legislation our commitment to the missing and murdered women and girls calls for justice as a central and guiding aspect of our work.

Manitoba's commitment to reconciliation is outlined in The Path to the Reconciliation Act, which was the first reconciliation legislation of its kind in Canada. Under this legislation, Manitoba's efforts are to be guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's calls to actions and the principles set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Today's amendments add the MMIWG calls to justice as foundational to guiding our work.

Madam Speaker, addressing violence against Indigenous women and girls and the incidences of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is a priority for Manitoba, and it is our intent to continue to take action to prevent and combat gender-based violence of all forms.

Thank you.

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

**Bill 76—The Coat of Arms, Emblems  
and the Manitoba Tartan Amendment Act**

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier):** I moved, seconded by the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Mrs. Cox), that Bill 76, The Coat of Arms, Emblems and the Manitoba Tartan Amendment Act, be now read for a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'm pleased to introduce Bill 76, the coat of arms, emblems and Manitoba tartan amendment act. This bill designates the polar bear as an

official provincial emblem, making it the second mammal that will be an official emblem of Manitoba.

There are few animals that signify the vast territory and the rich natural beauty of northern Manitoba like the polar bear. Tourists come from around the globe to see and to learn about this majestic animal in their natural habitat in Churchill, and this bill will help to build our province's brand as the polar bear capital of the world.

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

Committee reports?

### TABLING OF REPORTS

**Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I am pleased to table The Manitoba Court of Appeal Annual Report for the fiscal year 2019-2020.

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

**Madam Speaker:** And I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage please proceed with her statement.

### Women's History Month

**Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister responsible for the Status of Women):** I am honoured to rise today in the House today to recognize October as Women's History Month. It is an annual tradition for us to celebrate the achievements of women throughout our history and acknowledge the essential role of these trailblazers and the important step they have made in shaping our province's past and paving the way for future generations.

To show our recognition this year, we have relaunched the Empower Awards, which will recognize the exceptional contributions made to our province's pandemic response. Two deserving Manitoba women, one adult and one youth, will receive this award.

I am delighted to share that many incredible women have been nominated this year, from a variety of areas across Manitoba. The Empower Awards will be held on October 25th, where we will celebrate the nominees and reveal this year's recipients.

This month we also celebrate International Day of the Girl. And in 2012, the United Nations declared October 11th as the dedicated day to highlight the role

girls play as powerful voices and change in their families, their communities and their nations.

To recognize International Day of the Girl this year, we are pleased to announce financial support for the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology to provide a certified secure computer user training program for young women in high school. This program will provide the opportunity for young women to explore career options in cybersecurity while gaining marketable skills. It is important to build gender diversity and equity in cybersecurity, increasing the career opportunities for youth and assisting with our economic growth and recovery.

\* (10:10)

This partnership builds on our government's commitment to advancing economic equality for women, which includes a project that we announced earlier this year with the Manitoba Construction Sector Council. Our government invested more than \$600,000 in a multi-faceted skills training program for Indigenous women in northern and remote communities. The training initiative was designed in collaboration with the construction industry and includes career exploration, targeted training, mentorship and ongoing career support.

I am thrilled to report positive feedback from these programs so far. In Cross Lake, 16 women have completed the job readiness course and the safety training, four women have already been hired by Midnorth Development Corporation, and the remaining 12 moved forward with a blasthole drilling program. All 12 women graduated and are now employed. In Fairford, 11 women completed job readiness and safety training and are now in the framer course. They're building their own communities.

Madam Speaker, our government recognizes that we must continue to eliminate gender-based challenges and provide supports to empower women and girls to be leading professionals in every sector and industry across our country and province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy International Women's Day and happy International Day of the Girl.

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** On October 11th, we will celebrate the International Day of the Girl, a time to reflect on the challenges that young women face every day.

In Manitoba, thousands of girls and people who menstruate are unable to go to school throughout their

period because they don't have access to tampons and pads.

In provinces across the country, including Ontario who just announced their plan today, governments are stepping up to provide free menstrual products in schools, except the PCs here in Manitoba. Three years ago they promised to consider a program for Manitoba schools. They broke that promise, and when the minister responsible was questioned on that broken promise, she offered girls USB sticks.

Girls don't need USB sticks. They need access to basic hygiene. They need a government that values them, that is willing to spend a little money to help them to go to school, to get an education and to reach success.

Today I urge the PC government to stop breaking promises to girls and to start doing the right thing for our kids.

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

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

**Ms. Lamoureux:** I really enjoy the opportunity to speak every year about International Day of the Girl during Women's History Month. The reason I like this topic so much is because I personally find my strength, especially here in politics, through feelings of empowerment, and that's what October 11th is all about.

Back in 2012, the United Nations declared this momentous day to recognize the need for greater opportunity for girls and to bring awareness to the impacts of gender inequality.

International Day of the Girl focuses on the need of addressing challenges to promote empowerment and fulfilment of human rights. And this year's theme—Digital Generation, Our Generation—stands for equal access to digital services and opportunities for girls to safely use, lead and design technology.

Madam Speaker, the pandemic has further highlighted the gender divide around connectivity as well as online safety. I believe there is a lot more needing to be done here provincially, and to this day, and right here in Manitoba, women are still less likely to be employed full time, more likely to earn less than their male peers and are underrepresented in trades and leadership roles.

We need to empower girls from a young age to move away from persuasive gender inequalities in society. Girls should be encouraged to pursue their dreams and to call out injustice whenever they encounter it. And government should invest in improving the quality, relevance and gender responsiveness of teaching and learning.

Madam Speaker, there's still so much more we need to be doing, and I'm hopeful that, as women here in these Chambers and virtually, we can spearhead these issues in a thoughtful and inclusive way.

Happy international women's month. Thank you.

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### Carey Lai

**Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Economic Development and Jobs):** Madam Speaker, today I have the great pleasure of presenting a private member's statement honouring Waverley constituent, pharmacist and my good friend, Mr. Carey Lai.

Pharmacists in our province have answered the call to protect Manitoba. Since day one of this pandemic, all pharmacy staff rose to the challenge of providing care to all Manitobans. Whether it be ensuring medication supply was adequate to the public, helping and training individuals to use life-saving medication to prevent overdoses or providing education to reduce vaccine hesitancy, pharmacy staff in our province truly helped provide such essential resources.

As a pharmacy owner and practising pharmacist, he has been leading a team at Leila Pharmacy to meet the needs of our community, especially when it comes to providing counselling, support or vaccinations. Not only has his team provided COVID-19 vaccination shots to Manitobans, but have successfully held numerous drive-through clinics which provided vaccinations to those who were unable to attend supersites or offices due to anxiety.

Mr. Lai and his team also share a desire to support those who live with a disability. His clinic has been able to vaccinate many who do—would have not been able to get their shots via traditional means.

Most notably, Mr. Lai was honoured among with fellow pharmacist and Waverley constituent, Arnold Chew, to serve as a regional manager on our Province's Vaccine Implementation Task Force for the Leila supersite.

He started as an immunizer for the task force and then became a clinical supervisor. In May, he was promoted to be a clinic manager and shortly after promoted to oversee the entire operation at the supersite. Since September, Mr. Lai has been the regional manager for data quality and insurance.

As such, Mr. Lai has truly served the community. Every time I use my vaccine QR code, my heart goes out to Mr. Lai and all other heroes that have tirelessly worked to ensure Manitobans are safe.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleague to join me in honouring Mr. Carey Lai for his dedication to service and protection during this pandemic.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

### University of Manitoba

**Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley):** I am pleased to stand today to speak on behalf of 70 faculty members of the University of Manitoba who reside in the Wolseley constituency.

The PC government has been interfering in the U of M Faculty Association's free and fair bargaining since 2016, and this has had significant negative repercussions.

U of M is facing a crisis: not being able to recruit and retain talent, and lost opportunities for innovation. Among research-intense universities in Canada, U of M is ranked the lowest for salaries. Top candidates don't apply or they withdraw from the recruitment process when they learn about the pay scales.

There have been frequent failed searches, which has cost tens of thousands of dollars in the departments of physics, education and business, among others.

Nursing faculty are retiring early due to being undervalued and overworked, but the university cannot attract new hires, even though there's an urgent need to train a new generation of nurses. Asper business lost 10 faculty members since 2017, and senior scholars are simply applying elsewhere, taking the large grants they hold in health research to other provinces.

Indigenous faculty are in high demand nationally, but U of M can't attract or recruit these scholars, which means they cannot strengthen the indigenization of programs such as social work or diversify their faculty overall.

All of this has negative impacts on the student experience: undergrads can't get the courses they need and graduate students have fewer opportunities for mentorship and face increasing pressure to leave the province.

Government interference in bargaining has real cumulative impact on students' education, which is seriously harmed by these recruitment and retention issues.

The University of Manitoba is an enormous addition to the greater public good of this province. The positive economic, cultural and social effects that ripple outward from the campus are substantial. Government interference erodes the university at all levels, and thus erodes the status and well-being of—

**Madam Speaker:** The member's time has expired.

### Boyne Care Holdings PCH

**Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland):** Madam Speaker, history has repeated itself with the first phase of the 105-bed Boyne Care Holdings personal-care home in Carman officially opened August 27th.

The original 70-bed Boyne Lodge PCH was built by the community in 1967. Care needs, population growth and an aging facility—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Pedersen:** —were determining factors to build a new facility. [*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

\* (10:20)

**Mr. Pedersen:** The municipalities of Carman, Dufferin, Grey, Roland and Thompson worked together in creating Boyne Care Holdings and, together with private donations, have raised in excess of \$17 million of the total \$39 million project cost.

This new facility contains eight pods of nine to 10 residents. Each pod features individual bedrooms and bathrooms with a lounge area and a kitchen for light dining. The exterior patios, walkways and park-like atmosphere create a pleasant experience for residents, families and staff alike.

Phase 2 has begun, with renovations to the existing Boyne Lodge building adding an additional 26 beds in the same pod-like structure on the second floor with offices and administration on the first floor.

Phase 3 calls for modernizing the adjacent Boyne Towers senior's apartment to an aging-in-place facility.

Thank you to the five communities, the private donors and the Manitoba government for making this facility become a reality. This new facility is unique to Manitoba, not only in design, but in the collaboration between the Province, Southern Health-Santé Sud, the municipalities and the residents of the surrounding communities.

Our seniors deserve our care after spending a lifetime contributing to our communities, and these new facilities will ensure this care for the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

### **Stephen Mymko**

**Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona):** Today I rise to honour a great Manitoban and fellow citizen of Transcona, Stephen Mymko, better known as Steve. In my previous career as a teacher in Transcona, I had the privilege of working with two of Steve's daughters, Brittany while I was at Arthur Day and Danielle while I was at John Gunn.

Steve is a tireless community volunteer who began giving his time as a 16-year-old at Gateway where he coached hockey and softball. In his early 20s, as he was just starting his family, he moved into Transcona and began this sort of journey around to check out the diamonds. He noticed that they were in poor repair and set out to do something about it.

Madam Speaker, what first began as an effort to improve baseball diamonds in east Winnipeg soon grew into a desire to create the East Winnipeg Sports Association and a brand-new recreation park complete with not only baseball diamonds but also soccer pitches, ultimate Frisbee fields, a tobogganing hill, walking paths and meeting place where all could gather.

In order to fulfill this dream, Steve needed to go out and seek funding for this complex. He personally applied for and wrote numerous grant applications, began to court the local business community for sponsorship dollars. After meeting with people at Buhler, Casera Credit Union, New Flyer, Winnipeg Foundation, Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries, Waste Connections, Qualico and numerous other sponsors, Steve was able to gather the necessary support to begin to construction of this state-of-the-art recreation facility that services all of Winnipeg and the surrounding area.

What makes this park truly unique, however, is the concerted effort to create a natural habitat for the area flora and fauna. All along its walking paths, you will now see and experience a wide variety of birds, wildlife that have returned to an area that was once degraded farmland and barren landscape.

Madam Speaker and members of this Assembly, please join me in congratulating Stephen for his years of volunteer work and for the creation of the Buhler Recreation Park.

### **Allen Dowhan**

**Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin):** The city and constituency of Dauphin lost a strong community advocate and true friend with the passing of Mayor Al Dowhan on 'sempتمبر' 21st, 2021.

The many great qualities that Al lived by every day were instilled at a early age while growing up in Winnipegosis, Manitoba. The importance of hard work, family, education, community, respect and culture guided Al, and, in return, Allen inspired countless others to do the same.

Allen attended his first City of Dauphin council meeting in November 1998 and was named deputy mayor in 2001, 2002 and again from 2010 to 2017, before serving as mayor.

During his 23 years as elected municipal representative, Al served 'tirely'—tirelessly as a proponent for sustainability, and under his guidance, Dauphin was awarded the 2017 Manitoba Sustainable Community award.

On top of his sustainability focus, Allen was also an active volunteer and community builder and strived to make his community a better one in which to live and raise families. Following graduation at Winnipegosis Collegiate, Allen held careers in both finance and teaching, and was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society of Management Accountants.

In 1986, Allen's love of education led him to accept a teaching position at Dauphin's Assiniboine Community College. For the next 25 years, Allen served to advocate strongly for investment and development of skills, training and post secondary opportunities at the Parkland campus.

As a citizen and as an elected official, Allen Dowhan most certainly contributed significantly and positively towards the vitality and strength of community spirit that the Dauphin region is known

for, and he leaves a proud legacy of love, selflessness and pride towards community building.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba lost a strong community leader in Allen Dowhan. Al's sense of 'huvour' and never-ending determination to make Dauphin a better place for everyone will be missed.

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### Manitoba Hydro Cost of Labour Dispute

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Brian Pallister attacked Manitoba Hydro at every turn. He froze the wages of workers and he caused a months-long strike at Hydro that nobody in the province wanted—nobody except for the PC MLAs on the other side of this House.

And today we finally know how much this strike cost Manitobans: it cost \$18 million—\$18.4 million. That's how much this Hydro strike cost Manitobans.

Will the PC MLAs opposite simply do the right thing and pay it back now?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier):** I appreciate the member opposite raising a question about Manitoba Hydro. Madam Speaker, I would implore the NDP to continue to raise questions about Manitoba Hydro because it gives us an opportunity to remind Manitobans what they did to Manitoba Hydro: billions of dollars wasted on putting a transmission line on the wrong side of the province.

And I understand why the member opposite is upset and I understand why he yells, Madam Speaker. He's trying to stop Manitobans from remembering, remember the billions of dollars that were wasted, that has put Manitoba Hydro in jeopardy.

We've dedicated ourselves to fixing the finances of Manitoba Hydro. We'll continue to do that work. It'll take us a long time and we'll continue to ensure that Manitoba Hydro is there for—a public entity for all Manitobans.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** You know, the frustrating thing about the PCs is that they're so wasteful with the money of hard-working Manitobans. I just can't stand it. We on this side of the House simply will not abide by it.

We have the documents that prove, Madam Speaker—in fact I'll table the documents for the benefit of the PC MLAs—that show this unnecessary Hydro

strike cost the good, hard-working people of Manitoba \$18 million. And what did Brian Pallister and his PC MLAs win for that \$18 million? Nothing. They lost at arbitration and they were forced, because of us delaying Bill 16, to give Hydro workers a fair deal.

Will they simply admit this was wrong and pay back the \$18 million?

**Mr. Goertzen:** It must be a Friday morning, Madam Speaker. The member opposite didn't have any time to develop questions that would be beneficial to him and his party because he now wants to talk about money and leaving money for Manitobans.

Of course he doesn't need to be reminded, although Manitobans may need to be reminded and we will continue to remind Manitobans, of the effort that the NDP took to take money out of the pockets of Manitobans, Madam Speaker. They raised the PST. They expanded it to a number of different areas. And now, when we're trying to fix that and reduce the PST on issues like personal services, he again doubles down and says he's going to vote against that.

He still won't let go of the legacy of Greg Selinger and the NDP. He wants to continue to have taxes high in Manitoba. We'll continue to try to make life more affordable for Manitobans and stop the NDP from taking money from Manitobans, Madam Speaker.

\* (10:30)

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, I'm surprised that the interim PC leader doesn't think that \$18 million is worth asking about. Must be nice for him and Brian Pallister, not to have to worry about \$18 million.

But for us on this side of the House and the good, hard-working people of Manitoba out there, especially the Hydro workers who bore the brunt of this \$18 million in cost, it absolutely is worth—  
*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Kinew:** —asking about.

It's not bad enough that they've privatized Manitoba Hydro entities, it's not bad enough that they engaged in a multi-billion-dollar cover-up to try and undermine our most important Crown corporation, all in the name of privatization, but now they take \$18 million away from hard-working Manitobans.

Will the interim PC leader simply admit that it's wrong and apologize to Manitoba Hydro workers?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'm not accepting any of the premise of the question, Madam Speaker.

The NDP and the Leader of the Official Opposition wasted \$18 million on Hydro before breakfast every day, Madam Speaker. Billions of dollars were wasted on putting a transmission line on the wrong side of the province of Manitoba. They ploughed through hundreds of thousands of trees, went on the wrong side. They ignored all the experts. They ignored the experts at Manitoba Hydro, Madam Speaker—[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Goertzen:** —they wouldn't—[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Goertzen:** He can yell as loud as wants, Madam Speaker, it doesn't make any difference to me because I'll continue to remind Manitobans of the billions of dollars that were wasted. And because of that, they added onto the debt of Manitoba Hydro, they put it in jeopardy in terms of the rates for those who—ratepayers to Manitoba Hydro.

We're committed to fixing the finances, both in the province of Manitoba as well as Manitoba Hydro. Where they destroyed it, we will fix it, Madam Speaker.

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

#### **Manitoba Public Insurance Autopac Premiums and Rebate**

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Cut through the bluster and this much is true: when Brian Pallister and the PC MLAs interfere with Crown corporations in Manitoba, it always costs you money.

We've now become aware of a scheme to take more than \$100 million from Manitobans very—some—via some very shady tactics at Manitoba Public Insurance. It's a lot of money; we're talking about \$113 million. That would work out to a 10 per cent rate reduction for everybody who has to pay an Autopac premium.

Did Brian Pallister and the PCs tell Manitobans about this scheme? Did they reveal it at committee? Did they publish a directive to Manitoba Public Insurance? No, no, no.

Now that this scheme has been revealed, will they simply admit that it was wrong?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier):** Well, the member opposite wrote the book on shady activity, so I'm not going to question him on his knowledge of that, Madam Speaker.

But I would say, if he were to look at Crown corporations—in fact, I think that he was there. On June 10th, he asked a question of the president and the CEO of MPI about the driver's licence branch. And the president responded specifically, we're looking at the possibility of the extension line of business to cover these costs, as the extension line provide certain excesses of money.

So disclosed at public committee, in response to a question by the Leader of the Official Opposition. It was then filed with the PUB on June 24th. It'll go to the PUB on Monday.

Boy, this is the worst cover-up in Manitoba history, if he considers this a cover-up, Madam Speaker. Good grief.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Yes, they really are missing Brian Pallister on that side of the House when their leader stands up and says, yes, it was a cover-up and we did a terrible job at this cover-up, and that passes for an applause line these days with the failing Progressive Conservatives.

The issue at hand, Madam Speaker, is that this party developed a scheme to take \$113 million away from the good, hard-working people of Manitoba. Did they put out a press release on this? Did they make an announcement? Did they tell the people of Manitoba, you know what, you could be paying 10 per cent less on your Autopac premiums next year? No, absolutely not.

As with Hydro, so goes MPI. It's always cover-up, it's always schemes and it always costs you money.

Will the failing interim PC leader simply admit that it's wrong?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I know that the Leader of the Official Opposition had written his questions and he doesn't want to veer from the script that he had, Madam Speaker.

I'll try to remind him again, because clearly he forgot about the question that he asked at committee.

He asked a question on June 10th at Crown Corporations Committee, and the president and the CEO of MPI indicated that they were looking to take some of the fund from the extension line to cover some of the costs for the driver's licence side for the technology increase—for the enhancement of technology, Madam Speaker. It's in Hansard.

Now, to remind him, Hansard isn't written in disappearing ink. It stays there forever, Madam Speaker. It's still there.

And then they went and they took the application and brought it to the Public Utilities Board, Madam Speaker. And now it's going to the Public Utilities Board on Monday. Public in June, public in July, public on Monday. The member doesn't know what he's talking about. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** You know, Madam Speaker, I don't know who signed off on the legislative strategy of if we just admit the scheme in question period maybe it will go away, but the bottom line is this: it cost Manitobans \$113 million.

And what we've seen so far in question period today confirms everything that Manitobans don't like about the PC Party. First, \$18 million at Manitoba Hydro wasn't worth the leader getting out of bed for, and now \$113 million in additional Autopac premiums that you have to pay for, Madam Speaker, well, apparently that's not worth their time either. It's absolutely shameful and it shows just how much they are out of touch with the average Manitoban, who is struggling to get by during these difficult times.

Will they simply admit that it was wrong and commit that they will never interfere in a Crown corporation again?

**Mr. Goertzen:** He could speak to the member of Concordia, who would remind him of how the NDP tried to lift \$20 million out of MPI and drop it into the universities—out of the Crown corporation.

In response to a question, Madam Speaker, the president of MPI indicated to the Leader of the Opposition, who now has selective memory or has amnesia, that they were looking to keep the money within the corporation; that they would bring this to the public in matter—they would bring it to the PUB so that they could have a determination—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Goertzen:** —of it. Now they don't like the PUB.

It was disclosed in June. It was submitted in July. It'll go to the PUB on Monday, Madam Speaker. That is the way the process is supposed to work.

### **Manitoba Hydro Cost of Labour Dispute**

**Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James):** Eighteen million dollars. Eighteen million dollars is the bill that Brian Pallister left Manitobans for his unnecessary Hydro strike. That's money that every single person who turns on a light or heats their home will have to pay. That's the cost of Brian Pallister interfering in Manitoba Hydro. But the bill isn't being paid by Pallister or this PC government. Instead, it's being paid for by Manitobans.

Will the PCs do what's right and will they send the bill for Pallister's Hydro strike to Brian Pallister himself instead of passing it on to Manitobans?

**Hon. Ron Schuler (Acting Minister of Crown Services):** And the fact that there is an outstanding bill from Manitoba Hydro in the tune of billions of dollars for a Hydro line that goes the wrong way, for overruns at all kinds of projects—including Keeyask, Madam Speaker.

\* (10:40)

The question, then, is should that overrun, should those bills all go to the Leader of the Opposition and the NDP, who got us into this mess? Should they be paying for that as well?

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

**Mr. Sala:** Eighteen million dollars is what Brian Pallister's Hydro strike cost Manitobans. He forced a strike with thousands of front-line Hydro workers, made them go without pay and walk the line because of his illegal wage-freeze mandates. And now he's left Manitobans to foot the bill for his failures.

That's wrong. Manitobans shouldn't have to pay. It should be the PC government.

The question is simple: Why are they making Manitobans pay millions of dollars for their interference?

**Mr. Schuler:** Madam Speaker, it was the Leader of the Opposition and it was the NDP who forced Manitoba Hydro to put a hydro long-line on the wrong side of the province. They forced Manitoba

Hydro to build projects that ran over by billions of dollars. That's going to cost Manitobans in interest costs for generations to come.

The question is will the Leader of the Opposition get up and apologize and will he offer to pay for all those cost overruns for forcing Hydro to put a line on the wrong side of the province? Will the Leader of the Opposition stand up and do the right thing and apologize?

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

**Mr. Sala:** You know, the responses we've heard from the interim Premier (Mr. Goertzen) and this minister just highlight how absolutely disconnected the PC Party is from regular—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Sala:** —Manitobans.

We know what Brian Pallister's interference in Hydro does. It makes life more expensive for regular Manitobans and it means millions more in costs to heat our homes and turn on the lights—over \$18 million more.

That's wrong, and the PCs should be doing what's right and they should stop interfering. And the PCs and Brian Pallister should be paying the bill, not Manitobans.

Are they going to send that \$18-million bill to Manitobans, yes or no?

**Mr. Schuler:** Well, Madam Speaker, you can see an NDP party that is absolutely disconnected from Manitobans when they drove up the costs of Keeyask, of Bipole III and everything else to do with that project.

The question is—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Schuler:** —who's going to pay, who's going to actually pay for that boondoggle of a mess that the NDP got—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Schuler:** —Manitoba Hydro in? Will it be the Leader of the Opposition? He won't even recognize that he is—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I cannot hear.

Just a reminder to members, please. This is getting a little ridiculous, the commentary that is happening right now and the heckling. I'm having trouble hearing, and especially when we have somebody remote, it's almost impossible to hear what they're saying. So I'm going to please ask members to stop with the conversations that are going on and the heckling that is happening when members are trying to respectfully answer or ask questions.

I'll allow the minister to conclude his statement.

**Mr. Schuler:** The fact that the Leader of the Opposition is angry about this information, we understand. Can you imagine how angry Manitobans are that they are stuck with billions of dollars of debt because of his actions? [*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Was I not just understood in my comments?

I am going to ask members—and if you want to start me to name you, I will, and that can go down in Hansard for history—so I'm going to ask members to show some respect in here.

This is a democratic institution and I think showing some level of respect towards democracy would be a very good thing today.

### **Manitoba Public Insurance Autopac Premiums and Rebate**

**Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples):** Madam Speaker, the FIPPA document, which I table, shows Manitoba Public Insurance transferred \$60 million in March of this year from ratepayers to the governmental costs. There was no press release, no transparency. There will be another transfer next March too.

That's—the money should go back to ratepayers, not Brian Pallister's government.

Will the minister give the money to the people it belongs to: Manitobans?

**Hon. Ron Schuler (Acting Minister of Crown Services):** That question is very telling because, at committee, Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation indicated that they are coming up with a new program. They're going to get Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation up to the standard of every other insurance corporation in North America. That costs money. It is a program for all of MPI.

And, Madam Speaker, we now have the NDP, who one day say everything should go to the PUB—now we have the NDP saying that it should go out on a press release. They're nothing more than a pickerel

on a dock, flip-flopping every day, depending on what's happening is—depending where they are on this issue.

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

**Mr. Sandhu:** Madam Speaker, over \$113 million was taken from ratepayers. This translates to a 10 per cent rate reduction for every driver in Manitoba. Or you can put it another way: this translates to a \$100-million tax on Manitobans. That's wrong.

This interference in MPI is costing Manitobans money.

Will the minister stop interfering and make sure Manitoba drivers get the rebate they deserve?

**Mr. Schuler:** Well, this must be pickerel-on-a-dock day for the NDP. They flip-flop on absolutely every issue.

This is a program that gets Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation up to an international standard. What the NDP is saying is that we should let MPI become derelict and give a refund to the public, which they opposed the last time a refund went out. Madam Speaker, we get incredibly inconsistent messaging out of the NDP.

This was put in front of the committee. The Leader of the Opposition asked the question. He got the answer: it's going to the Public Utilities Board. It's going to be a public conversation.

You know, the NDP is never happy. Just like a pickerel on the dick—on a dock, and they just flip-flop back and forth.

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

**Mr. Sandhu:** Madam Speaker, Manitobans should know what is going on at MPI—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Sandhu:** —what secret decisions are being kept from them. That's wrong, and those decisions are costing Manitobans millions of dollars.

Our request is simple: Will the minister make sure Manitobans get the money that belongs to them? Yes or no?

**Mr. Schuler:** Answered June 10th, 2021, page 9.

The CEO and president Eric Haberlin *[phonetic]* makes it very clear: we're looking at the possibility of the extension line of business to cover for these costs,

as the extension line provides certain excesses of money.

It was made public. It was made public on June the 10th. It's going to be discussed on Monday at the Public Utilities Board. I would suggest to members of the opposition they allow the process to continue.

We respect the Public Utilities Board—something that they never did when they were in.

### **Menstrual Product Availability Request to Supply Schools**

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** Madam Speaker, earlier today the Ontario government announced that it will offer free menstrual products at schools. They will be distributing 6 million free menstrual products each year to all 72 school boards in Ontario starting this current school year.

On this side of the House, we believe that pads and tampons should be free for students. In fact, in the last election even some members opposite said that they would consider it, but two years later and nothing has changed.

Will the minister commit today to making menstrual products free and accessible in all Manitoba schools?

**Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education):** I do appreciate the member's question and I certainly want to congratulate the province of Ontario—the arrangement they have made with Shoppers Drug Mart. Quite frankly it's been a—a private company come to the table to support female students. We'll certainly appreciate that offer that Shoppers has made to the government of Ontario and to the students there.

\* (10:50)

Certainly, we're committed on this side to look further and see what else we can do to assist our female students here in Manitoba.

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

**MLA Marcelino:** Madam Speaker, quote: We know that a lot of girls can't afford to have supplies on hand and that this can lead them to missing school. Unquote.

Who said that? It was the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires), Madam Speaker, two years ago. Members opposite are clearly aware of these issues facing students in Manitoba but they still have not done the important work to address period inequity.

October 11th is International Day of the Girl, but here in Manitoba many girls, as well as other students who menstruate, are missing class because they don't have access to necessary period products.

I ask again: Will the Minister of Health commit to ensuring that menstrual products are available free of charge to any student who needs them at school?

**Mr. Cullen:** I way say—will say to the members opposite that our government has been increasing the budgets, the allocations to school divisions, over the last number of years—1.5 per cent—1.56 per cent increase this year alone. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Cullen:** The school boards clearly determined that they want autonomy to make those types of decisions. We're allowing school boards to make those types of decisions. We're allowing the local decisions to be made at the local level.

School boards can make those decisions, they can decide where they want to allocate—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Cullen:** —resources. We do know many school boards are making those allocations to supplying these products to our female students.

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

**MLA Marcelino:** Ontario can take this issue seriously, yet I don't see a single department here taking this issue seriously.

The Education Minister clearly isn't comfortable talking about this issue. The Minister responsible for the Status of Women (Mrs. Cox) tries to talk about USB data blockers instead of pads.

Period isn't an unparliamentary word. It is our job as legislators to address inequities when we see them occurring, and period inequity is a real issue.

Will the Education Minister please take responsibility for this issue and ensure that menstrual products are free and accessible in all schools in our province?

**Mr. Cullen:** Well, clearly the NDP didn't take this issue seriously for 17 years, Madam Speaker.

Now we're clearly looking at it. We're investing in education. We just recently announced our poverty and education committee. We're allowing those—that

committee to investigate poverty and how it relates to education here in Manitoba.

That committee will be reporting back to our Poverty Reduction Strategy committee of Cabinet. And certainly we look forward to positive results coming out of that committee as well.

So, Madam Speaker, we're making investments in education. School boards are allowed to make those decisions on where that money is allocated. We're looking at the poverty and education component, looking forward to recommendations coming forward on that front as well.

We take this issue very seriously.

### **Online Administration of Park Passes Revenue to Out-of-Province Company**

**Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley):** According to a freedom of information request that I will table for this House, it appears that nearly \$600,000 of new administration costs paid by Manitobans trying to enjoy our parks has been leaving Manitoba to go to Texas.

Why? Because this government chose to outsource online administration of park passes to a Texas-based company.

Can the minister please explain why she would choose to hand over hundreds of thousands of dollars to the US instead of investing it in our parks or keeping it in the pockets of Manitobans?

**Hon. Cathy Cox (Acting Minister of Conservation and Climate):** Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Again, I would like to reiterate: our parks are not for sale.

And I would like to remind the member opposite that it was their government, the NDP government, who planned to raise cottage fees—lease fees for cottagers—by over 700 per cent, ensuring that cottagers who owned those beautiful cottages—small, tiny cottages, intergenerational cottages—were planning—they could lose their cottages.

They didn't care. And what did they call those cottagers? They called them fat cats—the premier and the Conservation minister.

We will not take any examples from any of you across the floor.

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

**Ms. Naylor:** Madam Speaker, I just want to be clear that Manitobans are paying hundreds of thousands of

dollars more per year on administrative costs for park passes. Not a dime of that is staying in the province. That's not actually something that can be argued; it's a fact. It's not being invested in our parks, none of it's going towards making our parks more affordable or accessible for people to enjoy.

I would like the minister, or the minister that is speaking on the minister's behalf, to explain just why we're sending over half a million dollars of Manitoba's hard-earned dollars out of this country.

**Mrs. Cox:** Thank you again for that question.

I would suggest, though, however, that that member maybe get outside of the Perimeter and go and actually visit some of our parks. You know, Birds Hill park, we've made huge investment in our parks there.

Over in Turtle Mountain, again—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mrs. Cox:** Again, in Turtle Mountain, Grand Beach, Winnipeg Beach, you left tens of millions of dollars to deferred maintenance, and we got it done.

We also have a \$20-million endowment fund that is provided to individuals, to organizations, to friends of parks to be able to upgrade those parks and decide on the projects that they want to complete to ensure that our parks are better for all Manitobans.

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

**Ms. Naylor:** That's rich, because I have no problem: I can afford the extra \$4.50 anytime I want to book to go to a Manitoban park, which I do on a regular basis.

But Manitobans have been clear. They want all aspects of their parks to remain public. This is not an affordable change for many Manitobans.

Does the Minister of Conservation and Climate (Mrs. Guillemard) and her government simply not listen to Manitobans? They just continue to use this Texas-based company to charge Manitobans more and not invest a dime of that into our parks.

Will the minister backtrack on the privatization and commit today to no privatizing of any more parks or park services?

**Mrs. Cox:** Again, our parks are not for sale.

And I would actually like to educate the members opposite that it was Duff Roblin, a Conservative

premier, that first established our Manitoba parks system.

You know, we wanted to ensure that parks were available and accessible for future generations, and that's exactly what we're doing, Madam Speaker.

#### **U of M Faculty Association Labour Dispute Staff Retention and Recruitment Concerns**

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** At the beginning of the pandemic, in April 2020, this government demanded cuts of up to 30 per cent from colleges and universities, cuts that would've instantly shuttered the University of Winnipeg and Brandon University.

Now, the government reversed themselves and told the colleges and universities they would only get the money if they graduated people for—needed for the job market. We desperately need graduates for nurses, computer science and mental health, but when I talked to faculty who live in St. Boniface from UMFA, they made it clear they don't have enough people to actually teach people in those departments and they can't attract or retain faculty because U of M salaries, research and more lag badly behind many universities across Canada.

How can the university possibly meet labour market targets set by the—this government when the government won't fund the programs to 'tactally' teach them?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier):** Madam Speaker, this is a government that strongly supports not only post-secondary education but outcomes from post-secondary education. We know—and there are many stories on this side of the House and many stories, I'm sure, on that side of the House, of individuals who have had their lives transformed because of post-secondary education.

So I look forward to continuing. Our government continues working with post-secondary education. We know that there's additional and historic investment in the training of nurses, is one example, Madam Speaker, to try to fix the challenges that came under the NDP when there was a shortage of nurses. And we are putting hundreds of millions of dollars into the training of nurses. That is just one example of the commitment that we've made to post-secondary education.

\* (11:00)

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

### **Bargaining Interference Concerns**

**Mr. Lamont:** When this government was first elected, they directly interfered with bargaining at the University of Manitoba by ordering them to force a wage freeze or face funding clawbacks. That decision by this government meant U of M was fined millions of dollars for violating labour laws.

I sat as a student representative on the board of governors at the U of M in the 1990s during a strike. This is not normal interference. This is doing an end run around the board of governors, the university and its employees.

University autonomy matters for a reason. It's partly so that research and teaching can be free and independent from political interference, but it's also so that we let institutions be run by people who know how to do it.

Is this government going to let bargaining run its course and fund universities properly, or will they simply abolish the board of governors and run it themselves?

**Mr. Goertzen:** This is a government and a minister responsible who value post-secondary education.

When it comes to labour negotiations, we've seen just recently tentative agreements reached through labour negotiations—that we certainly value fair and free labour negotiations.

I want to inform the House that the minister and I will be meeting with all the presidents of the universities just this afternoon. We look forward to a productive discussion. It's another way that we're reaching out and listening to the various leaders within our community, and that included in those leaders are post-secondary education leaders. And we look forward to a productive meeting this afternoon with all the presidents from the universities.

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

### **U of M Faculty Association Labour Dispute Bargaining Interference Concerns**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Madam Speaker, the government has directly interfered in bargaining between the University of Manitoba administration and faculty. The actions of government are contrary to the principle that universities are independent.

The Premier, who has expressed pride in his actions, has created a major problem for the University of Manitoba when it comes to faculty recruitment, faculty retention, the capacity to have enough faculty to teach the courses being delivered and the ability of the university to carry out high-quality research.

The government has also said this has been the normal practice for years.

Can the government give specific earlier examples of when it was normal practice in the case of university faculty bargaining?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier):** The member is wrong in much of his assertion. He is right, though, that we do have pride in our universities. I spent eight years at the University of Manitoba. I know there are many members on this side of the House who spent many years in post-secondary education in Manitoba. I'm sure there are many on the other side, as well, Madam Speaker.

We know that it can be transformative for individuals when they have the opportunity to go to post-secondary education. We want that to be a good experience. We want it to be a positive experience. We want it to be a rewarding experience for them throughout their life.

That is the reason why we're reaching out to the universities, hearing about how the pandemic has affected their ability to deliver programs. I look forward to a productive meeting with the presidents of the post-secondary institutions this afternoon, together with our very capable and engaged Minister of Advanced Education.

### **Mental Health and Addictions Government Support Initiatives**

**Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere):** Since 2019, this government has invested \$52.3 million in innovative new mental health initiatives. These include new Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinics, youth service hubs and the creation of 100 new supportive recovery housing units.

As this week is mental health awareness week, could the Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery update the House on how the government plans to build on these successful mental health initiatives?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery):** I thank the member for Rossmere for this very important question.

We're engaging with the public to develop a five-year action plan for mental health, wellness and recovery, and over 300 people have already participated in round table sessions in communities across Manitoba, including Thompson, Selkirk, Morden, Winkler, Winnipeg and Brandon, just to name a few.

We're listening to health-care experts and people with lived experience who have faced mental health challenges as well as substance abuse challenges. We want to hear from Manitobans from every part of our province.

I thank the over 1,300 people who have participated in our online survey and encourage Manitobans to visit—

**Madam Speaker:** The member's time has expired.

#### **U of M Faculty Association Labour Dispute Bargaining Interference Concerns**

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** We—just yesterday, I asked the Minister of Advanced Education to show respect to those who work at universities and colleges with fair negotiations. He chose to evade and not answer those questions.

Now, the day before that, I asked him three times in Estimates whether he knew anything about negotiating mandates at the University of Manitoba. He claimed there's no involvement. However, we know that their—were involved in placing negotiation mandates at U of M that once again threaten the workers there and put us closer to a strike.

Now, why is this minister evading accountability and carrying on with the same interference, just like Brian Pallister?

**Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration):** I thank the member from St. Vital for the question.

Just to clarify yesterday: I'm not going to stand here and apologize or stop thanking health-care workers. I can't help it that the member refrains from asking any questions. The last question he asked was May 12th, Madam Speaker.

So, to answer his question today, straightforward and very clear to the member, government is not the employer. Strikes are not going to represent our students very, very well. We strongly encourage that UMFA and the University of Manitoba get back to the bargaining table. And misinformation being put on the record by both the NDP and the Liberals are not going to help this move forward at all.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Have a happy Thanksgiving weekend.

**Madam Speaker:** The time for oral questions has expired.

### **PETITIONS**

#### **Louise Bridge**

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

The background to this petition is as follows.

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

(2) The current structure will undoubtedly be declared unsafe in a few years, as it has deteriorated extensively, becoming functionally obsolete, subject to more frequent unplanned repairs and cannot be widened to accommodate future traffic capacity.

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

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

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

In 2014 the new City administration did not make use of available federal infrastructure funds, and instead decided to fund an off-the-list, low-priority Waverley underpass.

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

\* (11:10)

(2) To urge the provincial government to recommend that the City of Winnipeg keep the old bridge fully open to traffic while the new bridge is under construction and consider the feasibility of keeping it open for active transportation in the future.

(3) To urge the provincial government to financially assist the City of Winnipeg in keeping the old bridge open for active transportation.

This petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

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

Are there any further petitions? Grievances?

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

#### House Business

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** I have a leave request. Could you please canvass the House for leave to make the following permanent change to the Estimates sequence: move Finance before Health and Seniors Care in room 254?

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave to make the following permanent change to the Estimates sequence: move Finance before Health and Seniors Care in room 254. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

\* \* \*

**Mr. Goertzen:** Could you please resolve into Committee of Supply?

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the chair.

## COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

### (Concurrent Sections)

#### ROOM 254

#### FINANCE

\* (11:30)

**Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook):** Good morning, 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 Finance.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** You know what, I'm just going to yield to the questions right off the bat and—to expedite the process so we can get as much information as possible out.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the minister.

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

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** No, we do not. We just wish to proceed to questioning.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the member.

Under Manitoba practice, debate of the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line items 7.1(a), contained in resolution 7.1.

At this time we invite—oh, sorry—and we ask that the minister introduce the staff in attendance.

**Mr. Fielding:** We've got Richard Groen, our deputy minister, supported by Silvester—Silvester, how do you say your last name?—Komlodi. And Ryan—Ryan, how do you say your last name?—Klos. It's a real tough one, Klos.

So we're supported by our administrative officials in my Department of Finance and Treasury Board.

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

**Mr. Wasyliv:** We're seeking a global discussion.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank you. It is agreed, then, 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. Wasyliw:** Just wanted to let the minister know that we recently received a FIPPA request back from Municipal Relations that showed some analysis on the impact of education property tax on pipelines, railways, 'multinational' corporations and their owners, and it showed that the pipelines and railways would save \$29 million annually with the complete elimination of the education property tax, and the commercial number was blacked out.

\* (11:40)

I'm wondering if the minister could explain if any analysis has been done on the education tax rebates for commercial property.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Before I recognize the minister, I would like to inform the committee that when the speaker has one minute left remaining, I will wave this sign up to let you—just give you some warning that you have a minute left.

And, also, because we're doing this virtually, I want to make sure that the minister gives a proper hand signal to make sure that I don't recognize him before he is ready.

**Mr. Fielding:** To answer the question, first of all, there's 580–five–658,000 property owners that got some sort of benefit, and the average property owner in the city of Winnipeg, I think, was around—close to—just over—just close to \$500, but it really depends how big your property was.

But the numbers were \$84 million for farm land and commercial.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So I'm wondering if the minister, then, can clarify how much he anticipates commercial properties will receive in rebates with the elimination.

**Mr. Fielding:** Yes, Mr. Chair. Yes, there's—50,000 commercial property owners and other properties that we categorize got a 10 per cent rebate. As people may or may not recall, it's a 25 per cent rebate for all residential properties, so there's in the tunes of 650,000 Manitobans got a property tax break, which is really important and, again, 50,000 property owners got a 10 per cent rebate, as you—or, sorry, commercial properties got a 10 per cent rebate and that's in the tunes of \$48 million.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Has there been any analysis done for secondary properties?

**Mr. Fielding:** Yes, just to reiterate. So, there's 658,000 Manitobans that own property in, really, in the province, got a much-needed education property tax cut. Now, for the most part it really depends on how big your property was and the assessed value and all that sorts, but suffice it to say over 658,000 Manitobans got that support.

You know, if you're talking about secondary properties, that'd be about 110,000 properties—secondary properties got a rebate because they own property in the province of Manitoba.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister can tell us how much they anticipate the secondary properties will receive in rebates with the elimination?

\* (11:50)

**Mr. Fielding:** And so, the secondary properties—now, you've got to remember, with the secondary properties what happens is you can't get a credit, so part of this whole process, there's actually property tax reduction. So the government is committed to 50 per cent reduction over the next two years: 25 per cent for this budgetary year, 25 per cent next year.

Our government is committed to, you know, phasing it out over 10-year periods. We haven't talked about the future years. And so—and just to nuance the point, if you're a secondary-property owner—so let's say you own a, you know, whatever, cottage or you own a, maybe a secondary property that you, you know, make some income off of, you don't get the credit, right?

So the plan, again, is to reduce the education property tax but also phase out the credit. Now, a part of that—the credit—we've done a couple things to address that: No. 1, we've frozen property taxes for two years; frozen rent control for two years—we've put a zero per cent and we also put about \$31 million more in the Rent Assist program so people were able to get more supports.

But to answer your question specifically, it's \$40 million this year. That's 25 per cent. So I'll, you know, get you to times that by four is the total amount.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Yes. We've recently received an internal document that explained that residential and farm property owners will receive an average rebate of \$358. Apartment owners and landlords will receive an average rebate of \$1,700, and as you're fully aware, the renters are obviously losing the rebate.

So I'm wondering if the minister can justify how these tax rebates are fair to the average Manitoban?

**Mr. Fielding:** So, thank you for the question. And—so we truly believe that, No. 1, you know, people that are paying education property taxes—paying too much, and that's why we've committed to phasing it out over a 10-year period. We've—did, obviously, the first 25 per cent this year, 25 per cent next year.

We wish that all parties in—Legislature would have supported that because we think people are paying too much, but that wasn't the case, so I'll let you, you know, talk to your constituents why you didn't support that.

What I would say on that—back into the equation—No. 1, you have 650,000 people that own property who are getting benefits, like, a good amount of money, too, back. And the rent portions of things for renters; we wanted to support the renters as well. So, what we did is we put a cap on—essentially a rent control, essentially, for two years; that's a part of it.

And so what we did for there—and so benefits—so, for instance, a renter would get the benefit of the zero per cent rent control for two years. And then, obviously, we also built the regs, if people are applying for the above-rent guidelines, then they would have to take in consideration what the landlord got back in terms of the rental there.

So we did some analysis, and so just breaking it down, maybe, so you can understand maybe a little bit better. It took a constituency—a building, actually in your constituency, maybe pronouncing it wrong: Adamar Manor, which is at 110 Adamar. I could be saying the name wrong.

But, essentially, under our plan as opposed to your plan, which is the status quo, someone who's renting would actually be \$68 better under our plan. So we think that not just renters, which is important, but the 650,000 Manitobans that own property in the province of Manitoba are going to see benefits. So there's benefits on both sides.

What we also did is we did—just to mention not just the rent control, we also put another \$37 million in the Rent Assist program so more people are supported. In fact, since we've come to office there's been almost 3,000 more people supported in the Rent Assist program. So that's a large amount of people. Probably, that the venue, you know, go to the—maybe a big night at the Convention Centre, right?

That amount of people are more supported under the Rent Assist program. And that's one of the reasons why the poverty level's gone down, because you'd be able to give more money in people's pockets. Also with the way the Rent Assist works, there's been an increase every year in terms of dollars and cents.

So, just to pack it down a little bit further, when we came to office—when the NDP were running things, for instance, under the Rent Assist program—two persons, with a single adult and one child, were getting under the—under, kind of, the non-EA Rent Assist and Rent Assist, they would be getting about \$758, and that's on July of 2016. So just when we came to office.

Now they're getting about \$992, so that's actually increased by about 3.9 per cent, so clearly there has been two things that have been happening here.

Number one, if you're 650,000 of the property owners here in the province of Manitoba, you're going to get a good benefit, and second of all, if you're a renter, you're also getting a benefit, or really even in your constituency, you know, a renter that's at a location we had is about \$68 better under our plan than the status quo NDP plan.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** Well, I'm glad the minister brought up 110 Adamar, because I think that's a great example. I've been getting numerous complaints from that building of above-guideline rent increases and a number of my constituents being 'renovicted' from 110 Adamar, and I think it just highlights the callousness of what's going on here.

So, the minister failed to answer my question and so I'll ask it again: Does the minister believe that this tax reduction that gives the average landlord \$1,700 while the renter loses a benefit is fair? Yes or no?

**Mr. Fielding:** Well, I would say that our plan is better than the NDP status quo plan and I guess my concern probably is really to the member because you are part of the rent—the Residential Tenancies Commission, and under your watch there is over 2,079 above-rent guidelines. Every one—100 per cent—of these were approved.

So, the concern that I have is, you know, you seem to be making some decisions when you're in your position of responsibility, but now you seem to be running away from those decisions, which is unfortunate.

But what I can say is, under our plan there's 650,000 Manitobans who are going to be better off

because we've got a 25 per cent reduction in terms of their education property taxes. That's going to go up to 50 per cent next year, so those people are going to be better off.

And in our plan, because of the rent increase, I'm putting a freeze on it for two years under—places, you know, places that are—even in your constituency—are better off.

I also did the Leader of the Opposition, just to make sure I wasn't just kind of picking on one member—in terms of making sure, you know, the benefits I'm showing—the people in your constituency are better off, but also the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew). Look at Penthouse Towers. Under our plan, where you have a rent freeze and you also have, again, \$31 million that are going to the Rent Assist program, that renter is going to be—actually be about \$110 better—\$110 better than under the NDP status quo plan.

So I would suggest and argue that renters, as well as property owners, are better off under our plan than your plan.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Well, unlike the minister, I've never, ever ordered the increase of rent on any Manitoban at any time, and I certainly invite him to come down with me to 110 Adamar and talk to my constituents who are being 'renovicted', who are seeing their rent skyrocket 20, 30 per cent in a single year, and explain to them how they're better off.

Can I get a commitment from the minister that he will do that, he will come down to 110 Adamar and meet my constituents and explain to them how they're better off under this rigging of the tax system?

\* (12:00)

**Mr. Fielding:** Well, thank you. You know, I would also invite that member to come meet with the 658,000 Manitobans that got an education property tax; maybe more of a, you know, kind of a, might be a discussion—a talk—discussion when you say that your party and yourself voted against an education property tax cut that could be in the tunes of close to \$500 for individuals.

*Mr. Greg Nesbitt, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

I mean, there isn't just renters in your constituency. There's also people that own property that's there, so there's two benefits: there's the 650,000 people that got a property tax cut, which you didn't support, and then under our plan, the renters—renters specifically, whether in your constituency, your Fort

Rouge or wherever constituencies, they're better off under our plan than your plan.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Will the minister come with me to 110 Adamar and explain himself directly to these tenants who are being 'renovicted'? Yes or no?

**Mr. Fielding:** Well, we consult with everyone through a budget process. That was the problem under the NDP—that you never consulted with Manitobans.

So we, in part of our budget sessions, consulted with close to—I think it was close to 30,000 Manitobans in the process; went to all corners of the province. We went—in Winnipeg we went to a variety of areas. This year was a little bit different—the norm, because the fact that we're in a virtual setting, and we would like to get back to where we're able to go and meet with Manitobans. But I encourage you to join me at part of those budget consultations. We can meet some of the 658,000 Manitobans that got an education property tax reduction—about, again, a 25 per cent reduction. They're going to see that, again next year, happen for a 50 per cent reduction in it.

So we think that that makes 'entired spence' and, you know, we'd also encourage the member to consult, and you can come have a discussion with the 2,900 more people that are part of the Rent Assist program. You know, we could—probably could house them all at the Convention Centre or maybe a small venue now that we're able to get back to watch concerts—and have a discussion with them of why we—didn't support that when you or your government was in power and now that they're supported.

That's—those are some of the reasons why, specifically, that poverty level's come down, is that—child poverty capital, worst under the NDP, and that's changed under our government. So we've seen the poverty levels going down.

In fact, I think, if I'm not mistaken, for some of that there's, like, 32,000 less children in poverty, you know, because of some of the changes we've made and also because, like, the Canadian child benefit, that's part of it.

So I encourage you to come out and meet those 650,000 Manitobans that are seeing a cheque in their pockets, where they're able to invest specifically during the time of a pandemic.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Well, I certainly have to correct the minister. He's looking at some outdated data.

The latest data from Manitoba is showing that child poverty is on the increase and it certainly has to do with these government's policies.

It's sad testimony that this minister is not accountable. He will not meet directly with Manitobans who his decisions are hurting. It is making their lives harder, making them less affordable, and he doesn't have the courage of his convictions or a belief in his policies to defend them on the doorsteps of 110 Adamar to the people who are being 'renovicted.'

So I don't think I'll get a different response from this minister. I think courage is not one of his strong suits, but if he changes his mind, there is an open invitation to come to that building with me and meet the people whose decisions you're affecting their lives with.

Now I'll ask this minister: Residential and farm properties have an average rebate of \$358; commercial landlords have an average rebate of \$1,700. Does this minister believe that's fair?

**The Acting Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt):** Before I recognize the honourable minister, I'd like to ask him to direct all his comments through the Chair and avoid using the term you.

Thank you.

**Mr. Fielding:** Absolutely, Mr. Chair. Listen, you know what? I've been thinking about—I want to apologize to the member from Fort Garry.

The figures I put on the record are inaccurate. It wasn't 30,000 people that we consulted. It was actually 51,000 people through EngageMB.ca. We've heard 51,000 participants in our 2001 budget process, whether that be online, telephone town hall meetings, public engagements and all these types of measures.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

So we have listened to a pretty good subsection of Manitobans. We always want to listen to more and so what I would say is that there is 658,000 Manitobans that got an education property tax. They can, at least under our government while we're in power, that they're going to see a secondary piece of 25 per cent reduction for next year's.

What we tried to do with this is, No. 1, whether you're a residential owner, right, you get a 25 per cent reduction—you own a house or what have you. If you're a business, right, there'd be a 10 per cent reduction. So it wasn't the same 25 per cent level that's there.

And we have made substantial investments. We've made sure that the rents are staying low by putting that, you know, into a kind of a way—a rent freeze, I guess, if you will. We've also built into the guidelines—the above-rent guidelines, that wasn't there when you were, you know, co-chairing it or being involved on the commission—where they had to take the consideration of the amount of money which they saved from the education property tax before they make any decisions about the \$2,000, you know, about the above-rent guidelines.

So we think that the policy does make a lot of sense. There's benefits to owners and benefits to renters. There's benefits to farmers and, quite frankly, there's benefits to business as well, which is important because we know during the pandemic that businesses have been struggling, and so we think that providing some supports to, you know, kind of all Manitobans in so many different ways, the categories I've laid out, will help benefit them.

And probably—although there's—you know, the unemployment level is still, you know, far too high here nationally. Here in Manitoba it's been a little bit better. We're leading the country right now, about 5.6 per cent—rate. But some of the policies we've taken, this could be one of them, you know, is helping to recharge the economy.

So we're going to continue to do that. We're looking to make life more affordable for Manitobans, not less affordable.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Well, obviously, Minister, that—this policy has the opposite effect.

Now, I want to turn to another issue here. Minister Ewasko on Wednesday—and this is a quote from Hansard—said: Thank you, my friend from St. Vital, for the question. So, regards to the process, in regards to any type of—whether it's labour relations or things along those lines, we in the department, we actually don't get involved in that. That we—would have to be potentially a question for the Department of Finance.

And that was a response into a question about mandate letters to post-secondaries and your colleague, the—Minister Ewasko, said that that was your responsibility.

So I'm wondering, as the minister who is responsible, was any mandate letter or other forms of directive sent to the University of Manitoba or other post-secondary institutions in relations to their bargaining?

**Mr. Fielding:** Well, first of all, we appreciate—you know, we appreciate both management and labour. Part of this process, we encourage everyone, obviously, to be at the—you know, back at the bargaining table, and agreements are always preferable if you can have an agreed upon agreement.

The government's committed to kind of a balanced approach between labour and management. Recent agreements show our commitment to balancing a fair wage and fair negotiations, but that process is ongoing, so I'm not going to comment further on the recent agreements with the nurses, just in respect to their coworkers.

You know, we aren't going to take sides one way or the other. We want to make sure—and I think Manitobans would expect us to take a middle ground and we're obviously not the employer here but we do encourage all parties to come together at the table and our hope is that there could be an agreement moving forward we're seeing some agreements globally out there which we think is important.

The—to mention the processes that we started out, that's been the exact same process that's been in place for years under the NDP government as well as our government and that has not changed at all since we've come to office.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So I wonder if the minister confirm: has a mandate letter or any other form of directive been sent to the University of Manitoba or other post-secondary institution for their bargaining process?

\* (12:10)

**Mr. Chairperson:** Before I recognize the honourable minister, we've been made aware by the Hansard recorder that the audio coming from the honourable minister's office is not very clear, and we were just wondering if the minister would have a headset that perhaps he could use or maybe get one of his staff to get him one because it would make it a lot easier for us to hear the minister in this room here.

**Mr. Fielding:** Yes, Mr. Chair, we're going to look for some earbuds or something I can use. So we'll—I guess we'll kind of continue on this path for just a little while.

So we will endeavour to check our records in respect of that, but what I can indicate is that, you know, we do appreciate, you know, both organizations—labour and management. Those are tough decisions. We encourage everyone at the bargaining table.

It's a little disappointing that the member wants to get involved in that discussion. I think there is discussions that are continuing to go on. We have a balanced approach to labour and management, and recent agreements clearly show that ours is a government that does listen and can reach agreement with different organizations.

We're not going to be like the Leader of the Opposition where we clearly demonstrate our bias by these 'tex negotiatus' by walking the picket.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So if I've heard the minister correctly, a minister of the Crown has no idea whether his department has sent a mandate letter to the largest educational institution in Manitoba with their upcoming bargaining where there's a cloud of a strike vote hanging over it.

Do I have that right? Neither him or any of his senior executive staff are in a position to give a simple yes or no answer today, and they have no handle on what's happening in their own department. Do I have that correct?

**Mr. Fielding:** Yes, Mr. Chair, so, we'll endeavour to get the information back to the member by the end of the session here today.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I appreciate the undertaking by the minister. Obviously there is some urgency to this because the University of Manitoba Faculty Association is set for a strike vote later this month, citing government interference.

So I—wondering if the minister—who's not aware whether he sent a mandate letter in his own department—would he, on the record today, commit that, if one has been sent, it will be rescinded and he will allow free and fair open bargaining without any directive or mandate from the Province of Manitoba?

Will he make that commitment here and now?

**Mr. Fielding:** Our process has not changed since—the least from the previous government in terms of approach with labour negotiations.

I can tell you that that is—obviously those discussions are with the employer and employee, so that work is ongoing. It's unfortunate the member is trying to insert himself, thickly, in these negotiations. But I can tell you that is being discussed, obviously, at the bargaining table and I think, quite frankly, that's the appropriate place.

We've seen some, obviously, agreements with government just in the last number of weeks. We're

respectful of that process. We're not going to comment on that until, of course, the agreement has been settled.

But our process is exactly the same as it was under the former NDP government.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm glad to hear that the minister is committed to staying neutral and not be involved at all in the bargaining process at University of Manitoba. Of course, that means no directives, no mandates, nothing from his department that could influence or cause the management at University of Manitoba to become entrenched in a position.

And so, again, given his stated neutrality, will he commit today, on the record, that no mandate letter, no directive and no interference will occur from his office in relation to the upcoming bargaining session?

And if he sidesteps, refuses to answer that question, can you put on the record why you're refusing to make that commitment, given what you've already stated?

**Mr. Fielding:** Our process is exactly the same under the former NDP government it is today. There's been no change in terms of that.

I can say it is disappointing, of course, that the member is trying to get on sides. And for a member that's trying to get into government and be a—whether it be a minister of the Crown or his government changes—I would suggest that's a dangerous process, a dangerous precedence to set when you have leaders of the opposition that are walking with the picket lines, clearly taking one side or—of the the issues or not.

I don't—I'm assuming that—I'm hoping that probably wouldn't be the case once they get into government. But I can say that our process is exactly the same under the former NDP government it is today. So I'm going to refer him back to the answer I gave last question.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister can explain why he won't commit today to ensuring that there's no mandate letter or directive from his department in relation to this bargaining situation, if he could explain his rationale.

**Mr. Fielding:** Again, to the member, our process is exactly the same that was under the former NDP government.

Our approach—we appreciate what the faculty does at the University of Manitoba, the education they

provide; we appreciate the management as well, the employer.

We encourage everyone to get back to the bargaining table to reach an agreement. Obviously, it's preferable if you can have a agreed upon agreement that's done at the bargaining table. That's really where it's supposed to be done.

And our government is committed to a balanced approach between both labour and management. That is the approach we've taken and, quite frankly, we think it's the right approach. We've seen some success lately at that, so we want to see that process happen.

And we're not going to be like the Leader of the Opposition where we're starting to walk the picket lines, picking one side or the other. I think taxpayers would want a even and fair process, and that's exactly what we've done and won't—commit to doing.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I see the minister just sort of reiterated the Brian Pallister approach to labour relations in Manitoba that we've had for the last five years, so do I take from his comments that he believes that is the right approach in Manitoba and that he's going to maintain the Brian Pallister approach to labour relations, and we're going to steady-as-she-goes and there'll be no changes from this new government?

\* (12:20)

**Mr. Fielding:** Well, we've a plan, of course and we know that the NDP have no plan. In fact, it looks like they're making it up on the fly, which I think is a dangerous and, quite frankly, a risky approach to government, when you don't have a plan and you're just making it up. I think even some of the commentators out there in newspapers have identified that the NDP really have no plan.

But what I can tell you, what our plan does, it—under a PC plan, it reduces taxes. We know the NDP will jack taxes up. We know that under our plan we'll reduce the deficit in under eight years. We know that the NDP love deficits and are going to increase deficits.

We know under our plan we've reduced poverty and we're going to continue to reduce poverty. And under the NDP, they had, of course—with the child poverty capital of Manitoba or, rather, Canada—in fact, North America.

We also know that the numbers of kids in care have actually gone down by about 8 per cent under our government and we know that they had some of the highest number of kids in care of all nations.

Now, there is some difference. What we have in our plan—important to have a plan, as opposed to the NDP—is that the health-care funding has actually gone up in our plan by about \$1.1 billion and we know the NDP's—you know, funding for health care wasn't as important to them.

We know education funding has dramatically gone up under our government and we've also committed to over 20 new schools. That didn't happen under the NDP government.

We also know that money for mental health has dramatically gone up under our government, whether it be agreements we've signed and monies that are on the table to address mental health. And of course, that didn't happen.

So there is a difference between our governments, of course. One has a plan for these things and one doesn't.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** Well, I think the minister's answer made it very clear that he fully supports the Brian Pallister school of labour relations, is going to continue exactly in the same vein and, although the players may have changed around the table, the attitude is very much present and the same.

I'm going to ask you to turn to page 24 of the 2021-2022—'21—sorry, 2020-2021 Public Accounts breaks down the budget and the actuals for strategic infrastructure and as, Minister, you'll note that roads, highways, bridges and flood protection was underspent by a whopping \$128 million; health, education and housing was underspent by an eye-catching \$209 million; and the overall strategic infrastructure was underspent by \$525 million. That's certainly a broken promise from the budget that said that no less than \$1 billion would be spent on strategic infrastructure. We're looking at clearly a 50 per cent failure on that promise.

So I'm wondering if the minister could provide a list of budgeted projects, amounts spent and deferred projects from the past fiscal year?

**Mr. Fielding:** Our government is very much committed to strategic infrastructure. That's why—and specifically when you're coming out of a pandemic, we think making important investments in infrastructure is really important. There's been numerous announcements recently: things like the ICIP funding for the water treatment centre. There's been funding for the Waverley West community centre. There's been funding for the St. James 55 civic centre project, I think \$13 million. And I think the Waverley West

was somewhere in the neighbourhoods of \$80 million. There was monies that was dedicated toward important waste and water projects out of the RM of Stanley and as well as Portage la Prairie.

So we're very proud of the fact that we invested \$1.6 billion on infrastructure this year. When you look at some of the important areas which we think is important, over 90 per cent of the money was spent for roads and things like the maintenance of roads. Really, really important. So that's important.

Eighty-three per cent of all education funding was there. We've got a commitment to build 20 new schools that should've been done a very long time ago but wasn't.

We also committed to a variety of maintenance types of projects. Under the NDP government, they used to, you know—liked to introduce this new spending but they didn't take care of the existing infrastructure and so we have, I believe there's been close to eight new schools with new HVACs have been set up, that—important obviously during the pandemic. That and along with the 20 new schools, there's been—upwards of 28 new schools are going to have great new ventilation systems.

We've spent more on strategic infrastructure, more than the NDP ever did except for one year. The one year, of course, was their election year. So we're committed to infrastructure spending, a strategic infrastructure spending. The \$500 million will be allocated—or is being spent over a three-year time period.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** So, would the minister commit to providing a list of budgeted projects, amounts spent and deferred projects for the past fiscal year?

**Mr. Fielding:** If the member could ask the question one more time. I think it was listing of the projects. Which—are you talking about the ICIS projects? Or are we talking about a listing, kind of like a variance of where and what was spent?

I mean, variance, for the most part, you know, that there's two things: No. 1, there's some delays as it relates to Lake St. Martin. As you may recall there's still ongoing environmental issues and consultation that happened with the federal government. And so that area is about \$100 million allocated. I think about seven—17, somewhere around there was spent on that, so there's obviously an under-expend there.

There was because of the pandemic, some issues getting into the health facilities, you know, hospitals,

personal-care homes. These types of things as you can—I'm sure you can understand with the pandemic happening you can't have access to all these places because of it. But the Health expenditures is mainly related to IT-type of projects there.

So that's—I'm not sure if that's exactly what you wanted, but, you know, there's some information for you.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** To clarify what we're seeking is: of the \$525 million that has not been spent, if there could be a list of the budgeted projects that make up that amount, the amount that was spent on those projects and what projects were deferred from the last fiscal year.

**Mr. Fielding:** So it's like at \$1.6 billion, right? There's—I want to say there's hundreds of projects in all different areas, right, that are either being completed, you know, or ongoing. Like, some projects are kind of multi-year programs, so you may have spent, you know, if it's a \$150-million project, maybe you spent \$50 million this year and there's two years out that happened.

So we don't have a—I don't have a listing here of each and every project, where it's at. If the member would like, I could get—you know, run through each of the areas related to the Public Accounts document where there was a variance and I could provide that for the member, if he likes.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** I can certainly understand if the minister and his staff aren't prepared to provide a list on the fly. The question is whether you will undertake to provide us a full list for review after this hearing.

\* (12:30)

**Mr. Fielding:** So, you know, we are, you know, we're trying to figure out how—what the best approach to this would be. Like, literally, there is hundreds of projects out there. So, like, would the member—I mean, probably on major projects we could obviously provide information on what major projects would be. But, you know, there could be a million-dollar, you know, project here and there that's there. Like, I don't know if that's the information you want, or, you know, I mean, globally I can do this.

I don't know if I can provide—like, it literally would be hundreds of pages long to provide a listing of these. And then some of them, for instance, you know, may be projects in the three years—you know, might be phased over three years, right, it's a long-term project.

So, you know, I guess globally what I can say is there isn't—been any projects that have been cancelled. You know, globally for the most part, you know, it's—there's some reasons that there's been some delays. So if there's specific areas, maybe, that you'd like us to focus in on we could, but it's going to be really hard to, you know, assemble a list of all the projects, you know, and where they're at, because just, quite frankly, there's a lot of projects that are ongoing, right, maintenance and all that sort of stuff.

So, I'm just trying to narrow it down for something that's usable that you want. And you, you know, have a right to ask for it, but that isn't kind of, you know—something that's really hard to put together.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** Obviously, to the minister's question, we would want all the information that you can provide. Your government officials obviously know what projects are planned and what are—in what stage they are and what money's been spent or not spent.

The information is there. It's just whether the political will is to actually be accountable and transparent and provide that to the public. So, I'll leave that and whatever the minister is willing to give us we will take, and more is better than less.

**Mr. Fielding:** I didn't really have response to that. You know, we'll endeavour—you know, we'll take that under advisement and we'll refer back.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** This is, as you know, well-known, Minister. This isn't the first year that your government has underspent strategic infrastructure. In fact, there's a pattern that, year after year, that's what happens. In fact, you can set your watch by it.

And I'm wondering if you could tell this committee, why is that? What can't this government actually spend its strategic infrastructure budget and misses it every single year?

**Mr. Fielding:** I guess probably the same question may go back to the member, just looking at the recent years.

I notice the former NDP government, in 2011, undershot their infrastructure budget by \$368 million; in 2012-13 of—\$412 million underspent; in 2013-14, \$260 million. In 2015 you were actually on track that year, \$96 million. In 2015-16, you know, just the year, you know, right at the election time, they underspent their budget for \$423 million.

And so I guess what I were to say is there's reasons all the time of why some projects may—delayed. I can tell you this year, just, you know, these

are some generalities, but the most part, Lake Manitoba outlet channel project delays, errors, resulting delays and federal environmental approvals and COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, limited travel related to consultations, water-related infrastructure; you know, heavy rain events and diversion of internal resources to manage floods resulted in reduction of other capital works during the construction season.

In terms of education delays and completion of Red River College Innovation Centre, there was obviously some funding challenges, which we addressed, and COVID-19.

Efficiency Manitoba reduced the delivery of in-home and in-business programs as a result of COVID-19 pandemic and public health restrictions, as well as there was a postponement of the capital acquisition for 2021-22.

And Liquor & Lotteries: due to casino closures and reduced revenue, projects were cancelled or deferred—to meeting cash flow during the pandemic.

So that kind of, for the most part, gives some of the explanation but, you know, globally it's a large—to do with this Lake Manitoba outlet and because we couldn't get in some of the health facilities.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Before I recognize the next question, I'll—just wondering if the minister has been able to locate a headset or ear buds or something, because Hansard is having difficulty getting all of what the minister is saying and to make sure that they have a proper transcript. If the minister could please find a set of headphones or something, that would be greatly appreciated.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** I'm wondering if the minister could tell us, under the current budget before the House, it's—there's a commitment by your government of \$1.2 billion in strategic infrastructure in this current fiscal year.

Would you be able to provide us with a list of budgeted projects and money spent to date?

\* (12:40)

**Mr. Fielding:** So, generally, because it's just, really, you know, kind of the end of Q1, although, you know, we're obviously technically into Q2, obviously—and construction season is just, you know, at least for the summer portions of things—now that more impacts with this and that sort of things, it's really too early to say, you know, what's on track and what isn't. You know, I think by mid—the mid-year review or report

that we bring out, that has more indications on it of where things are going.

Like, what happens this time of year, too, is, you know, there is money that is left in certain departments. I'll give you an example. Let's say on Infrastructure. What we do is we ask the department to come back and say, okay, you know, is there some additional projects you can do; if you can't—maybe there's a delay, and there's always going to be some delays in some projects, but they're—you know, there could be some examples where you can, you know, do additional work.

So an example would be Infrastructure. The reason why this year, you know, in the last couple of years we've been pretty good on the road budget and the maintenance budget is because we had—Infrastructure kind of came in at the end of summer and we said, okay, what work can you do over winter, right, to pass the construction season and they said, no problem, we can do a lot more gravel roads.

So what we do this time of year is if there is kind of, you know, periods that are trending down, then we kind of, you know, move money around, I guess, I would say, just—to certain projects. You know, a lot of them would obviously be, you know, incorporated in the budget documents or there's certain areas that you can maybe do a little bit more work.

So I guess I'm saying it's really too early right now, but I think by mid-year—the mid-year report, you know, we should have a better understanding of, you know, which projects are tracking behind. You know, some things like—you know, an example is things like Lake St. Martin, right, the channel project, right? We have I think \$101 million allocated in this year's budget. So, some things are a bit out of our control, some things aren't.

You know, there's also—you know, depends on agreements. So I'll give you an example with the ICIP dollars that's, of course, the federal-provincial billion-dollar fund that funds, kind of, like, roads. It funds, you know, kind of, waste-water treatment plants, like, recreational—these types of things.

We're a bit at the discretion of the federal government, too, with this, because what happens is, even for those types of projects—and Minister Helwer will be probably have some better—you know, he can provide more details on each of the projects, but—we submit our list to Ottawa and then it has to go through their federal Treasury Board and Cabinet. So we did that last summer. For the most part there's kind of a back

and forth with the officials and then all of a sudden, you know, there's a lot announced that happens.

This year, there was a federal election—and this isn't anything against, you know, the current government that's there, but what ends up happening is there's kind of a hurry-up-and-wait thing with a lot of the projects, and then all of a sudden they get their project out of the door, you know, whether that's, you know, before the election or not.

But, you know, I mean, just with that being said, with ICIP dollars we were able to make announcements, I think, on Portage la Prairie waste water; the RM of Stanley, waste water—those are hundreds of millions of dollars; things like the North End treatment centre with the City of Winnipeg; two of the, you know, kind of recreational projects, one being the Waverley West—it's a big community centre; I think it was, like, \$80 million—and then one was the Sturgeon Heights—or it was actually the 55-plus Centre, as well—\$13 million and we had kind of an agreement with all three levels of government.

So, a long story short, some are in our control, some aren't, but there has been quite a bit of announcements—the ones I, you know, kind of listed off—really in the last 2-3 months. So those are timings that happens.

Now, some of those projects, if we're involved in it it gets—categorizes as strategic infrastructure. If it's a grant, for instance, like, maybe to the City of Winnipeg or to others, it's categorized under kind of an operating grant, I guess, if you will, just because of the accounting of it.

So long story short, we'll have a better indication after the mid-year review as opposed to Q1. Just kind of a better trend line of what's happening in the construction season.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So, if I take the minister's comments, you're refusing to provide a list of all budgeted projects that are supposed to be undertaken this year and their current money that's been spent on those projects. Do I have that correct?

**Mr. Fielding:** No, you're completely wrong. I didn't say that at all. That was your words, not mine.

I—what I endeavoured to say is that we're trend—there's a trend line that happens in Q1 and there's a better sense on where projects—after Q2 for, you know, the reasons which I'll get you to refer back to my last answer of why, you know, it's a better trend line in the mid-year.

So I didn't say that at all. That was your words, not mine.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So, given that I had misinterpreted your words, I take it I now have your undertaking that you will provide a complete list of budgeted projects for the current year and the spending to date.

Do I have that correct?

**Mr. Fielding:** What I'll endeavour to do for the member is, once Q2 does come out, the—what we're calling now the mid-year report, that endeavours to provide kind of where we're tracking at all—expires, not just Infrastructure, but what we're spending on health or education or, you know, whatever categories the member or, you know, the media obviously want. That's a public document.

You know, generally what I do is I do a press conference, more specifically, I think, if there's some, you know, there's some abnormalities from where we're going.

What I can say is that, you know, after Q1, on a global scale, if the—you know, we're pretty much on track, I think we're \$34 million above where we anticipated, but the deficit's dropping from about, you know, it's about \$2.1 billion in Public Accounts to about 1.5-ish. So we provide all that information and—like we do every year. We're absolutely committed to providing all that information in the mid-year report.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Okay, so I'm taking from your comments that you're prepared to undertake to provide us a list of budgeted projects for this current year, including spending to date. And I have that 'corrihkh'?

That's your—my understanding. You are going to undertake to give us that list. Yes?

**Mr. Fielding:** I'm going to refer you to my previous comment.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So I will take that as a yes.

When can we expect to receive that document?

**Mr. Fielding:** We provide an update—the government provides an update on Q2 that goes through everything from operations, where the dollars are being spent. But what is important this year is we put away about \$1.2 billion in money for COVID supports.

And so we identify that, you know, we highlighted that in our Q1 report. And in our Q2, a part of the normal process that would happen under our government and other governments is we report on all these types of matters at the Q2 session.

So we're absolutely committed to that same process we've been involved in for many years.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** The minister knows full well that I'm not interested in him undertaking to give me the Q2 report, which is delivered to my mailbox. What I'm asking for an undertaking for is for a list of strategic infrastructure projects that are anticipated this year and how much money has been spent to date.

Is the minister refusing to provide that information? And if so, why is he refusing to disclose that information?

**Mr. Fielding:** No, we're absolutely committed to providing as much information as we can.

There's kind of a standard process that happens in respect to all avenues. We do it in Q1, we do it in the mid-year report that identifies, you know, where we're spending money, whether it be COVID, whether it be kind of departments, whether it be strategic infrastructure. We do that in Q3 and we obviously do that in Public Accounts. We just went through a process where we released all the information on doubled accounts for the year, and that provides all the information for members.

So, we're absolutely committed to the process that we've been involved in. We want to make sure the people have as much information as they can. And, quite frankly, we're proud of the fact that on our restated numbers we're pretty much bang on what we anticipated through Public Accounts and Q1, as we just identified.

And a lot of this information the member is referring to, you know, that gets categorized and gets reported on under Q1, our obligation is to report this information. So, yes, we want to provide as much information as we can.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So, it's obvious this minister is refusing to release that information, so I'm going to ask him: What is he hiding and why?

**Mr. Fielding:** We're providing all information we can.

We just went through a process where we released Public Accounts that went through every dollar, every cent, that was money that was, you know, reviewed by the Auditor General. Obviously the Auditor General signed off on this. We're very happy that some of the qualifications that we've had in years past have been resolved.

\* (12:50)

And so what we commit to do, and we have, and we do on a yearly basis is we provide all information of where the government's trending. Now, when you come from Q1 there's a trend line, right? This is what we're tracking. Nothing's happened throughout the year. Same thing with Q2, or what we call the mid-year review, and the Q3 where we say, there's a tracking. You know, this is where we're tracking.

Now, again, sometimes projects happen quicker, sometimes they happen later on. So we're committed to all the information that we would normally provide, whether it be your government previously or our government. We're absolutely committed to providing all that information.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister could give us an update on how many employers applied for the Manitoba Pandemic Sick Leave program?

**Mr. Fielding:** For the sick leave program, there has been over 2,469 people that have applied and got the benefit.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** The minister, he used: people; I take it he means employers?

I just want to make sure that I have that statistic right.

**Mr. Fielding:** Yes, it's 2,500 employees—or, 25—I'm sorry—2,469 employee—employers. And we believe it's probably about 5,000 people have benefitted from the sick leave program that we introduced.

I do want to reference the fact, of course, the federal government has the two sick leave programs that are in place. One was for a caregiver—I'm using the names wrong, but there's a caregiver support one and another program kind of related, if they had to take some time off for COVID relief. So there's the two federal programs, and the money and how we establish this program, I guess, is—there is kind of a lag between when you can apply, so we figured out what that dollars and cents would be.

So, again, about 2,400—almost 2,500 businesses have applied, and we think it's about 5,000 people that have benefitted from the program.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** How many businesses applied and were rejected? Or has every single business that applied been accepted in the program?

And what I mean by that is: you said there's 2,469 employers that benefitted from this. Was there 2,469 applications, or were there more and some got rejected?

**Mr. Fielding:** Of that, again, the 2,469 are businesses that applied; so, again, the number is just somewhere around 5,000. If you applied and you hit the criteria for the program, then you got accepted. So 100 per cent of people that met the criteria got accepted into the program.

Our government is very proud of the fact that on a basis—I'll give some numbers here—there's been about \$407 million of supports were individuals. So, of that, 368,000 individuals got some sort of support in the pandemic, and that kind of related to things like the Risk Recognition, where people would get—I think it was about 80,000 Manitobans would get, you know, about \$1,500. There is the caregiver supports.

There's a whole bunch of others: seniors that got—235,000 seniors that got, I think it's a \$200 cheque, and others. If you're a disabled individual you've got also a cheque for I believe it was \$200, as well. So, all totalled, almost 31 per cent of all the population of Manitoba above the age of 12, I believe, got some sort of support—368,000 individuals.

And that totalled about \$407 million for business supports, because I'm sure that we'll go there next. You know, \$470 million business supports. So that was 30,000 businesses of the 125,000 businesses in Manitoba got some sort of support through the Bridge Grant or the gap program or the wage subsidy program or Healthy Hire or, kind of, some of the restaurant supports. And that represents about 31 per cent of all businesses.

So, again, 31 per cent of all individuals in Manitoba above the age of—I think it was actually above the age of 12—got some sort of supports, 31 per cent; and of businesses, 33 per cent of all businesses. So there was substantial supports.

And what we're very proud of the fact is of the support systems for the businesses, or rather, you know, businesses, individuals—96 per cent of the dollars that were allocated were flowed out to individuals and businesses, so 96 per cent of all dollars that we allocated flowed out. We were able to move dollars, obviously, within department lines, and so what you're seeing in Public Accounts is kind of the grand totals, I guess, if you will, but 96 per cent of all dollars that were flowed out to—that were allocated were flowed out to individuals as well as businesses.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So, just to be entirely clear, has any employers applied and been rejected, or there's been 100 per cent acceptance of every single application made?

**Mr. Fielding:** Thank you for the question.

You know, 100 per cent—people that applied that met the criteria, that were eligible for the benefit, got the support. Now, the program is actually somewhat administered through Economic Development and Jobs, so I'm not aware of anyone that, you know, has applied and didn't get [*inaudible*] program as long as they were hitting the criteria. So if you were eligible through the criteria that was set out, then you got benefit.

\* (13:00)

Now, there could be some lags, you know, in certain—some of the processing. My understanding is, it was a pretty robust system where they did get the supports. But if you were eligible under the criteria for the program, yes, you got support.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister can tell us what was the total amount budgeted for this program.

**Mr. Fielding:** I'm going to refer you to Q1, page 5.

And so as you can see, just about middle the way—to the page, the Pandemic Sick Leave program. There's \$3 million allocated. We have supported, as mentioned, about 2,500 businesses I—we think around 5,000 people.

Now, part of the program, you may recall from the press release, we didn't actually put a dollar figure down there because what we figured is, you know, if people needed support we're going to give them support. So we'd be able to move dollars and cents around, but what we have allocated here is \$3 million. We be—more benched it as a government to support more people if need be, and so that is our commitment here today.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister could tell us how much has been paid out to date of that \$3 million allocation?

*Mr. Andrew Smith, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Mr. Fielding:** We've allocated about \$2.6 million as of mid-September, so that's not the latest but it's pretty close—mid-September.

Again, you know, the program isn't over until, I believe, at the end of October. I don't have the exact date right here, and so that money has been allocated—again, involves—2,500 employees have entered into the program, supporting somewhere in the neighbourhood of 5,000 employees.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Again, I just want to make sure I understand the minister properly, because he used the word allocated. He told us \$3 million was allocated in the budget and then \$2.6 million since September he said was allocated. I take it he misspoke and he meant has been spent.

And the follow-up to that is: This program ends on October 29th. Is the minister planning to extend the program?

**Mr. Fielding:** I just want to correct the record. We just got some updated numbers. So, as of today, we have paid out \$3,096,000.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** As the minister just alluded to, this program ends on October 29th.

Is this government planning to extend this program or will it end on October 29th?

**Mr. Fielding:** Okay, so just to clarify: so that is to October 4th—the \$3,096,000.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

So we made a decision fairly recently about the Healthy Hire, kind of expanding it out. So, we haven't made a decision yet on that; we're evaluating. You know, we'll make a decision on that fairly soon.

Yes, it's been a good program, I think, for employers, employees. So, you know, these are types of decisions we will make. Obviously, we're making a decision in the next—probably next week or so because obviously the deadline for the program comes up fairly soon.

So, you know, we haven't made a determination on that yet, but I wouldn't say no; I wouldn't say yes.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if you can share with the committee what the issue is, because we're about to enter the fourth wave with the expiry of a sick leave program. So what's the hesitation? Why hasn't it been an easy call to just extend the program?

**Mr. Fielding:** No, we're evaluating that. We're monitoring it so I don't think it's a difficult decision. Quite frankly, we probably, you know, will need to review some of these programs. So that will be one that will be, you know, taken in consideration.

You asked my personal opinions on it and, you know, there's a process we go through to make [*inaudible*] decisions on these things, but it seems like it's been a beneficial program in so many different ways.

So we're going to make that decision in the near future. You know, I think there's been some very good benefit to this program, so I'll leave it at that, but we just haven't had—made a decision. I think there's some time, obviously, to do such, and we'll probably do that in the next—probably over the next week or so.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Now, on page 13 of the Residential Tenancies Commission Annual Report it reads, and I quote, the commission upheld orders on 94 units in 26 buildings and varied orders on 523 units in 14 buildings.

I'm wondering if the minister can break this down further. Were the 96 upheld orders and the 523 varied orders all above-guideline increases?

\* (13:10)

**Mr. Fielding:** So, we're endeavouring just to kind of get that information. I should be able to get it to you probably by the end of the meeting here, or in the next few minutes; our officials are looking for that.

What I can say is, the process hasn't changed since the member was a part of that of course. The above—there's the RTB process and if people have—want to appeal it, for the most part, it goes straight to the commission. And so, of course, in the past, over the last six years before we came to office, there was over 2,079 above-rent guidelines approved, which is really disappointing, but was.

And so what our government is proud of the fact is a whole bunch of things. No. 1, during the pandemic when people needed the support, we had a rent freeze that was allocated. There was no evictions, and we were actually one of the first provinces to do that—I think one of the last to lift that order.

What we also have done is we created a rent bank to basically—is kind of—ability for tenants that are struggling with their rents to kind of get a, kind of a short-term loan, I guess, if you will, that'll be part of that to help them if there's any issues that are there.

Our government's very proud of the fact that, of course, we gave about \$407 million of their own money through our budget to support individuals, or 338,000 Manitobans got some sort of support. We, of course, did things like rent—freezing rent, like the rent controls obviously were in place for two particular years.

And then also, when people are considering the above-rent guidelines, we add—we said what you need to take into consideration is that landlords got some sort of break. It's kind of 'menched' out more in their

operating expenses. So, if they're able to save money in their operating expenses because they're not paying as much education property taxes, and that needs to be taken into consideration when they make their decision at the RTB and, I think if they appeal they can go the R-T-C.

But at the end of the day, the minister—you know, there isn't something that I sign off on on these rents, you know—individual rent increases don't come to my desk. The member probably knows that, he was a part of the commission. So that's the independent process. Same process as it was under the NDP government.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister can tell us what the average percentage increase of above-guideline increases there were in the previous year.

**Mr. Fielding:** So I've got information and I'll read it out here.

So between—maybe I'll start from the beginning. I'll look at 2015 and then I will go to the 2020 year.

So, in 2015, the above-rent guidelines or, you know, above-rent guidelines increase, the applicants, like, what they applied for, on average, was about 14 per cent. What was granted under the member of Fort Garry and his committee was 12 per cent. In 2016, there was—the average, you know, ask, I guess, if you all say it that way, request was for 15 per cent, and what the member of Fort Garry and his commission came up with was 12.8 per cent; 2017, it was—ask was 12.9 per cent, and what came down was 10.5, on average; 2018 it was 12.3, and then what was agreed to was 9.8. In 2019, it was 13 per cent, and what was agreed to is 10.6. And 2020 was 13 per cent and what was agreed to was 11 per cent.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if this minister finds it problematic that during a pandemic that so many Manitobans were subjected to substantial rent increases.

**Mr. Fielding:** So, what our government did is we're trying to make life more affordable for individuals.

So what we did is we put a rent freeze on for 2021 and '22. We think that makes a lot of sense.

What we also did is we increased the amount of money that flowed to the non-EIA Rent Assist budget. It went up by about \$31 million. And what that actually means is about 27—or, sorry—I guess it's 2,900 people got supported under that program.

We also established something called the Rent Bank, which was, you know, let's say if tenants were

struggling to meet their bills, it's kind of some flexibility for them to be able to, kind of, make sure they get their rent paid and there's kind of a process going back and forth with it.

Also, something that we think makes a lot of sense is on some of the rent the amount of money that people get, through EIA and non-EIA rent, increased. I can go through the numbers, but, essentially, since 2015 or '16, the amount of money—there's a whole bunch of categories—like, if you've got children or if you're, you know, kind of a too-old citizen, that amount has actually gone up by about 30 per cent.

So I would say, the rent freeze, we think it helped renters. It has in your constituency and the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw)—or Fort Rouge's (Mr. Kinew) constituency, they're better off on our plan than yours.

There's more money for the Rent Assist program and probably about 3,000 more people supported under that program. The actual money has gone up by about, you know, anywhere between about 30 per cent for those individuals.

And we also established things like the Rent Bank to make it easier for individuals. We copied the NDP BC in terms of the Rent Bank program.

So we think all of those things put together, you know, really will help lower income individuals, whether you're living in a rental unit—that's also to be augmented, the 658,000 Manitobans that got education property tax cut. You know, if you're sitting in the city of Winnipeg, you're a resident of Fort Garry and you're an average homeowner, you've got about—a cheque for about \$481 back. That's going to double next year.

\*(13:20)

So those are the items that we took into consideration, whether you're a renter or whether you're a property owner in the province.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister could update the committee on what the current number of full-time equivalents is in Vital Statistics, what the vacancy rate is and where those vacancies are located?

**Mr. Fielding:** Yes, okay, I'll answer it in two parts here.

First of all, Vital Statistics. There's been issues with delays; absolutely, there's been issues with delays. In fact, just to paint the picture for you of what we had to deal with, there was about 24,000 applicants

that were delayed processing and we've done—we got a plan together and what—we've seen some pretty good results, I'm going to give them to you.

But essentially, we did two things: we increased the IT capacity, right, to the way they're processing things; and HR capacity, that's there. And so of that 24,000 backlog—the 24,000—we've actually almost 100 per cent caught up with that. There was actually only 43 left, so 99.99 per cent of the backlog has been caught up, in terms of, like, these—Vital Statistics.

And there's been about a 50 per cent reduction in the wait times, right? So, you know, wait times are there. I think we still need to do more work on this area but there has been substantial work that has happened, really even the last 3, 4 months. The backlog is totally, for the most part, drained, right, and the wait times are down by 50 per cent.

So, you know, we see it as a priority. The first is get rid of the backlog, which we did—24,000. And the second phase is the turnaround time. We want to make it's better. It's improved by about 50 per cent, but it's still not there.

To answer your question, the FTEs, there is—we budgeted 44 FTEs.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** What is the current vacancy rate of those 44 FTEs?

**Mr. Fielding:** Yes, so obviously, as I talked about, the plan moving forward and what we worked on, the twenty—almost 25,000 backlog that's been basically—you know, basically dealt with so they're back to normal levels and the fact that we are—been able to get a 50 per cent reduction in the wait times really is testament to the hard work the department has done.

Right now, there is 30 filled positions and of the other positions—we're talking about the 14—they're in various stages of hiring process right now.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** When we had this conversations in May, I think there was about 14 positions that were empty.

Given that four or five months have now passed, how come they've—those positions haven't been filled?

**Mr. Fielding:** Well, I would suggest that there's been some pretty good progress here—made, right? When you have a backlog of somewhere around 25,000 documents and basically now, as of October 5th, 99.99 per cent of these backlogs have been addressed. You know, like there's 43 left of the 24,864

and the fact that the wait times, which I think is crucial to people, have been reduced by 50 per cent.

You know, I think these people are doing a wonderful job, and I think the fact that we are hiring these individuals to make sure we're at a full complement. There's always turnover with individuals and that sorts but, you know, at the end of the day, you know, results are important and the results show that we have gotten rid of the backlog and we have reduced the wait times by 50 per cent, and we're hiring, you know, obviously, additional staff to make sure it's lined in a proper level. But there has been some pretty good turnaround on this—on Vital Statistics that we're very proud of.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** When the minister talks about 50 per cent reduction in wait times, what was the wait time and what is it now? Because I'm getting calls this week from my office of people who are waiting five months to get birth certificates, marriage certificates.

So what is the time and how much has it—you said it was 50 per cent: what is that in actual days?

**Mr. Fielding:** It has been reduced by 50 per cent. So, as you mentioned, actually we had about 6 months earlier this year. So, that's far too long. It's been dropped to three months, and that's still too long, in my opinion.

So we need to continue to do this work. We got the backlog, which is like the first part of the plan is—well, actually, it's kind of the second part of the plan.

The first part is to get the IT in place, the resources in place. No. 2 is to really get the backlog taken care of, right; the people that have been waiting on the backlog. And No. 3 is to—or the third phase, I guess, is the turnaround time.

So we want to—although it's 'increduced'—it's decreased by 50 per cent. That's not good enough. We still have more work to do in Vital Statistics, and so that's what we're endeavouring to do. And I think there's been some good progress made since we spoke last on the subject.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I appreciate you saying that three months is too long.

So I am curious, from your perspective, Minister, what is the ideal wait period? What would be acceptable to this government? How long should people wait for a birth certificate or a marriage licence—a marriage certificate, rather?

**Mr. Fielding:** We would like it get it down to two weeks, and that's part of our plan, is to get it back where there's a two-week kind of lag, I guess, if you will, or kind of wait time.

Now, if someone does need a process, you know, rush—you know, processing it right off the bat, they can get it within three days.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Now, Minister, in the latest Vital Statistics Report, I'll direct you to, let's see, page 14, under Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations. Two years in a row, I think, the language is identical. I think it's just been recopied and it indicates that Call to Action No. 17 that would enable residential school survivors and families to reclaim names changed by the residential school system by waiving administrative costs for a period of five years.

I'm wondering why the identical passage is appearing in multiple reports and what, if any, progress has been made on this, and is the government actually going to implement that recommendation and when?

\* (13:30)

**Mr. Fielding:** There has been some work done in this. There was—some of the work was suspended because of the COVID-19 parameters that are there, but there is ongoing work to re-establish with working with the Manitoba chiefs as well as with Ottawa.

As you can appreciate, some of the records are obviously in Ottawa whether that be for the residential schools, with our First Nations or Métis or '60s scoop, and so that process is ongoing. You know, I am working with Manitoba chiefs as well as Ottawa to make sure you get all the information assembled together.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So I take it from the minister's comment that you're in agreeance with that recommendation and you're attempting to implement it.

When will Manitobans start seeing their vital statistics fees waived for that service?

**Mr. Fielding:** We are working with Manitoba chiefs, working with Ottawa. We think that something should be in place by—further on in the year—before the end of the year.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I wonder if the minister can tell this committee whether any of the services, functions at Vital Statistics have been contracted out at all this year.

**Mr. Fielding:** Of course, it was—an Auditor General's report that came out fairly recently. We obviously have hired staff. The vast majority of the staff that came on staff were kind of summer students, I guess, that did a lot of the catch-up work that's there. So there was no contracting out of any of that service.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister could tell us—give us an update on how much mining tax has been collected to date in the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

**Mr. Fielding:** So we're tracking—so far in the year—obviously it's still pretty early in the year—\$3 million. And so, obviously, the mining tax is at 15 per cent. There's also kind of a—I don't want to say a kicker but, I mean, there's also a 10 per cent—not sure if I'm saying the terminology right, but kind of a 10 per cent kicker based on profits that—I think the way the 15 per cent is calculated is based on kind of expenses and revenues, I guess, for the most part. You know, when they're capital 'expensers,' it's the profits that's calculated. But so far, year to date, it's around \$3 million.

For the mining sector, and I'll be up there, actually, in Snow Lake, I think, in a few weeks, is—in the next number of weeks. You know, there's been some progress in the mining sector and there's been a lot of exploration happening, which is a good thing. Now there's, you know, more exploration happening that's obviously incorporated in their expenses. So that has an impact on the mining sector.

Mr. Chair, would it be possible to ask the committee to take a five-minute bio break at all? Would that be appropriate?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Is it the will of the committee to take a five-minute break? *[Agreed]*

Committee recess for five minutes.

*The committee recessed at 1:39 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 1:45 p.m.*

**Mr. Chairperson:** I'd like to bring the committee back to order.

Are—is the—I see the minister is back. You're ready to go.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Minister, the Ombudsman previously highlighted the delays in your department with its FIPPA processing times. I'm wondering if you could update this committee on what the current average response time is?

**Mr. Fielding:** So, we've seen an expedited amount of FIPPA requests that have come in, so we do acknowledge the fact that it's taking too long. We are kind of moving, I guess, pieces around to have the resources in place to do it as quickly as we can.

And, you know, we do lots of work with the Ombudsman to make sure that the information is provided in a timely 'fashet'—'fasset.' I mean, some things take a little bit longer just because of the information you're trying to pull up and some take a little bit less, so I'm not sure there's an average time, but it really depends on the application and what information they're looking for.

And I certainly, you know, would agree with the member and probably the Ombudsman that we need to get faster at providing that information back.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I certainly can attest first-hand that this department is probably one of the worst offenders in the government and the Ombudsman certainly had an average time that they were concerned with.

So I'm wondering if the minister can provide us what the current average time is?

**Mr. Fielding:** So what Finance does is we co-ordinate a bunch of services, so we'll do kind of the co-ordinations for Finance, Executive Council, Civil Service Commission, Central Services, Crown Services and other administrators for the all-charities function.

And so, you know, I don't collectively have what the average is, I think that's something through the new ministry of legislative affairs would have kind of, I guess, the global time frame. But, you know, again, it's ours—although it's kind of assembled in Finance, there's a whole bunch of departments that kind of feed into our numbers.

And so we do recognize what the Ombudsman has said, and we want to work with the Ombudsman to get the information to the people that are, you know, putting out the FIPPA requests in a timely fashion. So, committed to moving in that direction.

\*(13:50)

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister can update the committee on how the implementation of the Ombudsman's recommendations are going and when will they be fully implemented?

**Mr. Fielding:** Just some clarity. So, you're referring to the Ombudsman's, you know, freedom of information request, that's what you're asking for?

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Yes, that's correct.

**Mr. Fielding:** So, those responsibilities actually have been taken on by the legislative and—the new department, I'm going to say the name wrong but legislative affairs. So they're kind of co-ordinating this approach. But I think globally as a government I can say that we're absolutely committed to ensuring that freedom of information requests are fulfilled in a timely way, even though we may not be co-ordinating here in Finance anymore. We're obviously going to work with legislative affairs to endeavour to make sure that these requests are fulfilled in a timely way.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** As the minister knows, he has the inglorious distinction of being the only Finance Minister in Manitoba's history to preside over two credit downgrades of our provincial finances, something that before his government was unheard of.

We also know that the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the federal Parliamentary Budget Officer, is saying that Manitoba finances are unsustainable. And even though there was one year of balanced budget, that has not upgraded our credit rating.

So I'm wondering if the minister recognizes that it's his tax cuts to the wealthiest Manitoba that has put our finances in an unsustainable situation where we cannot afford the services we currently provide to Manitobans.

So I'm going to ask the minister: Is the plan to cut those services or is it the plan to restore fair taxation to successful corporations and the very wealthy Manitobans that have been cut?

**Mr. Fielding:** You know, I find the question almost comical. I mean, we know the, you know, financial situation we were left by the NDP government. We know that they drove up the debt of Manitoba Hydro by over \$10 billion by their reckless approach to some of the programs that avoided actually Public Utilities Board, going through them—I believe it was Keeyask or at least the bipole didn't even go through the PUB, that's there, that's driven some of the downgrades.

Manitoba actually is one of the only provinces—in fact was the only province in western Canada that didn't get a downgrade during the pandemic. I mean, obviously, you know, during the pandemic it's been extremely challenging as a minister of Finance, whether you're Manitoba or Ontario or BC, wherever, predicting what was going to go on, not just on a public health basis, but just on a financial basis. Because we had moved, quite frankly, hundreds of

millions of dollars for support for ventures—for businesses and individuals and you name it, right—PPE, you know, all this other stuff.

So we're proud of the fact that we actually didn't get a downgrade. I think the bond-rating agencies have said glowing things about our approach. In fact I remember one of the bond-rating agencies said that when we released our budget, that it was a very realistic approach.

We know that over the last four, five budgets what we tried to do as a government is, you know, come in under budget, right? Overperform. And that's happened each and every year and that's been a credit of, you know, I think a lot of the hard work that we've had to go through for it.

We are, of course, the only party in the Legislature that supports a balanced-budget legislation to get rid of the deficit in an eight-year time frame. We think that's realistic. We don't think that's—we think it's doable.

Now, our number one goal right now is the pandemic and make sure people are supported. But we do think an eight-year time period, and if you look at the what the bond-rating agencies would say, I think they would agree with you that having a long-term plan to get ourselves out of a deficit situation, because you have—you know, that's one of the areas that really drives debt.

So, having a plan in place that's there makes a lot of sense, and quite frankly, I think, you know, managing the finances in turbulent times has been a big challenge, again, not just for Manitoba but other provinces. And the fact that we're the only ones that haven't got a downgrade, as other provinces like BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, others have during the pandemic, shows that we're managing that process well.

You know, my one criticism with the federal government—and I think for the most part we've worked extremely well. I am, you know—work well with Minister Freeland and I consider her a friend, actually. She's someone that's been very good at pushing for Manitoba projects. But my one criticism against the federal government is that there hasn't been a plan to get ourselves back into balance. Everyone—every government is doing what they can to support individual businesses now, but you do need a plan to get yourself back into balance.

And that's what we have and that was supported, and I was disappointed that the opposition voted against it.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister can tell us how much extra money has been spent on servicing the debt due to the two PC credit downgrades and how much further Manitoba would be ahead right now without having to spend that money on interest. I'm wondering if you can give us that number.

**Mr. Fielding:** Well it's, you know—jeez, I don't even know where to unpack that one.

We know the track record of the NDP and their dangerous decisions, their risky decisions on the finances. And you know, if they weren't borrowing money they were jacking up taxes on Manitobans, which we think is dangerous. They haven't, along any part of the way, supported any deficit reduction plan that's been in place.

We actually did balance our budget prior to the pandemic coming to fruition. For the member to somehow say that it's our fault because the credit ratings is—I don't think anyone in Manitoba would believe that. I mean, we clearly know, you know, who's—you know, we know the track record of the NDP. We know what they did to things like the hydro debt.

You know, I don't even know what to say to the member. I mean the reality is our debt servicing charge is about \$1 billion a year—went down a little bit this year just because of the fact that interest rates have gone down. So, you know, it's really hard to answer the question when the member refuses to, you know, agree with the obvious, the facts that we were left with a mess by him and his government. Maybe not him, but he was, you know, his governing party. At that point the NDP left Manitobans in a really bad situation.

We're proud of the fact that we cleaned up the mess. We've got a plan in place. If the member, you know, has any concern about deficits, which I don't think he does, quite frankly, but if he did he would have supported a plan to get yourselves back in balance.

And to answer the question of, what, you know—how will that impact our ratings? I gave you the amount of money that we're allocating towards that. But, at the end of the day, you know, the bonds that go on the market, it really depends what the interest rates and the, you know, some of the lending that's in place. We've taken advantage of some of the, you

know, called the century bonds. There's been two or three, I think two century bonds that have been put in place that locks in long-term money for 100 years, really unheard of, you know.

And so that's really our plan going forward. I really encourage the member to get on board with our balanced budget legislation and support that and stop, you know, voting to jack up taxes on all Manitobans.

\* (14:00)

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I want to talk to you about the Political Contributions Tax Credit.

Since the changes in 2018, can you advise whether there's been an increase in political donations, and how many Manitobans have maxed out the donations? Meaning, how many 5,000-person donors are there in Manitoba?

**Mr. Fielding:** I'll refer the member to Elections Manitoba annual report.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister can break down the distribution by tax bracket for political contributions. How many in the top bracket, how many in the middle bracket, how many in the low bracket actually make donations to the political parties. That's not in the report; that's information within the ministry.

So, can you advise what that breaks down to?

**Mr. Fielding:** We're going to take that question under advisement, and we'll refer the information back to our table.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Now that bill 28 has been ruled unconstitutional, as the minister is aware, school boards are on the hook for tens of millions of dollars and interest in back pay for cost-of-living increases that didn't happen because, as you know, your government used that as a tactic to prevent that sort of fair negotiation at the board table.

That's blown a huge hole in school board budgets, which have caused class sizes to balloon, teachers to be laid off.

I'm wondering, is the minister going to take responsibility for that and reimburse school boards for the tens of millions of dollars that they now have to come up with under the current system?

**Mr. Fielding:** And the member quite knows when he was chair of the Winnipeg School Division that he took a lot of irresponsible action, I guess I would say, on the financial basis, where he was jacking up taxes

routinely. You don't have to go as far as Dr. Wiens, that did a report in terms of his—nature of a school division, so I'm not sure I would necessarily use his background to use as an example. In fact, that probably would be the poster child of bad behaviour when you're, you know, a part of a school division, when you're chair of a school division. But that's part of his legacy.

What I would suggest is that our government is committed to \$1.6 billion of new expenditures for operating and capital dollars. We're investing in 20 new schools. We're upgrading schools—I think there was eight different schools on HVAC systems and stuff, on just, you know, COVID-related reliefs that were done. So there's a lot of money that's being invested in the education system.

Some of the divisions, obviously, are in different stages of their negotiations, and the Minister of Finance has—or rather, the Minister of Education (Mr. Cullen) has ongoing discussions with these school divisions. But I can say as a government, we very much are committed to \$1.6 billion of new expenditures and building 20 new schools.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** The minister in his mandate letter is tasked with reviewing urban reserves, to quote, to ensure equitable treatment of taxpayers.

I'm wondering if the minister can give an update of has that review taken place. The minister's been in place for years now. What's the progress on this front? What's to be expected? Is there going to be legislation, et cetera? And what is this coded language: ensure equitable treatment of taxpayers? It sounds really troubling.

I'm wondering if you can explain that.

**Mr. Fielding:** What's really troubling is your record on finances when you were chair of the Winnipeg School Division. That's really troubling because taxpayers were on the hook for all the taxes you jacked up every year.

But I would say on the urban reserve, it's an important initiative for the government. We want to work with all parties, go to the Indigenous communities and make sure that there's—

**Mr. Chairperson:** I'd like to remind the minister to put his comments through the Chair. We've discussed this a little earlier and if we could refrain from the words of you and use the title of the person we are talking to.

Thank you.

**Mr. Fielding:** No problem, Mr. Chair, and we know the member's risky and dangerous approach to finances when he was chair of the Winnipeg School Division is something that I don't think makes sense to run the government here but that's something that he'll have to—you know, is part of his legacy.

What I can tell you when it—when we talk about urban reserves, we want a better relationship with Indigenous communities through reconciliation. You know, we think this is a really important initiative and that's why it was put in my mandate letter. We're ongoing discussions with Indigenous leadership and other organizations as it relates to that.

The process that has been in place—I was actually involved when I was on city council with one of the—the first urban reserve actually in St. James. It was an old Manitoba Hydro, you know, I guess, you know, location that they—that, you know, was being transferred as an urban reserve. And, you know, it worked out really well.

What actually happens in that is there's a servicing-sharing agreement that happens and so, basically, the municipalities will kind of wrap up, you know, what costs it would, you know, normally have on a regular property, right, whether it's through property taxes and, you know, servicing for garbage and all that sort of stuff, some of the services that would be in place. And it's considered as a service-sharing agreement.

So, you know, that's kind of the ongoing process and that's what actually happens once the service-sharing agreement is in place. Then it goes to Ottawa and Ottawa kind of makes the decision on the urban reserve as I understand the process.

But we certainly want to be involved and at the table and, you know, our discussions are ongoing with Indigenous communities and federal government and municipal governments, to make sure, you know, it's—it makes sense. But again, my own personal experience has been wonderful. I think it's been great experience.

There's jobs that've been created. I know Yellowquill College has gone to the first urban reserve. They were there at one point anyways, through some of the training. There's gas bars; there's everything else and it was a good arrangement.

So we'd like to see other arrangements like that come to fruition here in Manitoba. So we want to make sure the process works well and so we want to continue to consult with Indigenous communities.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** So what's the status of the review of urban reserves and what is the policy that's going to be implemented by this minister?

\* (14:10)

**Mr. Fielding:** So we're in a listening process with Indigenous communities and I want to make sure we recognize, you know—reconciliation piece, and we think these are great opportunities for economic development for everyone; all of Manitobans, all Canadians. And so we're very much committed to the process, but we're in the listening phase and so, you know, our hope is that we would have a policy in place soon—sooner rather than later.

And, you now, we're going to have a new government here, of course, in Manitoba over the next month or so, and I know one of the goals of probably both of the candidates that are vying for that is to have a better working relationship with Indigenous communities. And so that is our hope, and so we'd like to kind of take that, I guess, continued approach but ongoing enhanced approach to the table when we have those discussions with Indigenous communities.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** I'm wondering if you can shed some light on why your department underspent almost \$3 million from the budget on your taxation unit, which is the one that includes audits, investigations and collections.

Why are you underspending by \$3 million in that one area. It seems pretty critical.

**Mr. Fielding:** So there obviously is some vacancies in there, but there was also some move with deferrals. You may recall some of the business taxes, whether it be kind of the payroll tax or other types of initiatives that we kind of deferred, just to give businesses some breathing room, I guess, if you will. And so I think at that point we also made a decision not to penalize people if they were having some hard times with their cash flow bills, and so there was some deferrals that would happen.

So there has been some work that has been deferred but, you know, we obviously are working at our appropriate level but, again, there has been some work that's been deferred in regards to it.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** What's the current vacancy rate in that department?

**Mr. Fielding:** So we made a bit of progress since we met last as a committee to go through the Estimates. I don't know the exact number, what it was before, but I think it was hovering around 40 per cent, somewhere

around there. It might have been a little bit more, less, north or south of that number. But it's about 25 per cent.

So we've made some progress, but there's still too many vacancies that are there, so we want to make sure that we were going to staff up and we've got the budget appropriate to do that; just a matter of getting the right people in place and work is ongoing in respect to that.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** When will that department be fully staffed?

**Mr. Fielding:** So we obviously budget to make sure we have appropriate level of staff. With, you know, we—really depends on the hiring process and, you know, when you hire people there's also attrition that happens and there's turnover.

There's people retiring and the Department of Finance tends to be—our workforce tends to be a little bit older than other departments and so there has been a little bit more of a natural turnover just because of retirements that do happen. But we're endeavouring to hire as many people as we can to make sure we're fully staffed in respect to that. So it's hard to kind of put a place on it.

But you ask my personal opinion, I'd like to see us, you know, staffed up, for sure, more than we are. But, you know, we—you obviously can't control some of the turnover when people are retiring and that sorts. But that's making sure we have a robust HR decision—or HR process in place so we can hire those types of people to make sure they are staffed up and they're doing the—they're—all the appropriate work that is there for them to do is being done.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Now, Minister, we received documents which show that you waited to recuse yourself from matters relating to Tiber River mid-February, 2021. Media stories began emerging and the court case against Tiber River began in the late fall of 2020—it's October 26th, to be exact.

I'm wondering if the minister can offer an explanation to this committee why he waited so long to recuse himself from that situation?

**Mr. Fielding:** Well, it's not surprising this member, somehow, starts to take personal attacks on individuals, but it's, you know, it's not surprising, quite frankly. We've seen this before in the House. That's more the nature of his personality more than anything else.

What I can tell you is I took the appropriate action. When the member tried to do a political stunt by raising this in the media, you know, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner commented on this and said that I took all appropriate measures in respect to that nature. So I would refer to the comments made by the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** If the minister's actions were appropriate in February of 2021, why weren't they appropriate in October 2020, when this was all unfolding? Why did he wait a further three months to recuse himself?

**Mr. Fielding:** Number one, I guess, the option is to believe a member like yourself, and we're clearly starting to take personal shots, or you can believe the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, whose comment on this in respect to the actions that I took, clearly I took the appropriate actions. If you'd like to ask the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, he's clearly made his comments in respect to this on the record.

I don't really have anything more to say to that. I know the member likes to do these stunts, these political stunts and take political, personal attacks on individuals. I think that's unfortunate. But, you know, it really is his approach to politics, unfortunately. But I'll refer any comments in respect to what the Conflict of Interest Commissioner—so people have a choice to understand whether they believe the Conflict of Interest Commissioner who said I took all the appropriate steps, or a politician like yourself who clearly is in the midst of taking personal shots. That's been, you know, talked about it. An independent officer like the Conflict of Interest Commissioner—so, I refer any comments in respect to that to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** It's my understanding that the member from St. Boniface wishes to ask a few questions, and I'll yield the remaining time.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** I just had a—I'll try to keep, we don't have much time—but I was wondering, I know that there were, you know, we had evictions suspensions, basically eviction bans for a number of—you know, for the—at least for the first and second waves, or parts of them.

I was wondering, you know, we were talking about bringing back a fourth—that a fourth wave may be approaching, and it's cold. I know that there have been issues with evictions, that there's really two issues. One is that, you know, is that people risk being made homeless. But the other is that there are—that it

can risk driving up rent prices as well, right, just the turnover means that people can then bring it up.

So I was just wondering if—I had asked the Premier (Mr. Goertzen) about this the other day in Estimates, whether there was any consideration of bringing back an eviction ban if there were serious problems in the fourth wave.

\* (14:20)

**Mr. Fielding:** You know, just—I guess when the pandemic started, we were one of the first provinces to not just have an eviction ban, but, obviously, the wage—or rather, the wage—rather, the rent freeze that was part of it, that lasted quite a long time. In fact, other provinces kind of moved away from that. I think it was Saskatchewan and Ontario. We kept it in place for quite a long time. We have taken—and evictions aren't always related to, you know, arrears of payment, but, you know, sometimes they are.

And so with that we've tried to make some policy changes as it respects to wage—or not wage, rather, well, supports for individuals. I mean, we've talked about that 338,000 Manitobans that got some sort of support for individuals.

We did talk about a new process with the rent bank, right, so it's kind of a, you know, kind of a—it's a line of credit, I guess, if you will between the renters, so they would have the ability to stretch out the dollars and cents there, and we froze, you know, the—there's kind of essentially a rent freeze that's in place that's there.

So it answers specifically on that, that's the wage freezes that member may also be, I guess, venturing into evictions, so we haven't made a decision in respect of that. I mean, we're always looking at options to support individuals, but probably the—two or three items that I just mentioned are probably some good steps to provide a bit more flexibility for the financial needs.

You know, there is a process in place if someone's evicted for, you know, criminality or, you know, if they're destroying, you know, kind of the units, and that's kind of what we handled through the appropriate means through our enforcement and through the RTB process. So that's really in their purview. Maybe I'll leave it at that.

**Mr. Lamont:** Earlier in the meeting there was some discussion just about the changes to property taxes, and the minister was mentioning that there'd been a number of studies about, you know, how it happened.

The one question I have is about distribution, so it's sort of, you know, we know that we have numbers—the number of people who are getting it. Is there a sense or would the minister be willing to release any of those studies or make those studies available if they are not already just so we have a sense of, I'd say, the distribution, by which I mean, you know, sometimes, you know, you'll have one person who's paying five bucks and you have one person who's paying 500 bucks and—because that's a—it's a different question than the bulk numbers of averages or—I'm just wondering if there had been any distributional analysis and whether that was available.

**Mr. Fielding:** There hasn't really been done any analysis on it. I mean, traditionally, I guess you would say, well, you know, some of them may be living in an affluent neighbourhood, for the most part would be making more money, you know, like have a higher, you know, personal income taxes they're paying because they're making more money or vice versa if you're a lower income living in lowers.

But there is some abnormalities to it, right, so I'll give you an example of that. Maybe it's someone that was—let's say they were a doctor. They're—high, you know, performing doctor, for instance, but that they retire, but they may still be living in kind of a really big, you know, house, right, so there could be, you know, there could be—although their income has dramatically dropped, their personal income tax has dramatically dropped, they're still living in a big, you know, maybe a big house until maybe they downgrade for the kids. Vice versa, it could be the same thing.

It could be someone who's a farmer and, you know, maybe they sell their farm so they, you know, they get \$2 million for their, you now, collected as income, I guess, for that year and yet they're still living in a, you know, farmhouse that they built in 1947. So I guess there's some abnormalities in there.

So, long story short, I don't think there's been an analysis done on that and I think for the most part, you're right. There'll be trend lines there but there's also, you know, other circumstances where, you know, you're living in a big house or small house and you're not necessarily in the categories you think you may be with a personal income tax.

And when we do our, you know, our education property—it goes out to property owners, so we don't, you know, collect data on how, you know, much they're making or whatever. It just goes out to on whether you're a property owner, you know, and

there's obviously corresponding rent piece that we've talked about earlier on this meeting.

So, answer your question: there really hasn't been an announcement.

**Mr. Lamont:** I just had—it was some questions—it was relying—sorry, about some of the numbers around Workplace Safety and Health. I know that this came up a little bit earlier but for 2021—sorry, let me just make sure I've got the right book here—this is from the Main Estimates and supplement that Workplace Safety and Health for 2020-21, it says—

**Mr. Chairperson:** The member for St. Boniface, we've lost the audio with you. If you could—

**An Honourable Member:** Oh, I'm sorry about that; I'm not—so—

**Mr. Chairperson:** The member for St. Boniface.

**Mr. Lamont:** Oh, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Page 23, Main Estimates, just to say that for the year 2020-21, Workplace Safety and Health, it has—it's \$8,599,000 but in public accounts, it—for the annual report, it appears to say \$7,747,000 and there was some discrepancies with those numbers for the Manitoba Labour Board, the Employment Standards.

So I was just wondering if the—you know, if the minister could explain them or if he can't answer right now since we're running out of time, if he would be willing to put that under advise—to get back to me later about it.

Just there's a discrepancy, yes, in between the—some numbers in the Workplace Safety and Health branch for the year 2020-21.

**Mr. Fielding:** Yes, officials are looking for it. If they can get the answer in the minutes we have remaining, I'll certainly bring it forward but in the essence of time, I'll turn it back if there's any other questions.

We'll take it under advisement unless they can provide the information right now, as we speak. So I'll take it under advisement.

**Mr. Lamont:** I yield my time.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Any more questions?

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

Resolution 7.2: RESOLVED that there be granted Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,372,000 for Finance, Finance Policy and Legislation, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 7.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,810,000 for Finance, Communications Services Manitoba, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 7.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,493,000 for Finance, Treasury, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

As per the Sessional Order, the hour being 2:30 p.m., committee rise.

## ROOM 255

### INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr. Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** The Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Infrastructure. As previously agreed, questions for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia):** I do intend to give the minister the first word here today because I had—we had ended off on a question, and so I'm sure he has the answer there for that.

But just for the record and just so that folks following along might understand where we're at, I think the question was with regard to page 24 of the '20-21 Public Accounts book, which breaks down the budget and actuals for strategic infrastructure, and I had asked the minister to detail—to provide a detailed list of budgeted projects, amounts spent and deferred projects for the past fiscal year.

**Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure):** I thought we had left off somewhere else, so I'm prepared to ask or to address the question that was asked.

I would suggest to the member that he goes to the Manitoba Infrastructure home page. It's an interactive page. Top of the—or, sorry, middle of the page we have what is called an interactive map of all the projects, and he can go and have a look at them. They're all

there. They are what we are proposing, and he can have a good look at it. It really explains a lot of what we're doing. In fact, it is the second one underneath the COVID link, and I happen to have it here in front of me—thank you very much.

It's the—it's called Manitoba Infrastructure Projects Map. You open it up, and this map is a general guide and may not be relied upon in order to determine project scope for tendering. So we want to make very clear to committee that this is not a tendering site. Rather, for tender information, please consult the Manitoba sector website and it lists it there, and MERX for detailed project information.

So, again, it's not tendering site. It does, however, give really good information on what we are planning and you have to just accept the terms and you can get into the map, and I happen to be in there right there. I'd suggest the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) avails himself of it. It is a good way to see which projects we are going to plan on embarking on.

Again, I would point out to committee, like any other season, we are weather dependent. We do live at the bottom of what used to be Lake Agassiz and we have amazing ground in which to grow crops; however, sometimes that can be very troubling when you try to do construction projects. The gumbo gets wet like today and then the the equipment struggles with getting into the projects, and that can slow things down. If we find that a project is bogged down too much, we can always pull another project forward.

And so the member doesn't have to go through the map and count them all. There's an average of 800 contracts per year and he can see them all on the interactive map.

\* (11:30)

**Mr. Wiebe:** So, I mean, we're in Estimates here, I'll remind the minister. So this is—we're not looking for a general guide. We're not looking for an average. What we're looking for is specifically to compare the budget versus the actuals.

And what we're noting here is that on page 24 of the minister's document, it shows roads, highways, bridges and flood protection was underspent by \$128 million; that health, education and housing was underspent by \$209 million; that overall, from the pot that the government—and this includes the COVID spending—the overall strategic infrastructure was underspent by \$525 million.

So I'm not looking for a general guide from a website. I'm asking the minister to pick up his book, go to the document, maybe ask his officials—who are sitting, you know, right beside him—and ask for some detail, because I think that's what the people of Manitoba are asking for.

And I appreciate that the minister is already talking about Manitoba gumbo as some kind of excuse for not spending money and already trying to set that up. But I think the good folks in the Department of Infrastructure know exactly the kind of soil that we have in Manitoba, understand how to budget and deliver on projects, yet they have a minister who's in charge who continuously underspends.

And so I'm asking about these specific numbers that the minister can reference. And maybe he didn't do his homework, so he needs a bit of time now to catch up. I'll give him that time, if he can just ask his officials and get the answers for the people of Manitoba.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Excuse me, Minister, if you're trying to address us, you're muted. We cannot hear you in the room, so one moment please.

There we go. Thank you very much, Minister.

So, Minister Schuler, go ahead.

**Mr. Schuler:** I think the member is talking about last year, and then he's talking about this year.

So the amount of money that was lapsed, in real terms, out of Manitoba Infrastructure, was \$15 million: 10 was to the water division, \$5 million was to northern airports.

We also expired monies that were supposed to be expended on Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin outlet channel. That money did not get expended because the federal government has not given us approval yet to proceed with that project. So that money is on hold.

We also had monies that we didn't expend and those get carried over into the next year's budget. We also have monies that are part of Manitoba Restart. Those monies were not expended and they get carried over into the next year—unlike under the NDP government when money was expired, it was gone.

And I would point out to the member opposite that in 2005-2006, for instance, they had a measly budget of \$94,918,000 in their capital budget and they underspent by \$5.6 million, and that money was lapsed as—just on a basically a \$95-million budget; 2006-2007, they had a budget of \$116 million—a

fraction of what we're spending right now—and they lapsed, again, almost five—almost \$7 million.

So what our government has decided to do is that any monies we don't expend in one year, we get to carry that over to the other year.

I would like to point out to the member that if he's asking for the actual, what we think a project would cost in this budgetary year—and that's where I directed him to that map—we do not produce that. One of the reasons why we don't give what we think a project may cost is then we go to tender and, surprise, we usually get in and around that number and we want competitive bidding.

One of the reasons why we had a surplus last year in last year's budget is a lot of the tenders came in under price. It was very competitive. We were very pleased about that, and then that money gets moved into this year's budget, which, he will recognize, is probably something that should have been done under the 17 years when he sat as a senior member of the NDP government and never seemed to get it done.

So it's something that we are doing as a government. We are moving it into the next year. And, yes, weather conditions have a lot to do whether or not projects get completed or not.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Okay, so I'm happy that the minister is catching up now with the line of question.

So yes, I'm talking about the Public Accounts for the year 2021. So the years—the fiscal year 2021. And what I'm talking about is exactly what he's referencing now and saying that, yes, we underspent, and don't worry, we're going to spend it at some point.

But that amount has gotten out of control. It's now \$525 million—a half a billion dollars—that they left on the table in that year. They said, don't worry, we're going to spend this money. Look at us—we're, you know, we're going to address some of these infrastructure deficits that we've let build up over the last five years. And don't worry, we're going to spend it.

Half a billion dollars was left on the table, and now the minister's coming to us with a budget of \$1.2 billion—or, sorry, \$1.2 billion and is saying don't worry, we're going to spend that this year. So if the minister wants to clarify, if he wants to give the committee the information, that would be helpful. What is the list—provide the list of budgeted projects for this year and the actuals that have been spent to date.

He says the construction season is at an end, and so, you know, there's a couple of projects that I'm sure

are still to be completed, but the money's been spent. He should be able to tell us the actuals. Get the committee up to speed, then, and let us know how you've spent that \$1.2 billion. Is it all gone?

**Mr. Schuler:** Well, I can explain for the member how this process works; I can't understand for him. So I'll try to explain it again to him.

First of all, the \$500 million is horizontal and vertical infrastructure. So if he wants to have that conversation about the \$500 million, he should go to Finance Estimates. He could go to Health Estimates. He could go to universities' Estimates. He could go to—he could go anywhere he wants, and he could get some of those answers.

The \$500 million is not a Manitoba Infrastructure number. It is a cumulative number, and I would suggest that of that number there is a certain amount that was not spent by Manitoba Infrastructure, and I already explained to the member where those under-expenditures came. On our water infrastructure side, we underspent by \$10 million; northern airports, we underspent by \$5 million.

We also did not get the Manitoba Restart money all spent in one year. We had over three years to get that money moving. We also underspent in our capital, which gets transferred over; I explained that.

We also had savings, and I think that's a good thing for Manitobans. I don't know why he thinks that's a negative thing. But that is not the \$500 million. That is government-wide.

So the member can go to different departments and find out maybe why—perhaps the Minister of Health could help him—that the department is in the middle of a pandemic, and right now they're focused on the pandemic. Their employees are focused on the pandemic. So the fact that they're maybe not spending all of their capital money right now should be understandable. I'd like to point to the member that we are in the middle of a pandemic, and that's where staff is—in Health and in other departments—I'd like to point out that Manitoba Infrastructure has also been called up.

I would call out staff that have been very, very instrumental in helping with the pandemic. We have Johanu Botha, who was heavily involved with the vaccine rollout. And, yes, there is only so much an individual can do. We had—Johanu Botha was operations lead for the vaccine task force. The director of northern airports, Jeremy Angus—an outstanding civil servant in the province of Manitoba—he was

taken and asked to help on the pandemic. Brian Imhoff, director of special operations—he was also asked to help out on the COVID rollout. They were instrumental in helping with the vaccination rollout. I would also point out that our motor carrier enforcement officers have been assigned to other duties. Manitoba Infrastructure has done its part for standing up for Manitobans, trying to keep them safe.

\*(11:40)

So the fact that there were some departments that may have underspent, I think, is reasonable—certainly in the Department of Health, who has been carrying the brunt of the work. They have been doing amazing work, and I see the minister sitting there, I know she will—

**Mr. Chairperson:** We seem to have lost your feed there, minister. You're frozen, so just one moment.

**Mr. Schuler:** —and individuals are doing absolutely everything and anything they can to help with that. And they should be commended, not criticized by the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) and the NDP.

**Mr. Wiebe:** The hypocrisy is just shocking, I think, to most Manitobans. You know, the minister wants to walk around and talk about strategic infrastructure and how much money they're spending, you know, oh, don't worry, we're going to spend all this money. It never seems to come to fruition.

So now he doesn't want to talk about the billion dollars—or half a billion dollars that's being underspent across government. That's fine. I'm happy for him to now dial it back and say, oh, it's only \$128 million underspent on highways, on flood protection, on roads, on bridges in this province. And he's proud of that fact. So that's great. Then I invite him to provide us with that list. He now is saying that they're spending more than ever this year in their budget, yet we know they haven't met a budget target yet.

So we're simply asking—he's saying that the construction season is over. He claims that this is a seasonal operation only, so he should have a pretty good handle right now. I understand that there's more to come from the following few months of the year and into next year, but maybe he can just give us an update, you know, make reference to the actual lines in the budget and give us a sense of where he's at, the actuals this year versus the budgeted amount that they came out with.

**Mr. Schuler:** Okay, so I'll walk the member through the budget.

Out of \$2.2 billion, Manitoba Infrastructure was responsible for \$658 million. Off of that \$658 million, \$84 million was expired because of Lake Manitoba outlet. I would suggest that the member for Concordia and the NDP maybe should get on board and help us with that process instead of always throwing stones at it. So \$84 million we can't spend simply because we don't have the approvals on it.

I would then point out that \$23 million was because of delays and the rest of that \$23 million will be rolled into this year's budget. We also had savings of \$38 million, so those \$38 million expired, and we do not use savings to keep spending with; that is a savings to the taxpayer. We expired \$5 million, and that was on the airport side of it. And I don't know if the member has any other further questions that accounts for what took place, but, again, Manitoba Infrastructure is running its budget very tight, considering that we have a budget of \$658 million.

And I just want to read for the committee: when the member was in charge, 2005-2006, the budget was \$94 million; 2006-2007, \$116 million; 2007-2008, \$239 million. I'd point out to the member, we are sitting at \$658 million, and we are doing an amazing job in ensuring that the amount of money is well spent. We're getting good value for our money.

We know that there are cost pressures on a lot of things. Steel is absolutely going through the roof, and we know that that's going to impact a lot of projects. If the member wants to avail himself of this new thing AI Gore invented called Google, he can go and he can google and see where steel prices are going. So we're not too sure we will see that kind of savings again this year, but in real terms we have under—we have expired \$15 million, 10 on the water side, 5 on airport runways, and I don't think savings should be viewed as something that was expired.

Manitoba Infrastructure views itself as the day after tomorrow. We're the department of hope. We make sure that we're out there and in ensuring that we hire good people. Construction companies are coming to us and saying that they are working very, very hard trying to fill all the positions within their company. *[inaudible]* stuff accomplished at the end we get something from that money, and we will have very good infrastructure.

Again, I'd point out to committee the more than \$600 million that we have in our budget this year is epic, epic in proportion compared to the \$94 million when the member for Concordia was in charge and didn't view this as a necessary place to be expending

money. And I would point out to committee we've had to spend over \$100 million in Highway No. 1; it was in such poor condition, and the same thing with Highway 75 going to the US. We're spending, I believe it is, more than \$50 million on Highway 75 just to get it up to a RTAC or national standard. And that's because the NDP and the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) and the Leader of the Opposition saw it fit to underspend at \$94 million on a highways budget.

Yes, we find this very exciting. Do we spend all of our money? No. What we don't expend, we're allowed to carry over into the next year—something that was never done when the member from Concordia was in charge—he and the Leader of the Opposition. They didn't think it was important. We do.

\* (11:50)

We're building Manitoba. We're building our highways, our roads and our bridges, making them safe for Manitobans, making them safe for commerce—something the NDP neglected for 17 years.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Well, I can appreciate the, you know, the minister's living in the past and he's referencing 2005. I think I was sitting in a university class and working at Penner Foods to, you know, pay for my tuition at that point. So, you know, I think he's living in the past, and he's one step—well, I'm being generous here—one step behind.

You know, we asked this on Wednesday. We asked about 2020-2021 numbers, which is now what he's trying to answer—although he still hasn't given me the specifics, the detailed list that we asked for, of those projects he just referenced that were deferred or cancelled or not undertaken—but he's giving me the numbers. He's—now he's caught—he caught up. He's reading out of the book. If he was here in the room, I could have handed it to him. We could have sped things up, but we know why the minister's not here in the room.

So, you know, it's frustrating, but I'll leave him to do that, and I'll leave him to catch up to this year, where he's now saying: well, we're spending, you know, \$1.2 billion and look at us, we're so great—except that we're actually not spending that amount of money.

And if he wants to prove me wrong, this is his opportunity. This is your chance. This is the minister's chance, Mr. Chair.

But I—well, I have a lot of questions, so I'm going to move on. He had mentioned the motor carrier enforcement officers, so I wanted to dig into that. The vacancy rate right now for those motor carrier enforcement officers has nearly doubled. From 9.3 in December 2018, it was up to 23.3 per cent in 2019.

Can the minister provide us with an update of what the currency—current vacancy rate is?

**Mr. Schuler:** I'd like to thank the member for the question, and we're back to where we were the other day.

I'd like to point out to committee that in 2021 we hired 179 people for that year—for 2021. In '21-22, in the first six months, we've already hired 165—again, through open competition. We continue to hire; we are currently at 96 positions in recruitment. We are going to continue that rate.

I would suggest to committee that's probably the maximum that we would be allowed through the Civil Service Commission at any given time. That is a lot of positions that are out for placement and we are trying to recruit 96 more positions. There will be more forthcoming as soon as we find the appropriate candidates.

I would point out to committee that with COVID-19 we've been struggling with—a lot of individuals look at the situation and figure it's a really good time for them to retire. Retirement rate is high. People are contemplating a life change. In fact, in 2021, 36.6 per cent of the people who left the department did so in retirement, and that number keeps going up.

We also have individuals looking at other departments for advancement. We know that there were a lot of—lot of recruitment efforts because of the pandemic. Within government, individuals moved into other departments and then, unfortunately, we did have some individuals who passed away. So we are actively recruiting.

We understand that, for instance, when it comes to Motor Carrier division, it is a tougher place to recruit simply because it's got so much hands-on training, and at some point in time—points in time we were completely locked down. Those individuals could not get their training, plus the individuals who were doing the job were called on for double duty not just at Manitoba Infrastructure, but were also called upon, for instance, at one point in time we were at our borders having stations where individuals were—it was

recommended that they would quarantine as they were travelling, and what the processes were.

At times, our officers are called on to do *[inaudible]* We're trying to hire, but again, we are in a hiring phase. It's all done through the Civil Service Commission. It is done through competition and we will continue to hire.

The member seems to be very intrigued on this. He seems to spend an awful lot of time. I would suggest he can find these positions at Manitoba jobs.ca, and perhaps he's looking for a change in his career. Maybe the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) could go there and he can find himself a good job because we are always looking for all kinds of people and we might actually even have a position for someone of his talents. So I would suggest he goes to Manitoba jobs.ca.

**Mr. Wiebe:** So, again, the minister is one step behind, it seems. And I guess he's also very—he's very sensitive about the fact that their overall vacancy rate in the department, as we discovered yesterday, is incredibly high. So now he's, you know, he's trying to spin this in saying it's attrition and, yes, it's—you know, we've got a real problem in vacancy rates. But don't worry, you know, everything is just peachy keen. We know that's not true.

I'm going to get to that, don't worry. The minister—we'll—I'll make sure that I come back to that.

But I want to focus him up here on the motor carrier enforcement officers because he knows that this came from the Auditor General's report in 2019, which talked about the number of positions that are vacant in that department which is, you know—he's talking about 165 people being hired. Well, there's only 44 positions in the motor carrier enforcement branch. So, you know, I don't know where he's getting that number, but I need him to focus up on this important finding from the Auditor General that said that the vacancy rate was double at that point, and it was higher—it was double from where it had been the year before. And this is a serious issue, and the minister knows that this is a serious issue because the Auditor General brought it forward.

So, you know, this should be an action item that he received from that report that his department is working on. He's got—again, he's got—he's sitting, like, probably, you know, a foot from his officials. You know, we can see him talking and kind of spraying out while he's talking to those officials. Maybe he can just ask them, you know, what has been done to address

this? What is the current vacancy rate, so that we can have a discussion about the recommendations that have come from the Auditor General.

\* (12:00)

**Mr. Schuler:** Thank you for that.

And I do want to point out to committee before we get into the other questions that this morning we announced changes to the safety rating and monitoring through motor carriers. This is something that was called for by the MTA. The government has developed a new standard for assigning safety ratings to companies operating commercial vehicles in the province, and our government is committed to road safety, ensuring that Manitoba's commercial truck operators are rewarded for safe operations.

After reviewing the current provincial Safety Fitness Certificate, or SFC program, our government has decided to update, modernize the assigning safety rating system to better reflect recommendations from the industry and to better serve motor carriers. The MTA has advocated for modernizing the assessment of safety ratings, and they are pleased to see improvements being made on this item.

In fact, Terry Shaw, who most of us know—he's the executive director for Manitoba Trucking Association—he said, and I quote: Our industry members were pleased to provide input into the new process, which will serve road safety while also reducing red tape. And we applaud to these changes and look forward to ongoing communication regarding opportunities for road safety enhancements.

Mr. Chairman, our government requires carriers to operate their vehicles in a safe manner and to comply with applicable highway safety laws and regulations that pertain to highway carriers in accordance with the National Safety Code. The NSC is a set of 16 standards developed by the member jurisdictions of Canadian council of motor transportation administrators in consultation with the motor carrier industry, to ensure road safety and to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of people and goods across the country.

Changes to the safety rating policy aligns with industry advocacy and addresses recommendations, including in the Office of the Auditor General report on commercial vehicle safety. Using this policy, Manitoba will now assign a consistent safety rating to all carriers with a similar on-road performance regardless—regardless of historical audited status.

So, yes, we did take the report serious. We've addressed it; we've accepted the recommendations and are working on it.

Again, I pointed out to committee, in '20-21, we hired 179 people that year; '21-22, the first six months we've already hired 165 individuals through competition, and another 96 positions are through the Civil Service Commission on Manitoba jobs.ca.

And I would invite the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), if he's looking for a career change—maybe he is; he indicated that he went to university in 2005, maybe he's looking for a bit of a career change. You know, I think maybe within the Department of Manitoba Infrastructure we might have a position which would align with his skill set. I would encourage him to go have a look at it, and Manitoba Infrastructure is in a hiring phase.

**Mr. Wiebe:** I mean, it's such a disrespectful answer and a flippant answer to a pretty serious, you know, charge by the Auditor General of the operations of the department.

In 2019, the AG's report said: The department is unable to demonstrate that its staffing patterns maximize coverage and the maximum—and minimize the risk of predictability. For example, we found that almost 50 per cent of commercial truck traffic occurs when major weigh stations are closed and that both weight stations and mobile patrol hours are overly predictable.

The minister knows this. And he knows that a big part of the issue that's been identified—not just throughout his whole department, which he continues to reference, and I encourage him to do that. I know that, you know, the MGEU has been pretty vocal about the deficiencies that are showing themselves across his department when it comes to safety on our highways and the lack of people that are employed there. That's fine. He can continue to do that. But what I'm just simply asking is the current vacancy rate—his officials have to have this, because it was the Auditor General's recommendation. They've got this at their fingertips. Give us the current vacancy rate.

In 2019, the vacancy rate was 23.3 per cent. And so—there—I mean, there's no way for the department to address these serious allegations from the Auditor General and the findings from the Auditor General's report—there's no way to address that when you're sitting at a quarter of your staff being—positions being—not being filled.

So, you know, if the minister wants to have a conversation about the work that they're doing, it's going to start and end with him giving me that number so that we can at least be on the same page. Maybe they've filled those vacant positions. Let the committee know that. That's all we're asking right now.

**Mr. Schuler:** I would like to point out to the member for Concordia that the auditor's report audited the years of 2014, 2015, 2016, '17 and '18. And I think the member for Concordia, who indicated in 2005 he was in university—I don't think he was still in university in 2014. So we can be under the impression it was while he was one of the lead members of government at that time, and the auditor reflected not just on the years when he was in government but the spillover effect.

And we get it: this is the member for Concordia's mess, and as minister, I have to clean it up. We get that. And we'll do that. That's—when we came into government, there was one mess after another that we had to clean up, and we did that.

So the auditor audited the member for Concordia's mess, and it's left up to this minister to clean it up, which we're going to do. In fact, the report was received with 17 recommendations, and we have decided as a government to implement all of them, because they address the mess that the member for Concordia left behind. And we'll address them.

Commercial vehicle safety is a priority for Manitoba and we take these recommendations serious. Improving oversight of commercial vehicle safety is a mandate item. Manitoba Infrastructure has been working on implementing the 17 recommendations from the December 2019 OAG report on commercial vehicle safety. In fact, the current status of the implementation—17 recommendations is as follows: four are completed, eight are to be completed within the next year, two to be completed within two years and two more will need additional time. A new performance management process is now in place to provide oversight and ensure quality of on-road inspections.

The department remains committed to the modernization of systems used to provide commercial vehicle oversight and services, as is evidenced in the recent launch of Manitoba MOOVES—M-O-O-V-E-S—the new automated routing and permitting system, which, I would point out to the member from Concordia, he was too busy fighting his internal battles with his former premier and all the kinds of

shenanigans that were going on—and it took our government to start bringing in some of these automated systems.

In fact, we even brought in the autonomous vehicle legislation, which his party stalled for years because somehow, they have a fear for new technology. In fact, Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation wants to modernize their computer strategies, and the NDP are fighting it—very unfortunate, and our government is cleaning that up.

\* (12:10)

The recommendations were focused on addressing identified safety fitness program insufficiencies, gaps in management of on-road inspections and weak performance measurement. Progress has continued to be made in the following areas: implementing improvements to the department's motor carrier safety monitoring activities related to operator safety ratings and carrier profiles.

Actions undertaken to date include the development of new safety monitoring reports to improve commercial vehicle 'operator'-operator oversight, changes to the Safety Fitness Certificate application and renewal processes and improvements in routine communications with industry on safety requirements.

Carrier profile system generates reports to identify carriers who may pose an increased safety risk and poor performing carriers for follow-up action. Following audits, investigators make recommendations for 'operator'-operator improvement, which can include safety and action plans, additional training, monetary penalties and/or further audits.

Output targets for roadside inspection officers continue to be monitored. Output increased 14 per cent per officer over the period of the O-I-G-OAG review of oversight of commercial vehicle safety.

Due to COVID-19 reassignment in the initial response and the most recent code red initiatives, inspection outputs may decrease in the current fiscal year.

MI has implemented more variability in shift schedules to reduce gaps in on-road enforcement activities. Even with COVID-19 reassignment, variable on-road enforcement activities have been maintained.

Internal process improvements specifically in regards to motor carrier safety monitoring activities

are being implemented with significant action on six of the nine related recommendations anticipated in fiscal year 2021-22.

MI is currently working on a formal action plan for consideration—

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** Despite the length of the answer, I want to note that the minister didn't even bother to consult with his officials, who presumably are still in the room, because they could give him the vacancy rate, and then we can have a discussion. He can continue to read the information that he gave at the—I'm assuming at Public Accounts, that's where he's reading that from. But he won't give that number.

Maybe his officials have left, maybe they're getting a little bit nervous. They got the anti-vax minister sitting across from them leaning over, you know—no mask on, I want to note that. So he's in his office here in the Legislature, somehow got through the door. I'm surprised somebody didn't stop him and ask him to, you know, show his vaccine card or to at least, you know, let the people of Manitoba know if he is vaccinated.

Maybe his officials now are starting to get nervous and they've left his office, which is a real shame, because I don't know if he can do his job as minister. He doesn't seem to be well-informed, and I do have some serious questions and some actual facts and numbers that I'd like him to put on the record. He has refused to do that so far.

With regards to departmental transformation, again, the minister talked and said, well, you know, there's this massive vacancy across our department and some of that is because of that departmental transformation. So, in July, the minister announced the consolidation of the infrastructure regions from five down to three. That's the Capital Region, Western Region, Northern Region. And there was offices in Steinbach, Brandon and Dauphin. There's also, I believe, offices remaining in Portage and Thompson.

So what we want to know, though, are: Are there other Infrastructure offices that have been closed in this consolidation and would that, then, explain some of this incredibly high vacancy rate that he's experiencing throughout his department?

*Mr. Blaine Pedersen, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**An Honourable Member:** Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chairperson (Blaine Pedersen):** Sorry, Mister—or, Minister Schuler. Go ahead.

**Mr. Schuler:** Thank you. And we have a new Chair, look at that. You know, you never can get far from MI, eh, Mr. Chair?

So, I'd like to first of all welcome the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) to the Estimates of Manitoba Infrastructure. He seems to veer off into Health, and then he veers off into Education, and he veers off into all other places. Well, this is Manitoba Infrastructure.

I'd like to point out that we reduced five regions down to three and that no offices were closed. So—I'll say it again, because he seems very distracted. He seems to be distracted because he doesn't know which Committee of Supply he's in. He's in Manitoba Infrastructure. So no offices were closed. What we did is we just streamlined the operation.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

We used a lot of technology for our highway system. I would point out to him that since he left government, we've actually modernized. We've taken on a lot of substantive—substantive new technology. I know when he was one of the leaders of the NDP in office they used to send around memos—I guess they chiselled them into stones and carried them around the building to each other—we use a lot of new technology.

Today, his leader went on and criticized Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for expending good money, but it will end up being a good product, and it will be a modern computer system. And they cost money.

And I would point out to the member that we are using that modern technology. We are bringing in legislation for autonomous vehicles, which his party stalled. He personally stalled that legislation because he just doesn't view technology as being important. We went from five to three different divisions—or regions, rather—and we use a lot of technology.

He and his former critic got up and criticized the fact that we were selling off all kinds of old snowplows and buying really, really substantive, new snowplows. And they are bigger, they're more efficient, they're safer, they are better for our highways.

And that's what the NDP does—they criticize. And so no, no offices were closed. And we leave them open. We just consolidated the regions to make them more efficient. I would like to point that out to the member. And I know he'll get back on his tired old treadmill—which, I'd point out, gets him absolutely

nowhere—but he'll get back on his treadmill and rehash the same old slogans. But no offices were closed.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Well, you know, the minister is again not giving me numbers about the number of people who—you know, the vacancy rate and the number of people that have been affected by this change. He was quite proud to say that—yesterday, you know, he—the vacancy rate is high because of changes like this.

So, you know, the minister is maybe mincing words here, and I want to make sure we're clear: are there any plans to close any subregional offices?

And as a result of this reorganization, maybe the minister can just be clear: how many folks, you know, either quit or retired or were laid off or were terminated or were relocated? Yesterday he seemed to make the case that this was responsible for a lot of the vacancy that's happening in his department. So maybe he can just put that on the record—exactly the numbers that we're talking about.

With regards to this reorganization, how many folks have quit, retired, been laid off, been terminated or have relocated?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Minister Schuler.

**Mr. Schuler:** Oh, you're back; Mr. Chair, I would like to first of all address the first question and—that the member asked. And the answer is none.

I'd also like to point out to committee that—so, we have the three regions. We've got the Capital Region, which has the head office in Steinbach, sub-office in Winnipeg and field offices in Arborg and Carman; the Western Region, which has its head office in Brandon; a sub-office in Portage and field offices in Birtle and Boissevain. We have the Northern Region, with a head office in Dauphin, sub-office in Thompson and field offices in Ashern, Swan River and The Pas.

\* (12:20)

And I'd like to be very clear: we have closed no offices. I know that's really bad for the narrative for the member for Concordia who—the grim reaper of questions, he wants this negativity. It's actually a good news story: we're modernizing.

In fact, we're going through the department and as soon as we can get the federal government to agree to a certain tablet, we're going to have all electronic monitoring for semi-trucks across this country and across the province. It's a huge step, huge step, and it's going to properly monitored, something that could never get accomplished in 17 years the NDP—we had

technology back then, I'd like to point out to the member, and we're embracing technology.

We're embracing it throughout government and we are modernizing our approaches, and that's why we also have to modernize how we do things within our department. And on June 23rd, 2021, we announced the service delivery modernization of our highway regional operations to improve safety delivery for stronger regional planning.

And we believe that this modernized server-service delivery model will help municipalities and regional highway operations to improve services and find efficiencies without reducing services to Manitobans, and we've accomplished that. Our government is committed to improving services for Manitobans that best serve our growing province.

I'd like to point out to the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), this department is very aware that as we move towards what we refer to as Winnipeg one million, that a lot of efforts are taken on behalf of Manitoba Infrastructure.

You probably have followed—maybe the member for Concordia hasn't—that we would like to see the Perimeter Highway become a freeway status. We are removing a lot of the uncontrolled intersection entrances and exits off the Perimeter Highway—we think that's important—and slowly moving to a signalized intersection.

We hope within several years that it'll only be signalized or it will be overpass intersections on the Perimeter Highway. And we've already announced St. Mary's, which we hope we'll be proceeding sometime this fall, and we've announced that McGillivray will be the next overpass.

So, you know, we're doing this, whether it's Highway No. 1, which we identified as part of our economic corridor, so it's Highway No. 1, 75 and the Perimeter. The RTAC grid, which we have talked about, another priority across the province that should make no difference where you are anywhere in the province that you can access an RTAC road.

RTAC basically is a national standard road. It can bear significant weight and it is engineered differently and we are going to try to move all of those roads, if they're an A or an A1 they'll go to RTAC, which means that they will have no weight restrictions, even in spring.

We are moving this province into being a modern, dynamic province, which is what we want to see. We

believe Manitobans have learnt from the whole COVID issue is that you don't always have to live in a big, urban setting; that you can do your work, for instance, from your office.

And I'd like to point out, I know the member—the—perhaps he's a little bit of a Luddite. He thinks everybody should be in one committee room and smoke big cigars or whatever. Actually, there is something called working remotely, and that's using technology as an advantage. I think that's a positive thing and that's what people are doing across this province and, I would say, across the world.

But in Manitoba, they're looking at other towns and villages and RMs where they can perhaps set up, and we want to provide with them—for them an RTAC grid so they can get onto an RTAC grid with their goods and services, that they can get onto the economic corridors—the economic corridors identified as Highway 1, the Perimeter and 75. Those are major, major national and international corridors.

We will be viewed—

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** Well, I want to be clear with the minister that if he was working remotely, I'd actually feel a lot better about that, but it's very clear that he's sitting in his legislative office, that he's somehow gotten into this building, that he's walked through a bunch of civil servants and sat down on his chair. He's now conversing with them, we presume. Although, if he wants to make it clear that they're not in the room anymore, that would also maybe make me feel a little bit better.

And he's putting everybody at risk because he's—you know, his vaccination status is questionable. You know, I sat next to him in the Legislature for a few months, unfortunately. And, you know, obviously nothing on the record, but I think we all understand where his stance is on vaccinations, on mask requirements; maybe he should make that clear for the people of Manitoba exactly where he stands, maybe make that clear to the interim leader of the PC Party where he stands on that, make that clear to his Cabinet colleagues, who he continues to put at risk by coming into the building every single day.

So if he was at home right now, actually, I think we'd probably feel a lot better about that. But he's clearly not. Working remote doesn't mean working a few steps away—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, order, order.

Just a quick reminder that a couple of things in that last statement is we cannot refer to the presence or absence of members. And also I just ask that we kind of try to bring it back to the topic of infrastructure, please.

**Mr. Wiebe:** I appreciate that, Mr. Chair, and I think I was following up on the comments of the minister referring to where he was working from, so I think that's clear in the comments.

The minister mentioned the north Perimeter access points. Obviously, there's been a lot of pushback from residents there who are asking for the minister to sit down with them to understand exactly the impact that has been undertaken by taking out those access points. I want to note for the committee that there was no investment whatsoever in the north Perimeter in regard to these uncontrolled access points. And, you know, we've had a chance to talk to a lot of those residents, and they've told us they have some pretty good ideas about how that could be managed. They understand the importance of the Perimeter Highway. They live, in many cases, very close to it, and they understand the importance of it as a trade route and as a commuting route for so many Manitobans and so many Winnipeggers.

And yet the minister hasn't sat down with them, hasn't had that conversation, hasn't had that one-on-one interaction to find out what their concerns are, and he certainly hasn't committed any new money, which is the concern. So if you're going to upgrade to—it to freeway status, as he calls, it, you know, that presumably means that things need to be upgraded, and instead, the minister hasn't done that. This government, once again, hasn't done anything to invest in that important corridor.

So maybe I'll ask the minister to comment on that. Maybe he can point to some upcoming plans. Maybe he actually will sit down with those folks and actually hear their concerns, find out each community, how it's being affected and how we can accommodate them. And not just—I want to note, it's not just the residents there and the many people who live in those communities that use those access points and use the north Perimeter, but it's a lot business. And he's hearing from them as well; I know they've been in the media. They've certainly been asking the minister for a sit-down, and they're not getting it.

So maybe the minister wants to talk to them right now and explain to them why he's not going to sit down and listen to their concerns and make real investments in a upgrade that is much needed.

**Mr. Schuler:** First of all, I'd like to point out to the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), in his first few minutes of his statement, I think he has a little bit of an issue. This isn't about him, and he likes to talk about himself, and this isn't about him.

And I worked with Minister Steve Ashton for many years, and in my community of Springfield and East St. Paul, and I represented West St. Paul, at that time, I know, in Springfield there were many mud roads that were removed off the Perimeter Highway. I supported Minister Ashton when he took Pritchard Farm Road and McGregor Farm Road off of Highway 59, with a complete redevelopment. Minister Ashton, for all his failings, and he had some—we all do—he was a great leader, and I would say to the member for Concordia, he is definitely no Steve Ashton.

I would like to point out to members that this minister has been actively involved in the north Perimeter and never before in the history of the Province of Manitoba have we ever consulted on a project like we have on the Perimeter Highway. Started with the south Perimeter safety review, south Perimeter functional study. Then we've done the north Perimeter safety review. Now we're going to be commissioning the north Perimeter functional study. And, yes, the safer we make the Perimeter Highway, the less safe uncontrolled intersections become.

I've been out there. I've spoken to individuals. We've had them here in this office. We've done it through Zoom. I've done it through phone calls. I have travelled that. I've driven those intersections. I've done so for four years. I know all of those intersections.

\* (12:30)

And I would point out to committee that the Brady Road intersection—which, by the way, if the member was ever 'intuned' to what was going on in the government instead of doing whatever he does, which I'm not too sure what he does—we have spent tens of millions of dollars on removing uncontrolled intersections off the Perimeter Highway, and Brady Road was one of those. We announced it, we struggled with getting property and one morning, a young 19-year-old, Ethan Boyer, was caught between two semi trucks right at that intersection.

He was being extracted, and some of the first people who were on site were Manitoba Infrastructure staff, and then first responders came—passed away when he was being extracted. It was a very, very quiet, very, very somber time in this office, and the emails that were coming in.

We did the right thing. We have expended a lot of money. We named it the Ethan Boyer Way for a good reason, because it was Ethan Boyer who lost his life there.

These are important, very serious intersections that must be removed. They are dangerous. If you go and you park on one of those access points and you look at the traffic going by, there is international traffic who are under the assumption that the Perimeter Highway is a limited access highway and have no idea that we have uncontrolled intersections.

As of this fall, we hope that all median crossings will be removed off the Perimeter Highway, and that's necessary. And I understand that there's an inconvenience. And we know with Holmes Road we've got the east and the west access, we're going to divert the traffic from the east access to the west access. That adds 37 seconds onto a drive. And we are going to make significant improvements which will still be done this fall, but they are necessary.

The Perimeter Highway, on its route to becoming a freeway status highway, must have all those intersections taken off. And we understand that the last 20—I think we're slightly under 20 intersections left—we understand they're going to be difficult. We understand they're going to cost money. We understand that Manitobans want this. Manitobans want a Perimeter Highway, they want it safe, they want it to be limited access and that's what this government is doing.

But to state that we've never met: false. Again, the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe): false. False that we're not spending money. We're spending tens of millions of dollars on this. False. And if he was actually in tune to what's going on, he would know that. False that we're not talking to people. False that we're not out there. We have staff going out there on a regular basis, almost daily basis, speaking to people and dealing with people.

So, you know, maybe the member for Concordia should inform himself first before he makes such broad, sweeping statements which he knows nothing about. I would say the Manitoba Infrastructure has been way over and above any other jurisdiction in North America when it comes to the consultation and dealing with the issues and concerns of individuals who live around the Perimeter Highway. They have done a great job and I'd like to thank each and every one of them for what they've done and for what they're doing for this province.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Well, you know, the minister wants to believe that I'm asking these questions about his vaccination status for my own personal benefit, to call attention to myself. He knows for sure that that's not the case.

He knows that because, as I said, we sat in the Legislature, you know, probably—well, they say six feet, didn't feel like six feet sometimes, apart from one another—and the minister refused to wear a mask. The minister has refused to disclose his vaccination status.

And I came to work every day. I wore my mask. I proudly posted that I had been vaccinated to show leadership in the community and to say that I believed everybody should get vaccinated as soon as possible. And the minister refused to do that.

I came to work every day because I didn't think about my own personal safety, but now I certainly am thinking about the personal safety of the civil servants who have to sit in the room right now with the minister, who have to sit just feet away from the minister, who probably were told take off your masks when he came into the office, who were told we don't have masks in this office, we don't wear masks here. People that wear masks have mental health issues, I think is the terminology I've heard the minister say.

So, you know, I invite the minister to continue to try to put this on me as if I'm trying to call attention to myself. I'm here in the room. I'm here in the building. I'm wearing my mask and I've got my vaccination status. I'm happy to share—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order. Order.

I'm sure the member realizes that we need to get back on topic, please.

**Mr. Wiebe:** I appreciate that, Mr. Chair, that direction. The minister talks about costs—again, we're in Estimates here, so, you know, the budget books are in front of me. Again, if he was here I could hand them to him so that he'd be on the same page.

He can talk about the money that's being spent on the north Perimeter, you know, and maybe he wants to dine out on the interchange at Highway 59 and the Perimeter. I noticed he drove around in a convertible, you know, before that highway was open to the public for a photo op, you know. It was a project that we worked very hard to get moving through the process. That was an investment, that was an investment in money.

Yet, you know, on the north Perimeter, we see no investment. He says he's spending tens of millions of

dollars. Show me the line in the budget. Show me RFP. Show me exactly the money that's being spent. I'm not talking about the money for those backhoes to pull out those uncontrolled accesses. I'm talking about the actual money.

Maybe he can show me the reports that show what kind of investment is needed to ensure that business and residents that live in that area will still have some kind of access or proper access. He can do that. I'd be happy to see that. That is what this committee is for, so he can do that, and I invite him to do that.

And he wants to dispute the idea that folks aren't being heard. I ask him then to commit to this committee here to release his personal calendar. Show us exactly who he's met with, when, where, how many times. You know, tell us what was discussed. Tell us that you said to those residents, to those businesses: We're not investing in the north Perimeter right now, we're just taking out access points.

So, you know, it's—you know, the minister refuses to put on the record facts. Again, maybe the officials have left his office. So we can have a totally different discussion. This can devolve into a simply political discussion. I'm happy to do that if that's where things are at in his office right now. Maybe he's all alone, he's closed the door and nobody else is allowed in because of his anti-vax stance.

But if his officials are there, they can point him to the line in the budget and the documents that show the meetings that he's had. Maybe he can disclose the information that was gleaned from those consultations that he supposedly did. Show us the information. Disclose that to the committee. Show us his personal calendar, the meetings that he had and show us the money that's been spent, that he claims, on the north Perimeter.

**Mr. Schuler:** Well, the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) seems a little sensitive on the fact that he seems to be incredibly self-centred.

I would like to point out to him that all work that is done on the highways goes out for tender on MERX and the successful bid is also put out on MERX, what the successful bid was and what the contract is for.

So, the *[inaudible]* which, okay, we'll take him at his word. I can sit at his desk and use that new technology that he didn't seem to have when he was in government, which now he can make access of, he can go on MERX and he can find all the contracts that have been let on the north Perimeter.

In fact, I would point out to him, we replaced the *[inaudible]* that that box culvert was there, it was dangerous insofar as flooding is concerned because bridges—branches or trees could block it off. That was just completed and that was part of that whole rehabilitation of the Perimeter Highway.

We are now doing on Main Street north, a substantive, substantive construction project. I know that the member for Concordia doesn't get out of his bubble because evidently he's only here in the building, he thinks this is where he should run his politics from. I believe the opposite: I try to get out as much as I can and I actually have meetings outside of this building. I meet with people where the problems are on the street, we have a look at them, we have a discussion; unlike the member for Concordia who just wants to sit in his office and try to pull the strings of opposition.

I'd like to point out that the—that Main Street south of the Perimeter is also being redone and that is a—an agreement between a developer and the municipality and MI. There is \$19 million going in there. It is very frustrating to get through that whole section right now because there is so much construction going on, that perhaps that's one of the reasons why people are getting uneasy is because there's so much change.

Insofar as the intersections, the reason why we are still leaving the west intersection—uncontrolled intersection ride in, ride out on Holmes is so that we can finish all those construction projects. We hope we'll have some of that work done next year. There'll be a lot more work coming as far as those are concerned. And then those access points will all come off, and there'll be good access onto Pipeline and onto Main Street, but we needed that north Main, a reconstruction—reconfiguring the intersection.

\* (12:40)

I would suggest to the member, you know, maybe he wants to get on his bicycle. There are beautiful bike trails, I would recommend them highly. I know Manitoba Infrastructure has been very good in ensuring that we have good active transportation corridors. They are there. I'd suggest maybe he takes his family and goes on a bicycle ride. Have a look what's going on outside of his little bubble here in the Legislature, in his little office here in the Legislature. Go out and look at the kind of work that's being done. For him to say nothing's being done, well, no, he can't see anything because he's always stuck in his little office doing who knows what.

Well, maybe he should take some of that time and go on MERX and see what kind of contracts we've let and how much we're expending on it. He could do a little bit of research, wouldn't hurt him. Or he can go out and see the kind of work that's being done for the \$630 million we're expending in this province every year compared to the measly, or as Gord Mackintosh used to refer to as pithy, \$94 million that used to be expended when the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) was around.

We are doing unbelievable, unbelievable investments in Infrastructure. In fact, sometimes we are getting so many people calling us, it's because there's so much going on that they're feeling very inconvenienced. They feel that there's so much change going on. And we appreciate that. But we are spending a lot of money: \$630 million is a lot of money compared to the pithy \$94 million, which the member for Concordia used to expend. Yes, we are getting a lot accomplished, and if he wants to know what, he can go on MERX and he can do a little bit of research and see exactly what the contracts are and how much they have been let for.

And I'd like to point out that we did complete 59 and the Perimeter, the highest traffic corridor in the province of Manitoba. It was completed, and we are very pleased with the product. We know that there are some challenges with that. We're working with residents on it. Some unintended consequences, we're going to deal with those as well. But this department and this government is on it, and I am very pleased with the way our department has been conducting itself.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Well, technology is failing the minister because he continues to cut out from time to time, and so we didn't hear everything he had to say.

I think we heard about a box culvert. We heard about the work that's being done to ensure that Gateway Church and The King's School that's being built on the north Perimeter has proper access, that's at north Main. And Costco that's going in on north Main, and Windsor Plywood, I think. But, again, he cut out a bit.

None of those address any of these uncontrolled intersections that the minister is referencing. So he can refer to MERX and, you know, he won't—he'll refer to it existing, but not the specifics, which, again, I mean, we're in Estimates. So the minister can't just keep saying, well, go to the website. That doesn't fly; it doesn't fly anywhere.

And, you know, I'll just point out that the minister is now again referring to the \$630-million budget, the one that he wouldn't answer earlier exactly how much has been spent and which he acknowledged over and over again last year was not spent, was underspent by 178, was it? Hundred—is it \$128 million last year? This year he says, well, yes, I think we're going to spend it this year, but doesn't.

So, you know, I guess I shouldn't expect much more out of the Estimates of this minister. But I will ask about, again, about specific dollar amounts that have been spent.

In 2018, the minister spent \$839,000 and gave it to PricewaterhouseCoopers to undertake a review and a set of recommendations on the reorganization of his department. So I'm just going to ask, then—the minister spent that money. Can he just undertake to provide a copy to the committee of that report so that we can ask further questions with regards to it?

**Mr. Schuler:** So the \$15 million that we didn't spend out of our budget in real terms, I'd like to point out that if the member would go to the interactive map—and maybe he has staff that could help him with that, maybe they could show him how to get into there.

The member said that there were actually no projects on the north Perimeter. False again, like most things that come out of the member for Concordia and the NDP. So I just want to talk about it a little bit.

At east junction PTH 100 and PTH 101, located in the RM of Springfield: great improvements on Highway 1. Structure on Highway 1 at Symington Yard overpass located in the RM of Springfield: design work. Traffic safety improvements on Highway 1 in Headingley at Race Track Road, located in the city of Winnipeg: construction of a service road so we can take an unsafe intersection off the Perimeter Highway. Surface rehabilitation on Highway 9 one kilometre north of PTH 101, 1.7 kilometres south of PTH 27, located in the RM of West St. Paul: construction. Traffic safety improvements on Highway 8 at Grassmere Drain 1 kilometre north of PTH 100 located in the RM of West St. Paul: design. Structure on Highway 7 at Grassmere Drain 5.9 kilometres north of PTH 101 located in the RM of Rosser: construction. Structure on Highway 59 at Floodway 4.5 kilometres north of PTH 101, vicinity of Birds Hill, go to the—located in the RM of Springfield: construction.

We are building more bridges. So, to be very clear, we took out—the NDP neglected box drain that

was so old on north Main and took it out, and we put a proper bridge in. And, by the way, the RM came to us and asked if they could have a proper walking bridge put in as well, which has been built. It looks fantastic; it gets the traffic away from the bridge, something that the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) never seemed to get accomplished because he was spending too much time in his office in the Legislature, not going out and seeing what other things are being done.

He can go on this interactive map and he can see the kinds of money that's being expended. There is a lot of money that's going in. In fact, we—on the south Perimeter, we just announced on—yesterday that there's going to be all kinds of construction happening. I think we're going to be doing asphalt work and a lot of it's going to be done evenings and nights, so we would ask everybody: Please respect the workers that are there. Lower your speed to the approved speed limits.

There is so much work being done that I would spend all of the time of Estimates just going through all the projects, but rather than doing that, why don't we get the member for Concordia to just go to the interactive map and do some of his own research? Like, they're given all kinds of researchers. In fact, they introduced all kinds of interns again. Get one of the interns perhaps to research for them if he doesn't know how to work these newfangled things called a tablet. And maybe he doesn't know how to get into this. You know, perhaps he could get one of these new, dynamic, young Manitobans who're coming in who are way better with this technology and they could help him get on to this.

But the information is all there. He doesn't have to wait to committee and have everybody else do his work for him. You can tell he's a typical NDP former-government MLA who wants everything done for him, brought to him on a silver platter. He doesn't have to work for this information; others should do the work for him. No, go do it yourself, or you've got research staff who can do this for you.

And go in and look at it, look at the great work that's being done by the Province of Manitoba with the more than \$630 million. In fact, our government committed to \$500 million each year for three years, that's \$1.5 billion in three years which, compared to the pithy amount if we were to add up any three years here, you'd get to a fraction of that compared to what's being spent right now.

But the member doesn't want to do his research. What he wants to do is come here and just throw stones and not use technology and pooh-pooh autonomous vehicle legislation and stall it for a long time so that we couldn't go out there and put ourselves out as a modern province.

You know what? This province is going to move ahead and is going to modernize itself and is going to do the right things, in spite of the member for Concordia, in spite of the Leader of the Opposition and the NDP. We are going to build this province into being an economic hub for the country, and we're going to do that with the investments we're doing in our infrastructure.

And I couldn't be prouder of a department than what's being done at Manitoba Infrastructure, the men and women who really care about what they're doing, and I am so proud of the work that they do and this department.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Okay, just before we go on to the next question, just a reminder that all questions and all answers should be directed through the Chair instead of directly to the other person. So with that, I'll call on Mr. Wiebe.

**Mr. Wiebe:** I mean, can you imagine having a—you know, I suppose, a half billion dollars worth of projects on the table and you can't even fill up one question with the list.

\* (12:50)

He—you know, the minister wants to say, well, we could be here all day. I think I'm asking for that. I'm asking for how that money's being spent on the north Perimeter. And, you know, and he can't point to anything, unfortunately, not a single project that impacts these access points.

You know, he could burn the whole afternoon with facts and figures if that was true. But he acknowledges himself they're not actually spending that money.

As I said, PricewaterhouseCoopers was awarded a contract in 2018 with regards to the reorganization of the Department of Infrastructure. The question is if PricewaterhouseCoopers produce a final report? And if so, if the minister could table that or just indicate—maybe we'll find it on the Internet. That'd be fine. If the minister wants to point us in the right direction, where is the final report from PricewaterhouseCoopers?

**Mr. Schuler:** So to the question of the critic: the critic seems to indicate that Manitoba Infrastructure isn't spending any money. And then he says that people are upset because we're spending money, even though he says we're not spending money, but they're upset because we're spending money. So, somewhere in there is a question.

So, I'd like to point out that in the Manitoba Restart, projects are accordingly: PTH 1—that's PTH 26, goal [phonetic] road. PTH 1, PTH 26, goal [phonetic] road. So it's EB and WB. That's east and west. PTH 1, east junction, PR 205, west junction, PTH 10 EB. PTH 1, PR 257, east junction, Oak Lake EB. PTH 23, which is PTH 75 to PTH 59. PTH 59, US border to PR 403.

I'd like to point out that Highway 59 is not RTAC'd all the way down to the US border. With the Restart money, that will be accomplished. We will actually have Highway 59 RTAC'd all the way down to the US border. That is huge, and at some point in time perhaps we can even create redundancy that if Highway 75 is flooded out, like it was in '97, that then 59 could always become an alternative route to run our goods and services down to the US—USA.

So PR 59—and I mentioned, I think, PR 403 to PTH 52, PTH 23, south junction PTH 10 to west junction PTH 18, PTH 23—that's west junction PTH 18 to PTH 15—and PTH 23 from PTH 5 to PTH 34.

We also included two other projects in the Manitoba Restart. That was PTH 1 and PTH 16 intersection improvements, and then PTH 100, St. Mary's Road interchange was included in that as well. So there is a lot of work being done.

I would like to point out to the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) that the southwest of the province was terribly neglected under his 17 years of mismanagement. It was very unfortunate. Maybe he should've gotten out of his office, instead of just sitting in his office all the time, and he should've driven some of those roads.

We have, and I'd like to thank the department of Manitoba Infrastructure for allowing us to use one of their trucks simply because the roads at times were so rough that it just—a standard vehicle would've taken significant amount of damage. So we used a larger vehicle to travel a lot of those roads, and we found out they were terribly needed.

They were very neglected under the member for Concordia and the Leader of the Opposition. And we are going through and we are probably at the max

capacity of those regions insofar as construction goes, and we'll keep funding that to get them up to a standard.

I would like to point out that we are going to try to do strategic routes in southwestern Manitoba as we're going to do in the entire province. Our priority is—in southwestern Manitoba is to upgrade strategic routes in order to remove spring restrictions or increase allowable loading to support economic enabling.

We know that we've got the Simplot plant and we got Roquette plant. We have other organizations that have opened up there. There is a massive amount of investment, and we need to get product into those plants. So Roquette, it's second largest manufacturing outside of suburbs of Paris. Their largest pea processing plant is now in Manitoba.

A lot of soups, rather than using a corn-based substitute, want to use the pea paste and put that into the soup, so there is a high demand for the product. We're really excited about that, but we also have to get the farmers the opportunity to get this product to the plant, and that includes the expansion of Simplot.

And I see that the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) is on committee right now, and he's paying really close attention. He has worked very hard for that community, and there is huge investment going in to accommodate those that are going to be growing the peas and the potatoes and the kind of product that we need to run those plants, and I want to thank him for working as a colleague and all the work he did on behalf of Manitoba to get those plants not just expanded but our Brandon plant, for Portage la Prairie.

And I can give more—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Minister's time is expired.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Wow, so the minister spent less than two minutes of that answer giving any kind of detail about highway projects in this province, and I will note none of those were about the access points to the north Perimeter.

In 2018, PriceWaterhouseCoopers was awarded a contract—undertake a departmental reorganization and was supposed to issue a final report. Just going to ask the minister again, was that final report produced? If he—if it was, could he provide a copy for the committee?

\* (13:00)

**Mr. Schuler:** I just want to conclude with thanking the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart). I sort of ran out of time there, and well done. And I appreciate working with that member on a go-forward basis, so.

So the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) doesn't want to do his own research. So what he wants is—I guess the member for Concordia just assumes everybody is his staff, I guess. So he just sits in his office, or he sits at committee, and just assumes everybody does his work for him. So we're all his staff. So basically, the Manitoba—Minister of Manitoba Infrastructure, he just uses as another staff member so I should do his research for him. So—well, if that's how he wants to use his time, I guess that's what we'll do.

I'd like to point out that we put out an advisory note of temporary closures on the North Perimeter Highway exit to accommodate nighttime construction. We caution motorists to be patient. Manitoba Infrastructure reports temporary nighttime closures of the off-ramp that connects northbound provincial trunk highway PTH 101, North Perimeter Highway at PTH 190, Centreport Canada Way for roadway maintenance.

I just want to make this very clear for the member for Concordia, who may or may not be paying attention. Maybe he's directing other staff to do other things for him—maybe get coffee—I don't know; whatever it might be. But so this is on the North Perimeter. So when it says it's on the North Perimeter, I just want to make it very clear that he knows this is on the North Perimeter.

The first closure to Exit 45 will be Tuesday, October 12th at 6 p.m. until 6 a.m., continuing nightly with the same schedule until the final closure October 16th from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. The alternate route for this closure is Exit 50 at provincial road PR 221. The department advises the diamond grinding process on the concrete surface will result in a quieter ride and better traction for greater safety.

So, I just want to be really clear to the member for Concordia and the members for the NDP—and we know math isn't maybe their strength. So these companies are doing this work, and they don't do it gratis; they don't do it for free; we have to pay them for this. It's a contract. So yes, we are spending money on the North Perimeter. This is all part of what we're trying to do on the North Perimeter to make it safer. I'd like to point out to them that all median closures on the North Perimeter will be removed, and I suspect, at

this point in time, have been removed, and the curbing, weather permitting, will all be done, and that project will be done.

Where we've removed right-in/right-outs they've been scoped down now so that they're fully ditched. And in spring we suspect that grasses will fill that in within the year until you won't even notice that there was a right-in/right-out. But we are spending this money. Companies are doing the work. We will be paying them for that work, and I want to assure the member that they're not doing it free of charge.

So, there is a lot of work being done on the Perimeter Highway. Again, he'd have to get out of his little ivory tower here in the Legislature, and maybe—whether he uses a bicycle or uses his vehicle—he could drive around and look at these projects—they are substantial—which are taking place.

So I want to just address a fake news that the member for Concordia put on the record insofar as the changes being done on south and north Main at the Perimeter. Those are safety changes to accommodate individuals accessing, whether it's a construction company—there's a whole slew of businesses on that service road between Main Street and McPhillips. And the improvements are necessary. They're good. They are part of a growing community. We are very proud of West St. Paul, and they've got a great MLA, I'd like to point out, who's doing amazing work there. And that community is growing, and there is amazing services going in there. A lot of beautiful houses, a lot of beautiful families going to move in.

We like to see our province grow, and it is growing. We're doing a great job of it. And those improvements are being done for all kinds of access points, and most importantly, they're being done so that the access is in a safe fashion. And we've mentioned before safety is our government's No. 1 priority. That's what we will continue to do, and frankly, that's what we'll continue to fund.

I would suggest the member for Concordia gets out of his little ivory tower and maybe goes out and sees how other people in the province live.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Okay, and just before we go on to the next question, just a reminder, because it is committee, we do have the ability to refer to others in the committee by their proper names. So you certainly do not need to rely on the member. You certainly can say Mr. Wiebe or so on. So, just—that's an option.

So, next question is Mr. Wiebe.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Well, I don't mind calling him that and continuing to call the minister by his title.

In 2018, PricewaterhouseCoopers was awarded a \$839,400 contract to undertake departmental or reorganization. Did PricewaterhouseCoopers produce a final report?

**Mr. Schuler:** One of the things that the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe)—and he has achieved that title, I think he's deserving of to be referred to as the member for Concordia. And the other thing is, is then we get back in the Legislature and we use each other's names, we're called out of order there. So it's just easier to stay consistent just using title. It's way easier that way, it keeps things consistent.

I'd like to point out to committee that if there's one thing that Manitoba Infrastructure does a lot of, and that is commissioning reports, consultants. I would point out that when we had the structural difficulty on Lake Wahtopannah or the Rivers Dam we had two engineering firms out who were on contract who did amazing work at that site. I was out there for that entire period of time ensuring that we had everything we needed to fortify that particular structure because we had a one-in-1,000-year rain event. It was substantial, the kind of water that was spilling.

So we do hire a lot of consultants. They use what's called 'proprietary' methodology. We're very respectful of that. Many of the reports that might be warranted are still under review and so we want to be respectful of the methodology of a lot of the reports because we can't release certain things because that's how a company does their reporting.

\* (13:10)

I would like to point out that we did put on the record exactly how we've taken on a lot of these changes. We've went from five to three regions. A lot of the work that's being done is done electronically. The direction, a lot of communication now is done electronically. So we have closed no offices, we've just consolidated regions and just made it more efficient.

And we think that we're on a good path, we're modernizing the department, bringing in a lot of technology. I would advise the member for Concordia that—you know, exactly what's happening at Manitoba Public Insurance where they're going to be investing substantive money into a computer system that they need.

And it's not just for Canadian standards; these are becoming international standards that we have to live up to. It's even our RTACing; we're going to try to go from an A1 to an RTAC—I'm sure he knows the announcements that we've made. We think that's a better standard because it allows more people to access those without any kind of weight restrictions seasonally directed.

So we appreciate the advice that we get. We can't always necessarily make it public. He would know that, having been one of the senior staffers of the government. I think, if I remember correctly, he started off as a constituency assistant to the—Premier Gary Doer, MLA. I think he was the constituency assistant, then I think he moved into the building and he became one of the senior members of the failed Selinger government.

Maybe they shouldn't have relied as much on his advice that they did, but we'll let history make that decision.

And again, when he was there, he knows full well that we have to be very careful of—that we don't divulge information that is 'proprietary' and is against our agreements with different corporations and individuals who do amazing consultation-basing work with us.

I would suggest we are modernizing, we're moving the department ahead. There's a lot of really dynamic work. Never before in the history of this province have we had this kind of funding going into our highways, roads and bridges, in large part simply because the NDP, in their 17 years, mismanaged these budgets.

I think it was the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) used to say, under the NDP it was a four-year program of raid, raid, raid, parade; they would raid for three years and then it was a parade in one year and then it would go back to—they would raid the Infrastructure budget. We're not doing that, spending good money; we need a modern, nimble department, and I believe we have that.

Again, I'm proud of this department; not prideful, proud. The men and women who work here are just amazing and outstanding and I—I'm very humbled to be Minister of Infrastructure and work with these individuals.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank you, and just before we go on to the next question, I have been directed through protocols of this committee that, regardless of how we personally feel, we do need to address other

individuals by their proper name, as in mister or missus. That is the protocol I've been informed of.

So we'll just ask everybody to try and remember that, I know it might be a challenge but we'll just keep an eye on it and do the best we can.

**Mr. Wiebe:** All right, Schuler, I've got a question for you. Sorry, just joking, Mr. Chair.

The question that I have—so I just want to confirm that the minister put on the record that the department is implementing the recommendations of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report. That's what he said. So the report is being implemented—elements of it, but he says that it's still being developed.

*Mr. Greg Nesbitt, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

Can the—maybe just the minister confirm that the amount of money that we have here—\$839,400—was the final amount paid to PricewaterhouseCoopers? And again, just confirm that they are implementing the report but they won't table it here for the committee, they won't tell Manitobans what's in the report, but they're already implementing parts of it?

**Mr. Schuler:** This must be a very tough committee. I think we're on our third Chair; we just keep burning them out.

I would just like to say to the member who asked the question—I've never known him to be particularly witty; that was funny. That was very well done.

Can I just ask the Chair, like, what is the title I'm supposed to use? Like, seriously, I have actually no idea what title. Mr. Chair, could you help? Like, how am I supposed to refer to the member? Like, I don't know what title to use. Can I get clarity on that?

**The Acting Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt):** Okay, Minister, I've been—I've had some clarification from the clerk here that you can call him Mr. Wiebe, and he can call you Minister Schuler.

**Mr. Schuler:** Okay.

Mr. Wiebe, all contracts must be publicly disclosed [*inaudible*] with the court is still under review, and to your question, it is still being reviewed. And we are on our way to modernizing Manitoba Infrastructure. I think it's important that we always ensure that we test what we're doing, that is the right thing we do, that we've got the right processes. There used to be a term, and you hear it less and less; it's called best practices. I don't know if I really always liked that term, but it actually is true. You get one of these reports, and they look at other jurisdictions, and

we get a best practices oversight on what other jurisdictions are doing. Maybe others are doing things better than us. And it also takes into consideration that things really do change.

I'd like to point out to the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) that there was a time when essays written for university were handwritten. And then you would pay somebody to type it out for you, and then that was a thing, and then slowly the computers came in. So, like, we always have to keep moving as government. I think it's easy to get caught up in we've always done it that way and just dwell in the past. I think what we want to do is ensure that we do here, that it reflects the modern nature of our society.

And things are changing. Like, for instance, we want to go to more autonomous vehicles, and we know that the—that Mr. Wiebe—boy, I struggle with that, eh?—that Mr. Wiebe wanted to stall that legislation because he didn't really feel that autonomous legislation was important. That's why it was stalled for all those years. But what was important about that legislation is that at some point in time, we'll have chips in our bridges which will indicate to a vehicle if they're overweight, that they're not going to make it under the bridge and perhaps the bridge will shut down the vehicle or slow them down that they can't get under the bridge.

One of the bridges we're repairing right now—and it's the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart), he seems to have been working very hard; lot of money seeming to go into Portage la Prairie. We have what's called the Christmas bridge, and the Christmas bridge is, all I want for Christmas is my two front teeth. The bridge is missing spans; it looks like it's missing teeth. And that bridge has been struck, I think, three or four times. It just keeps getting hit. It is the lowest bridge on the Trans-Canada network in the nation, so it's going to be redone. I understand there's work starting on it already, just rerouting traffic. But, again, perhaps we could have bridges that would have a microchip in them that would warn vehicles that they're too high.

\* (13:20)

So the modernization has to take place. We've got to accept modernization. We have to embrace it. I know the member—I'm not allowed to use that term—Mr. Wiebe has young children at home and one day they'll look at him, they'll say, so did you have pencils when you grew up, Dad? They'll say those kinds of things to him and mock him for the fact that he's not up on all the latest technology.

But we've got to make sure that we ensure government is always in the forefront of what's taking place. That is important for us as leaders, as legislators, to keep pushing that forward and not, you know, it's good enough, good enough for me, we don't need to change it. We must change with what's coming at us and that's what we're doing as a department.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Minister Schuler, I just have a few minutes. If you can keep your answers short, then I can ask several questions.

First is: What is the timeline for completion of the Lake Winnipeg—or, Lake Manitoba outlet to Lake St. Martin, and the Lake St. Martin then connection to Lake Winnipeg? *[interjection]*

**The Acting Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt):** Minister Schuler.

**Mr. Schuler:** I have to start that all over again, don't I?

Mr. Gerrard, great to hear from you. Great to hear your voice. Miss you at events, you and your beautiful wife Naomi, and with just so much in common with her love for art, my love for art.

If you want, Mr. Gerrard, you can go onto our public disclosure site, Manitoba Infrastructure, and we have a lots of newsletters. We do a newsletter regularly now, that goes out to the communities. You might want to avail yourself.

If we started the project today, it would take four years. I would point out to you that there was a federal—

**The Acting Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt):** Order.

Minister Schuler, I'd just like to remind you that if you could put your answers, please, through the Chair rather than directly to the member.

Thank you.

**Mr. Schuler:** Sorry. Mr. Chair to Mr. Gerrard. Where was I?

So, we understand that with the federal election that there's going to be a Cabinet shuffle so we're kind of stalled right now. And also the head of the environmental commission has retired as well, and I think so has the deputy minister—no, not the deputy minister, the president of the agency has retired. So we're seeing a lot of changes taking place and we hope that doesn't stall the process.

We are ready to go and if we got the environmental approval right now, we would be able to proceed. We've got everything ready to go and it would be a four-year project.

**Mr. Gerrard:** There's been a lot of concern about the long time that it took to get the people in Pauingassi and Little Gand *[phonetic]* Rapids back into their communities.

There's major questions about why it should have taken so long, but one of the critical questions is also: what is the province doing to prevent such long absences from communities which, in fact, are very expensive while people are evacuated and have to spend time away from their communities? What measures are being taken to make sure that the electricity infrastructure is not damaged by fires in the future and that communities don't have to be left in the lurch for months at a time?

**Mr. Schuler:** To you, Mr. Gerrard, a lot of that is federal government. As we know, First Nations are federal government responsibility.

Under the direction of—most of this work was—Operation Return Home was under the—

**The Acting Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt):** Order.

Minister Schuler, I'd just like to remind you, once again, please direct your answers through the Chair, not to the individual member.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Schuler:** To you, Mr. Gerrard. So, a lot of Operation Return Home took place under the previous NDP government. Perhaps Mr. Wiebe could give you a little more briefing why there was so much delay.

Also, because the reserves had to be moved because they were basically in a flood plain. So new lands were identified. It involved a lot of consultation, then new homes had to be built. It was too long. It was uncomfortably long, and I'm sure, through you—through the Chair—you were here for that whole period of time, you know how difficult that all was.

Insofar as hydro lines are concerned, this was a particularly dry year and the problem was that the fires were incredibly intense. So it wasn't just a brush fire burning through. Even if we would have had steel structures, which I think they're going to look at, we still would have had a lot of damage. The fires were very intense and often they would burn through twice, so the first time they would burn through quickly and burn the underbrush and they would burn through a

second time and burn more of the fuel that hadn't been burnt up the first time.

So it was very hard to get to those communities, and I know that Manitoba Hydro is going to probably have a really good review of that. I would suggest that when the minister responsible for Crown corporations has his Estimates, you might want to raise that with him as well. But, you know, valid point and thank you for raising it—through the Chair to you.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I think that the—if one looks at the follow-up study—it involves the First Nations communities of Agassiz and Little Grand Rapids—that there could be some measures taken now to prevent those sorts of problems in the future. I think that there are certainly issues with forest fires as we had with those two communities, but I believe that we could better mitigate the damage from those fires and do a better job of preventing people having to be a long time out of their community.

My next question has to do with—there was a major washout at a bridge in Neepawa, and what is the timeline for repairing that bridge and returning things back to normal, and is that what the government is planning?

**Mr. Schuler:** First of all, through you, Mr. Chair, to Mr. Gerrard, I just want to say that as the last two surviving of the class of 1999, if you have any suggestions please always forward them to me. I've great respect for you and your time that you have served politics and if there is something that you want to advise us on, we would love to hear it from you.

Insofar as the dam in Neepawa goes, we toured that right after the event took place and we subsequently have been back several times. I would suggest to you that it was probably initially a bit of a burn. So we went through there and there was concrete, wood, steel—it had just about everything in it and that's all got to be taken out.

I am talking about—I just want to be very clear, Mr. Gerrard. I'm talking about the Rapid City Dam, which is the one that got washed out. The Rapid City Dam is going to be rebuilt. We understand that there is difficulty with it, simply because we're going to have to take out the whole dam. It's got way too many old components—probably it's got, I don't know, they figure anywhere from 60 to 80 years worth of different designs; we'll structure a proper one in there.

And I think the other one that you're talking about, the one in Neepawa, was one that just held back, it was sort of like a bit of a lake, and that one got

washed out. That would be more of a municipal project and you would have to talk to them about it.

The other one we are engineering—and again, what we want to put back, we want to put back that it could survive a one-in-1,000-year rain event. One of the issues was, when that river's dam broke and let all the water go, that put the extra stress onto Lake Wahtopanah and that dam.

So we don't want that happening again. We want to make sure that all the dams can hold, that if you have a one-in-1,000-year event, the last dam doesn't bear all the pressure and all the stress from everything else having been suddenly released, because there was a lot of cfs that came into Lake Wahtopanah and that put the stress on the spillway.

\* (13:30)

So thank you for that question. The one is actually more of a municipal project than the other one. Yes, we are working on it, and we view these as climate-resiliency projects. They have to be built, and they have to be built to one in 1,000, not putting back what it current exists.

**The Acting Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt):** I'd just like to take this opportunity to remind the honourable minister that he cannot refer to you or your or Mr. Gerrard directly. You need to speak to me as the Chair and refrain from using you and your. Thank you very much for your co-operation.

Mr. Gerrard?

**Mr. Gerrard:** No, I've turned it over to Mr. Bushie.

**Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook):** Good afternoon, Minister Schuler. Just a couple questions before we wrap up with yourself for the afternoon.

In regards to the MOU for the northern airport and ferry operations that was released—well, I guess the press release came out in February 2020. I'm just wondering what the status of that is and where that's at.

**Mr. Schuler:** First of all, Mr. Chair, I seem to be struggling with this you and your and that, and I apologize to committee. I know many of my colleagues for many years, and although we are from different political parties, I have great respect for them and great love for them. We've fought hard, we've gotten angry at each other, we've showed love to each other, we've, times, cried together. So I apologize to the committee if I'm breaking those rules. I will try and not use you or your.

So I would like to answer Mr. Bushie's question, and I thank him for that question. When the pandemic hit the first round, AMC asked us if we could put that whole process on pause. We did that out of respect because a lot of the communities wanted to focus more on what was going on within their focus, within their communities; that's where they wanted their focus to be and not trying to negotiate this agreement.

We have reached out to try to start the process again. We are going potentially into a new wave of the delta variant, so we are going to be very respectful in this regard. So we don't think it's time limited. We will allow all First Nations to deal with the most important issues, which would be the protection of their citizens, and we agree with that. We think that's where the focus should be, and we are prepared to pick up wherever we left off; when it is convenient we will do that.

We are all in this together. It's a tough thing. None of us here—in fact, I don't think there's one legislator that's alive today who went through the last pandemic, so this is new territory and we'll be very respectful towards any of our First Nation partners in this process. Whatever they—whenever they feel it's the appropriate time to get back to have a discussion, we will do that.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, to be clear, it was a request from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs to pause this process?

**Mr. Schuler:** Through you, Mr. Chair, that is correct.

**Mr. Bushie:** And what date was that?

**Mr. Schuler:** That was in the beginning of the pandemic, in early 2020.

**The Acting Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt):** Okay. Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions. At this point, we will allow all virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the question.

I will now call resolution 15.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,106,000 for Infrastructure, Infrastructure Capital Projects, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

I will now call resolution 15.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$178,647,000 for Infrastructure, Technical Services

and Operations, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

I will now call resolution 15.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,924,000 for Infrastructure, Emergency Management, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 15.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$543,258,000 for Infrastructure, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 15.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 15.1.

The floor is now open for questions.

Seeing no further questions, we'll now proceed with resolution 15.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,293,000 for Infrastructure, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Infrastructure.

\* (13:40)

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

## INDIGENOUS RECONCILIATION AND NORTHERN RELATIONS

**Mr. Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Good afternoon. So the next step of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

Shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and the critics the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next department? Agreed? Okay, so is it agreed? *[Agreed]*

So, we'll take a short recess.

*The committee recessed at 1:40 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 1:43 p.m.*

**Mr. Chairperson:** So, just a little message there to Minister Lagimodiere: as soon as you're ready to go, if you could turn your camera on, and when you're ready and we see your camera come on, we can proceed. And there you are.

So, 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 Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations. Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations):** I do, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Minister Lagimodiere, go ahead.

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** So, I'm pleased to be able to comment on the 2021-22 Estimates and discuss some of the important activities of the Department of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

Before I begin, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge that we are on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is on the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe, the Cree, the Oji-Cree, the Dakota and Dene peoples and on the homeland of the Métis nation. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the staff within the department, as well as staff from across government, who assist us in pursuing our mandate. Through their efforts, we continue to carry out our important work with Indigenous and northern peoples and communities in pursuit of a better and more prosperous Manitoba.

The department's 2021-22 Estimates of Expenditure is \$30.5 million and provides the resources required to address the challenges and pressures of delivering on the department's far-reaching and complex mandate.

Budget 2021 stabilizes our resources while advancing existing strategic priorities and adjusting operations to address the impact of COVID-19 on northern communities. I would like to take a moment to highlight some of our significant activities.

For northern COVID-19 response, we are committed to the implementation of various public health measures aimed at flattening the curve with respect to COVID-19, and a variety of steps have been specifically focused on stemming the tide of COVID-19 in the

North. Efforts including mandating northern travel restrictions, regular engagement with Indigenous and northern leadership and a focused vaccination strategy, targeting First Nations and northern communities who are at greater risk for severe COVID-19 health impacts.

We are pleased to be working in partnership with the health experts representing Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.—MKO—Southern Chiefs' Organization—SCO—and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs—AMC—in the planning and administration of vaccines to First Nation Manitobans.

The department remains committed to working with provincial and federal partners, local community leadership and Indigenous community organizations to ensure the safety and well-being of Indigenous Manitobans through these trying times.

With our vaccine response, Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations continues to support the vaccination 'prioritization' of those living in the North through the provision of supersites, immunization hubs, pop-up sites, urban Indigenous clinics and focused immunization teams.

The department supports the planning efforts of the First Nation vaccine task force, the Pandemic Response Co-ordination Team, and First Nation leadership in the distribution of the vaccine across all Manitoba First Nations. The department will continue to work with all provincial counterparts in ensuring all Manitobans have access to a vaccination to combat our fight against COVID-19.

With respect to treaty land entitlement, treaty land entitlement continues to be a priority for the government of Manitoba. There are nine treaty land entitlement agreements in Manitoba covering 29 entitlement First Nations for a total of approximately 1.423 million acres of Crown and acquisition land. Continued progress on treaty land entitlement is one way in which we are pursuing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. To date, under the treaty land entitlement agreements, Manitoba has transferred 696,450 acres of land to Canada, out of a total obligation of the 1.4 million acres. Canada has converted 677,118 acres of land to reserve. Manitoba has transferred 12,765 acres to Canada since September 2019.

With respect to our duty to consult, the government of Manitoba has committed to establishing a renewed framework for respectful and productive Crown Indigenous consultations, and I am pleased to

say that this work is largely completed. A key outcome of the renewed framework will include improved understanding of the Crown Indigenous consultation process for all parties, as well as more timely consultation approaches that support the aspirations, objectives of the parties, reinforced by early and respectful engagement with Indigenous communities across the province. The development of the new framework was informed by engagement efforts and provided an opportunity for final review and feedback from individuals, communities and organizations.

With respect to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, addressing violence against Indigenous women and girls, particularly incidences of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is a priority for Manitoba. Addressing the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls requires a multi-faceted approach, and we are presently in the middle of an engagement process to help aid and formulating Manitoba's response to the calls of justice.

\* (13:50)

We are committed to working together to keep women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people safe and to supporting families that have been impacted by these tragedies. This is why we have made substantial investments related to gender-based violence, including but not limited to the provision of \$6.4 million to 24 community organizations to deliver programs that address the diverse needs of victims and \$1.2 million in restorative justice initiatives for First Nations and Métis communities.

The final report of the national inquiry represents a significant milestone that is vital to Manitoba as we work collaboratively with federal and Indigenous partners in addressing the systemic causes of violence against Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people. These efforts reflect a top priority for my department and are supported fully by my Cabinet colleagues through a concerted government-cross-government effort.

With respect to the former Indian residential school burial sites, the horrific findings of unmarked graves of missing children who attended residential schools are stark reminders of the tragedy and lasting impacts of Canada's residential school system. This tragedy is deeply felt here in Manitoba and we are committed to working collaboratively and respectfully with Indigenous leadership, knowledge keepers, elders, residential school survivors and community members to develop an Indigenous-led approach to

finding the missing children who attended residential schools in Manitoba.

We need to support and engage the necessary process of truth telling as we seek reconciliation, healing and meaningful ways to honour the children who were lost and to support the survivors and their families. This is why we have committed \$2.5 million to begin the work to identify, investigate, protect and commemorate the burial grounds and unmarked graves of missing children.

We are also recognizing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation as a day of observance to encourage reflection and meaningful discussions among Manitobans about the impacts of residential schools. Reflecting on our history on September 30th to promote a shared understanding is essential to reconciliation.

With reconciliation, we remain committed to advancing reconciliation through concrete and tangible initiatives that build on meaningful engagement with Indigenous nations and peoples.

Through a combination of new and ongoing initiatives, we continue to address the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of reconciliation in Manitoba. Our work is guided by the Calls to Action outlined by the 2015 report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and we'll continue to implement and support initiatives that further reconciliation outside of these calls.

One example of our efforts include our March 2020 announcement of over \$1 million in support for key economic development initiatives, including \$675,000 aimed at advancing commercial fisheries, certification and increasing market competitiveness for Manitoba's commercial fishers; \$200,000 provided to improve the viability of Manitoba's forest sector by encouraging enhanced Indigenous participation in the forest economy; and \$150,000 aimed at assisting OneNorth to develop its capacity to leverage assets and actively pursue economic development opportunities related to the Hudson Bay rail line in the North.

All three of these—

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the minister for his opening comments. Your time has expired.

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

**Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook):** No statement.

**Mr. Chairperson:** No statement? Okay.

Before we get into questioning, I just want to make one quick clarification. In the preceding Committee of Supply, we received some correct information how we address each other in the committee. An error was pointed out and we are, in fact, an extension of the House and therefore in the House we must refer to people—pardon me, to members by their position or, again, by their title.

So I incorrectly made a comment, and the last one directing people to call the members by name. That is incorrect. So I just wanted to put that on the record so that we have that straightened out. And other than that, we can certainly move on.

So, under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department of the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 19.1(a) contained in resolution 19.1. At this time I've invited—let's see here, sorry—does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates of the department chronologically or have a global discussion?

Global discussion, it's all agreed? *[Agreed]*

So thank you. It is now agreed, then, that this department will proceed in a global manner, with all resolutions being passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Bushie:** Good day and thank you, Mr. Minister, for taking the time this afternoon.

The 2020-2021 annual report, it was stated that MNP was commissioned to do an objective, comprehensive evidence-informed review of the programs and services delivered in northern affairs communities to ensure citizens in northern affairs communities, settlements and organized areas in the North receive quality service at a cost that ensures sustainability.

What was the total amount paid to MNP for this review?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Minister Lagimodiere? If you're ready, go—

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Sorry, Mr. Chair.

Yes, before we get into the discussions I would like to first of all let the committee know that I'm joined here today by some of my staff members: Michelle Dubik, our deputy minister; Mike Sosiak, ADM, executive financial officer; Scott DeJaegher,

director of policy and strategic initiatives; Paul Doolan, executive director of the northern affairs branch; Geoff Sarenchuk, director of the consultation and reconciliation branch; and Diran Adejumo, director of finance and administration.

Essentially, with respect to the report that's in-questioned in the 2020 review of the northern affairs program, identified opportunities to streamline and improve how the government of Manitoba serves the communities, settlements and cottage areas located in the northern regions of the province. In light of the results, the department is working to modernize the program in a way that better meets the needs of the northern affairs communities, aligns with legislation and best practices and ensures financial sustainability to future generations.

And with respect to the analysis, on March 3rd, 2020, mandate letters directed the department to modernize The Northern Affairs Act and service delivery model for the sustainability of northern affairs communities and the administration of cottage areas outside parks.

The department retained Meyers, Norris and Penny to conduct a comprehensive objective review of the northern affairs program, its services and associated legislation, and make recommendations. The department is reviewing the findings and recommendations provided in the final report in December of 2020 and is developing a plan to modernize the northern affairs program.

\* (14:00)

The modernization will be a multi-year process involving legislative regulation and policy amendments and will be developed in consultation with Northern Affairs communities and cottage associations. Consultation on this matter has been paused due to the enormous challenges currently faced by northern Manitobans due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I just want to say that our government is committed to engaging with northern Manitobans in strengthening service delivery and governance structures in Northern Affairs communities, and the review of the Northern Affairs program is currently on hold to allow us to focus on the battling of the COVID-19. When we resume the modernization of the Northern Affairs program, we will ensure services better meet the needs of our northern Manitobans, align with best practices and are financially sustainable for future years.

The amount paid to Meyers Norris and Penny for this engagement for the review in 2019-2020 is approximately \$495,000.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, did MNP produce a report for the minister?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Meyers Norris and Penny produced a current state of affairs. In doing so, they met with our Northern Relations communities, they met with internal staff and did a review and they also met with—or engaged with our provincial counterparts to speak with them and make comparisons as to what they were doing.

With that, they—we're looking at what the report says that can strengthen and meet the needs of our Northern Affairs communities.

**Mr. Bushie:** Could the minister undertake to provide a copy for the committee?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Much out of this report is still under consideration, and we can make some of the revisions to the report available to the committee and—the same ones we've made available to the communities and to the stakeholders for review.

With this ongoing process, we are committed to ongoing engagement with our communities, and it's important that we reach out through the communities and have a detailed consultation with them with regards to the sections of the report that been they had delivered, too, for review. And moving forward, as I say, we are committed to ongoing discussions with our northern relations communities.

**Mr. Bushie:** In regards to the First Nations consultation policy: I'm wondering if the minister can notify the committee where the status of that is at, as previous Estimates going back—well, we didn't have Estimates last year with the Indigenous Relations Minister—we were led to believe that that policy being released was imminent.

I'm just wondering where that First Nation consultation policy is at within your department.

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** With regards to the consultation and the committee, we had decided to undertake further consultation on the protocol with the stakeholders, and as a result, the—this delayed the release of the report. The work is—the majority of the work is currently done, and I'm looking forward to bringing something forward to Cabinet in the future.

\* (14:10)

Under section 35 of the Constitution Act, the government has a legal obligation to consult with Indigenous communities whenever a government decision or action may infringe upon, or adversely effect, the 'exercive'—exercise of Aboriginal or treaty rights.

In the 2019 interim provincial policy guidelines, Crown-Indigenous consultation in Manitoba, the policy requires an update to reflect recent court cases, provide clearer direction for government staff and clarify the role and proponents to engage with Indigenous communities and participate in consultation.

In July of 2017, at that time the INR received approval, in principle, from their priorities and planning committee of Cabinet, and from the Cabinet, respectively, to prepare a new consultation framework. Between 2017 and 2018, IRNR engaged with Indigenous organizations, as well as proponents and industry representatives to guide the development of the first draft of the framework. Government departments, including Manitoba Justice, renewed the draft and provided comment. IRNR also made amendments to the framework based on external legal review.

Under Manitoba's 100-Day Action Plan, INR conducted further engagements on the draft framework with specific Indigenous communities and key proponents. Some of the feedback received was included in the final version of the framework.

The framework includes several improvements of the 2019 interim policy, direct reference to the truth and 'reconsation'—'ciliation' commission's Calls to Action No. 57 and No. 92: clear direction to staff on communications from the lead department to the Indigenous communities throughout the consultation process; designated consultation levels with respect; processes and timelines; new tools, timing and resources for staff; clarity on the proponents' role in early engagement, and Manitoba's ability to delegate procedural aspects of consultation; clarity on Manitoba's approach to accommodation; clarity on the distinction between engagement and consultation; and encouragement to engage with Indigenous communities when the duty to consult is not triggered; direction regarding community consultation protocols; and modernization language and terminology.

**Mr. Bushie:** The minister referenced the words final framework a couple of different times in his explanation there.

And I'm just wondering, when he talks about it being a final framework—which is giving us the impression that it was already done, but he also speaks about providing that in the future. I'm just wondering what's the timeline and what's the date to have that finalized and presented?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** So the current duty to consult is different from the draft framework or what we commonly refer to as the internal framework that's in place since 2009 and it's difficult to commit to a timeline at this particular time.

Current consultations are ongoing. We're working in forming the duty to consult. It's been shifting rapidly across the country and, with these changes—we're beginning to incorporate these changes and are looking at bringing these new tools into the final framework to help us develop and look into new phases.

I'm excited to have learned that in the last year's budget the department received an additional three full-time equivalents to support the government with treaty—with training and development and to advance Section 35 consultations and I look forward to meeting with our new incoming premier, once the premier is in place, so we can sit down and discuss a possible timing and advancing of our new duty-to-consult framework.

**Mr. Bushie:** After years of our MLAs asking for it, the government has finally decided that its time to have the land acknowledgement in the Legislature. However, it's interesting that they've selected three non-Indigenous MLAs to sit on this task force when this should be something that we look across all party lines.

Can the minister explain the decision behind the three MLAs that were chosen to lead this task force and why there were no MLAs, in particular Indigenous MLAs, from the opposition included in this task force?

\*(14:20)

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** I just want to point out that, you know, you're calling into question the abilities of the members that have been pointed to this committee.

I, for one, have all the confidence in the world in their ability to fulfill their commitment to this, and every MLA needs to have some degree of cultural competence to work in this particular space, in particular, in this Legislature, and serve all of Manitobans as they do that.

I understand that my colleagues are currently in the process of reaching out to Indigenous leaders throughout the province to seek their input and get the appropriate feedback from them so that the land acknowledgement will be based on the input from Indigenous leaders of—and-non-Indigenous people throughout the province as well. So it's important to seek the—that the committee seek out these consultations and put us in the right path and the right direction.

**Mr. Bushie:** It's interesting that the minister responsible for Indigenous Reconciliation is actually not included in the task force himself. But further to that, can the minister please provide details about what the consultation process is for this land acknowledgement?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** I appreciate the comments from the member and his concerns that I'm not involved in the committee in itself.

I think as a leader it's important to trust the people that are assigned certain tasks within a department, and I have—as I said before, I have all the greatest respect and confidence in the individuals that have been assigned this task. And they will be speaking with Indigenous leaders who have offered to provide their advice and support for the acknowledgement of treaty land. And I'm courage—encouraging them to continue to engage and to come back to us with their final recommendations.

So, yes. I'm not leading, but I'm looking forward to the input that they bring to us.

**Mr. Bushie:** Orange Shirt Day is now recognized all across Canada, and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a federal statutory holiday.

Can the minister please provide insight as to why this day is not a provincial statutory holiday here in Manitoba as well?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** As I started to say in the House yesterday that I have been on a listening and learning journey from the time that I was appointed as the minister and this has allowed me to engage with many First Nations leaders, elders, knowledge keepers in the community and survivors.

And with that, as I said, it's been an emotional journey; some days visiting residential schools and sharing the stories that the elders and the survivors shared with me. And I—you know, the member mentioned why is this not a provincial stat holiday and

from the time that I heard that word, holiday, I had concerns.

To me, with what I've learned and experienced, I think that is the wrong terminology for us to use. I would prefer moving forward that different terminology be developed. Whether we call it a day of observance or a day of remembrance, I think it's important that we do have a day where all Manitobans can learn and listen to the stories from our survivors and pay their respects to those who did not survive the residential school system.

With that, the government of Manitoba is committed to advancing reconciliation with Indigenous people in Manitoba and honouring the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is part of this journey. Through the provisions of financial resources, we are supporting the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's week-long national event, featuring programming on topics including land and treaties, languages and culture, truth and reconciliation, Orange Shirt Day and elder-youth knowledge transfer.

The government is also supporting a number of community-led initiatives to honour the survivors of residential schools, which will include opportunities for Manitobans—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order. Order.

The hour being 2:30, committee rise.

## CHAMBER

### ADVANCED EDUCATION, SKILLS AND IMMIGRATION

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** I think we should just pick up right where we were—left off last time, in regards to a mandate letter from this government to the University of Manitoba in regards to the negotiations with faculty.

I'd asked the minister clearly whether he had provided—sent a letter in that regard or knew of one that was sent by the government, and I wanted to get

a clear response from the minister to understand whether there had been directive given from this government to the university with regards to negotiation between them and the faculty.

**Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration):** Well, here we go. Can everybody hear me? Everything's good; okay.

So right where we left off, just for clarification, I am going to ask the—my friend from St. Vital. So, the letter that you speak of, can you give me some more detail as far as what letter do you have in your hands that is signed by me, because I have not submitted a mandate letter from my department to anybody.

\* (11:50)

So I'm actually asking the member, can he provide me with the letter and then I can comment—unless, of course—no, you know what? I'm not going to speculate. So I'm going to just leave the question back to the member from St. Vital at that for now.

**Mr. Moses:** So it was clearly reported in the media yesterday that there was mandates of some kind given by this government to the University of Manitoba. Being the minister responsible for post-secondary—the province, it would be reasonable to assume that the minister would either have produced that letter or at least be aware of that letter coming from another department or another minister.

And so I ask again: is the minister aware of the letter that was sent, in regard to the mandate for negotiations with the faculty? Is he aware of it and can he provide the contents of that letter?

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, once again, that brings some clarity to the line of questioning from the member from St. Vital.

So, he is doing his research from a media source—I'm not going to name the media because it really doesn't matter—a media source that tells the public that the media has heard from the faculty association that the president said something. And so we're already—much like a grade 2 game of telephone—we're four or five people deep in on this conversation about this letter.

So I'm going to be perfectly clear for the member because I know, you know, he wants some finite answers. So, as I've said to the member before: the department was created the beginning of January 2021. We have made it perfectly clear to the public, in addition to the post-secondary institution presidents,

that we're going to be working quite closely and collaboratively with our post-secondary partners in this great province of ours.

And so we have many conversations. There are different, I guess, pieces of correspondence that goes out. But to answer emphatically to the member, in addition to the Liberal's questioning today, as well, it's government's—government is not the employer and is obviously not at the bargaining table, making offers and counter-offers.

Again, like I mentioned in question period—and it's too bad that yesterday the member felt it was appropriate after question period to shout across the room at me—but it's not my fault that the member is only given the dying seconds of question period to ask his set of questions. He might want to take that up with his leader, the member from St. Johns, about his status or his line of questioning in question period. So I can't help that.

So I'm going to be emphatically clear that we're urging both UMFA, which is the University of Manitoba Faculty Association, and the U of M, which is the University of Manitoba, to get to the bargaining table and bargain in good faith directly and definitely not through the media.

And I would strongly encourage my friend and colleague from St. Vital to stop putting misinformation on the record which—inflaming the situation is not going to help anyone.

I don't think the member from St. Vital wants to see a strike. I know I don't want to see a strike. We want to, you know, making sure that students are getting the education that they are paying for and deserving, and that's what we want to see. But in no way, shape or form is my department or myself participating in those negotiations. I'm hoping that that is crystal clear for the member and to all the viewers at home that are watching this. Because I know that there's many people watching our Estimates process and also watching question period, because I saw that yesterday.

And again, I'm going to reiterate. I am not going to apologize or stop thanking front-line health-care workers for their service that my family received for the—at the Selkirk supercentre, for the vaccines, on behalf of my constituents and other Manitobans.

And it's too bad that the member and his party felt that after question period yesterday to shout me down. So, with that, I guess we'll move on to the next question. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Moses:** I think it's pretty clear if we see what happened—has happened in the past. We know that last year this government, though the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), sent a letter to the university to the administration saying that they had certain percentages that they could only allow for salary increases.

And I think that it's pretty obvious that that sort of direct interference from the government, which already has happened under this government, is interfering with negotiations. And so it's pretty important, it's pretty impactful for the university and for all the students there to know clearly whether this minister, as he says he hasn't, or whether the Finance Minister or someone from this government, has again directed the university to limit their salary increases and already, you know, pre-emptively determined the outcomes of the negotiations.

And so that's why it's so important to ask about this and get clear answers. And that's why I've pressed the minister on this multiple times because it's important to get these answers. And so, if the minister chooses to be forthright in his next response, that would be beneficial. Not just to me or to people asking in question period, because apparently that's annoying to the minister, but to the people who it's really impacted: the faculty, the students and all those who are about our post-secondary institutions in our province.

But I will ask the minister about a few issues that are obviously part of some plans that the minister might have moving forward with the post-secondary institutions in our province. And that is around the idea of matching the funding that the government provides through grants to our colleges and universities based on meeting labour market demands that the minister might have set for that college or university.

And so I ask the minister, does the provincial government have plans to hold or withdraw funding from universities or colleges on the basis of meeting labour market demands? And if so, what metrics are he going to be using to calculate and determine those funding levels.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Mr. Chair, my mic still working well?

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Your mic is working great.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Okay, great, because I was a little worried that the member from St. Vital wasn't quite

hearing me because I thought I was pretty clear in regards to the bargaining piece.

But I'm not sure which question he wants me to answer first. Because there was a multiple set of questions, so I don't know if that's a pick-and-choose, and then if I pick the wrong one he's going to go on Twitter and say I didn't answer a certain question or whatever. So I'm going to try to tackle them all in the brief time that we have this morning again—or this afternoon, I guess. Happy afternoon, everyone.

\* (12:00)

So, again, just reiterating the fact about the autonomy of the post-secondary institutions. And so, again, government's not the employer. So his assertions are offside. And again, inflaming the situation is not going to help anyone. It's not going to help the professors; it's not going to help the post-secondary institution; it's definitely not going to help the students. Again, government's not the employer. Strongly encourage UMFA and the U of M to get to the bargaining table and bargain in good faith and try to keep it out of the media as much as they possibly can.

But I know that the member from St. Vital, he likes this. He likes this to be in—upfront and in the media, because he gets his name out there, and matter of fact, if he continues to get his name out there he actually might get a set of questions that are in the front six questions in question period instead of being left to the dying seconds of question period all the time.

I did appreciate the question, finally, from the member, because as I stated in question period today—the last question that I received from him before yesterday was May 12th, and I guess that that's—the questions stopped after that, because I basically answered his questions on Bill 33 and made the amendments and, again, showed the fact that our government is a listening and collaborative government and working with our partners.

So, now, to his second or third question in regards to funding and creating new avenues of funding. As I said to him before: when we took over in 2016—when we won the largest majority in Manitoba history in 2016—we came in to a situation where we were almost \$1 billion—we were running almost a billion-dollar deficit. So we ended up having to take some suggestions from experts—unlike the NDP, who would shelf any kind of documents from experts and put it up on the shelf and let it collect dust.

So we're listening to the Auditor General's report. We're listening to the college review. We're basically—and what they're saying, just in case the member has not had the chance to read those documents, but I'm sure he has because him and I have had some open conversations in the past, and I know how read he is and how he educates himself on topics—so I'm sure he—that he's read those documents.

So we want to make sure that the post-secondary institutions, as directed from the Auditor General, is accountable because at the end of the day we are—we know that this is taxpayer money. I'm—this is not the days of the NDP where it just—they didn't care whose money it was. They actually rather spend the money. Tax and spend, tax and spend. That's what they did.

Now, I really—when you drill down, I really don't think that the member from St. Vital is like that. I think that's more, you know, his couple leaders there that keep keeping him to the back of the question period time. I mean, the post-secondaries, they know their business best, and they share our goal to protect the accountability and the—and students' success.

So, again, working with—I know that's a word that—a couple sets of words that don't fit well with the NDP, but working with and collaborating with is the way we're going to continue to make sure that student success—

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, the minister's time has expired.

**Mr. Moses:** I want to ask the minister clearly again, because he didn't really answer, does—this part of the question: Does the provincial government plan to withhold or hold back or stop or reduce funding from universities or colleges on the basis of meeting labour market demands, and if so, what metrics are being used to determine the funding levels?

**Mr. Ewasko:** And so, going back to accountability, if the member—and I'm hoping the member—again, I'm making some assumptions here. I'm assuming because the member from St. Vital is the advanced education, skills critic—advocate, I was hoping—I know he's not the immigration critic but the advanced education and skills—I'm hoping he read our strategy—our skills, knowledge and talent strategy—because it's more than labour market needs. It's more than business needs.

This is a whole-of-province approach and so when we talk about skills, knowledge and talent strategy, we're talking about—again, I know this is like sasquatch to the NDP party but you've got to be working with your partners in education, in immigration, in

other departments, the grassroots, all levels throughout the whole province of Manitoba, north, east, south and west. Because at the end of the day, we have to make sure that we're ready with our students skilled up with the right skills—and I'll use it: with the right skills, talent and knowledge—for—move it into the future post-pandemic.

And so outcomes-based funding—let's call it what it is—outcomes-based funding is consistent with calls from the Office of the Auditor General. So I'll just reference the documents. So that was 2020. So, again, if the member's sitting there making some notes so he can maybe jot that down.

The Manitoba College Education Review, 2018—still don't seem him reaching for a pen, but that's okay—the reviews by KPMG in 2017: we're talking—they're all talking about improved oversight and accountability of publicly funded universities and colleges.

And the reviews found—they found, among other things, that financial reporting, accountability and governance frameworks or processes were all lacking in some form of our various institutions.

We've had these conversations with the presidents. I've got more than an open dialogue with our presidents of the post-secondary institutions. They are all—we have received positive feedback from our PSIs, that they want to showcase how they're helping students. So they're onboard with this.

And so, with these things moving forward—accountability measures, again, unlike the NDP working in—I'm going to take that word—again, I'm going to take that word that the member brought forward yesterday with his ag background, silos—instead of the NDP working in silos, we're taking a different approach.

We're working with our post-secondaries, we're working with our post-secondary education partners and we're collaborating and we're going to be coming up with these different systems or matrix to make sure that we've got a strong—we've got strong programs moving forward, the education is affordable to students, now and into the future.

And again, we're spending well over a billion dollars on direct and indirect funds to post-secondary institutions in this province.

So I think, as the member himself, as all of us are, we're Manitoba taxpayers. And at the end of the day, I know that the member and his party thought that all

this money was their money and they could do what they wanted with it but we on this side of the House have a different mindset. We feel that we have to be accountable to the taxpayer and we want to make sure that that's—the checks and balances are there.

So, hopefully, that was clear enough for the member and thank you, Mr. Chair.

\* (12:10)

**Mr. Moses:** How will the outcomes-based approach you speak of be beneficial to students who are pursuing areas of study that may not be able to produce as clear or short-term outcomes for the determinations you're making or the metrics you're devising for this plan?

How will this benefit students who are not participating in programs that are part of the target areas or matrix areas that you're describing as part of the outcomes-based approach?

**Mr. Ewasko:** The mic's still working, correct? Good. I'm just making sure that my—

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Sorry, Minister.

**Mr. Ewasko:** My mic is not working?

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** No, we can hear you; your mic is working. Just go ahead, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Why are you sorry, Mr. Chair?

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** We—just a bit of confusion here; just some things happening here but we're good. Go ahead.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, on the outcomes-based funding: so, there's going to be dialogue in regards to creating the meaningful matrix in regards to this new funding model and again, that the PSIs and our post-secondary partners are in favour of it. We want to make sure that, again, we're—we've got the right skills and programs set for our students as they're moving forward in their lives right here in Manitoba.

As I've said to some of my education counterparts across the country in a few of our chats that we've had, you know, via Zoom or teams this year, we want to showcase what we have here in Manitoba. We don't want to do what the NDP were doing and driving students away from this province of ours.

And that's why I've made it abundantly clear on multiple times—I think you know over the seven questions that I think the member asked from March

'til May 12th for the spring sitting—made it abundantly clear that we're working with our post-secondary education partners, going to make sure that we're keeping our education affordable but also the programs strong. And you can't do that unless you're willing to work with, again, those partners because they—the post-secondary institutions, they, again, I mean they know their business best.

So the door's always open, as the member knows, to my office to have meaningful dialogue over, you know, whatever he wants to talk about.

So, as you know, we talk about the over \$1 billion of investment—again, it comes down to whose money is it. We're investing in education at the post-secondary level; we're investing into training; we're investing into immigration. Again, it's a whole-province approach. So you're part of this, the member from St. Vital. We're not talking silos like the old NDP government; we're talking open collaboration and working with Manitobans.

We're going—and if you've read the document, I'm going to read the four pillars to you just so that it—sinking in so maybe get a pen out. So we've got anticipate, align, foster and grow. Those are the four pillars in the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy. And so I encourage the member to please read the document and then give me feedback on it, because it's a living, breathing document over the next three years—well, two-and-a-half years now.

But I appreciate the question and, again, working with everybody on outcomes-based funding, taking a look at how we can make sure that we're all accountable to the taxpayer, whilst keeping our education affordable, whilst keeping the program strong.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Moses:** When can we expect to have the results of this work be available? The results of this matrix you're creating and the work you're developing around how you determine the levels of funding and how you create the program for the outcomes-based approach.

When can we expect that to be available for the public and ready for us to see?

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, again, as I've mentioned to the member from St. Vital, that we talk about collaborating and we talk about an open door and having those conversations with our post-secondary education partners.

*Mr. Scott Johnston, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

And again, post-secondary education partners. You're one of them. Post-secondary institutions, students, faculty, taxpayers, all the above. Right? So we wouldn't want to pre-empt those discussions. So those discussions are starting and so the member will hear when the various groups are being asked for their input on this.

So this is not, you know, again, this is not behind the shadows of Cabinet. That was the way that the NDP used to do anything that they ever did. It was all in that—in Greg Selinger's premier's office of 204. And we heard some of the other things that had been happening in room 204 under Greg Selinger in the past.

And you know, again, I strongly encourage the member working with his leadership team on his side of the House and make sure that we have more of a collaborative working relationship. Because I do strongly believe—because I've had the conversation with the member on a few occasions—I do strongly believe that the end goal is the same. We want to make sure that we've got strong programs here in the province of Manitoba, and we want to make sure that education for our students are kept affordable.

So, again, you know, investing well over \$1 billion of direct and indirect funds to post-secondary institutions, making sure that we've got access to post-secondary education is still, you know, strong with the \$30 million in scholarships and bursaries. You know, we've got over \$250 million that Student Aid administers for thousands of students.

I think that's the goal. And I think really deep down that the member from St. Vital has the same sort of goal in the back of his head. Because I know that he went through our system here in Manitoba. K-to-12 and then post-secondary education, as did I. And, again, the end goal is to make sure that we're having the strong programming, affordable education and making sure that we're also accountable to the taxpayer.

*Mr. Josh Guenter, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

So I look forward, actually, to the member, you know, and encouraging the rest of his team, to make sure that we pass the BITSA bill unanimously. So, with that, thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Moses:** In Bill 33, it talks about classes of tuition. The term is used in the bill.

I'm wondering if the minister can clearly define and describe what he means by classes of tuition in

that bill, and what impacts—what he plans to do with that in terms of having different levels of tuition based on the class or type of program at a university, and if you—gearing this towards specific types of program areas that he might have to define a certain type of class or category of courses for a certain tuition level.

Hope the minister can elaborate on that.

\* (12:20)

**Mr. Ewasko:** Again, I thank my friend and colleague from St. Vital for the question and bringing it back to Bill 33.

As it's been said on multiple times and during committee—of course, he could go back and read Hansard in committee, but, you know, sort of the one—some of the main goals of Bill 33, of course, was to talk about that flexible policy approach. I know that yesterday he was getting a little stuck on, you know, on the regulations and that, and really, it's not regulations. It's policy, so, flexible policy. Because he knows—and, you know, I don't know if he's had the pleasure of checking out all of our post-secondary institutions, because I know it's quite, you know, the endeavour, because we've got some great post-secondary institutions here in the province—but each and every one of them are different.

They've got their own exciting things that they're providing to students here in Manitoba. And so with Bill 33, again, this comes down to having those open dialogues and collaboration opportunities with, again, our partners. Each institution, again, has its different strengths that it provides to our students throughout the whole province, from north, south, east and west again.

So those policies have to be flexible. The department, as usual, is committed to consulting, and again, listening to our partners—I don't know if you've heard that once or twice from me today, but the collaboration and the listening is very, very important. And I like to think that I'm making sure that the door is open to not only our post-secondary institution presidents, but to all of our partners within education.

So I think, again, when those various different consultations are happening—again, as I said two days ago, I guess on Wednesday in Committee of Supply—that I definitely have that door open, and the offer is out to, you know, to my friend from St. Vital that we'll definitely get you in and get some feedback from you, because I do know from our conversations that you've got the experience of going through the system here

in Manitoba as well. And we'll be listening to you for some feedback as well.

**Mr. Moses:** Earlier this year, the provincial government announced plans to speed up the process of getting internationally educated nurses into the workforce. They said they'd offered about \$23,000 per person in financial and process supports and—no, who want to become licensed here to practise. The Province then reported about 12,000 applicants.

Can the minister provide the exact dollar amount that was spent so far on this initiative? And can the minister provide the number of internationally educated nurses who have been recertified and are now working in our health-care system?

**Mr. Ewasko:** Thanks to my friend from St. Vital for the question, and thanks for bringing up.

I think in a positive light, the—and I'm hoping he's going to talk more and more about this with his colleagues, because I don't think his colleagues on his side of the House understand that—the fact that, with us trying to increase 400 nursing seats in the province, it's actually a good thing because for quite some time we had heard that that's challenge, right? Shortage of nurses.

Of course, you know, again, I'm going to go down this avenue, so I don't want him to yell at me or anything, but I am going to take the time to, again, thank our front-line workers, our health-care providers and nurses and doctors and health-care aides and paramedics and first responders and everybody because this has been a really—this has been a challenging 18, 19, you know, 20 months it's going on now, through this pandemic.

So we had to do something. Again, you know, is this a tree that's going to bear fruit tomorrow? Absolutely not. I mean, this is something that should've been planted during—this tree should've been planted under the NDP, which isn't wasn't. And so I think they need to take a good, hard look in the mirror on what they did and didn't do when they were in government and they had 17 years. So we're planting the tree, and so we know that it's not going to bear fruit for two to five to six years on the nursing expansion.

I appreciate the question on the portal. I'd like to, you know, give a big shout-out to my colleagues, Minister Eichler and, of course, Minister Reyes, who's now the department—who's the Minister of Economic Development and Jobs, because the portal, I think, was a great idea. And how did the portal come about? The portal came about from collaborating and having

conversations with not only our education partners but through Immigration, through the business community, you know, seeing that we've got a shortage.

And so, shortly, because I'm assuming that the member for St. Vital's (Mr. Moses) going to remain in his seat because I think it's—EDJ is next up for Estimates. And so I'll sort of leave the portal discussion and that great news expanding for my friend and colleague, the minister of EDJ. Because it is, it's a great-news story and I appreciate the member bringing it up because it, again, it's showing that we're trying to have creative ways, out-of-the-box thinking on how to take the—take some pressure off our health-care system.

And as the member knows, I mean, we had quite the—we were left with quite the mess in the health-care system and so, you know, we were on the road of trying to help and to repair some of that, and then the pandemic happened.

And as the member knows, there's no playbook—there was no playbook for the pandemic. And, again, it's a worldwide pandemic so a lot of the things that we're talking about is not only happening right here in Manitoba, it's happening throughout this great country of ours, Canada, and throughout the world.

And so I just, again, hope that the people listening at home are taking their opportunity to get vaccinated and continue moving forward and helping us with this fight towards conquering this COVID-19. It'll be with us for quite some time yet.

So thanks, Mr. Chair, and I look forward to the next question.

**Mr. Moses:** I'd like to find out from the minister about the—an update on their expanded nursing programs that the minister talked about in the last few months. The reason I want to ask about it is specifically to find out around the funding. We know that there's a, you know, history of this government announcing programs and initiatives but maybe not putting—well, definitely not putting enough dollars behind them to actually support them properly.

So I want to know, in regards to this expanded nursing program, what provincial funding has been allocated to this to date? How much and which—to which institutions? How many seats have been added and which institutions are those seats located at? And those—that's specifically regarding the expanding nursing programs.

And again, I'd encourage the minister to use specificity if—in his response because I'm hearing a lot of rhetoric in his last responses and not much detail. So I would encourage the minister to try to do that in his next response.

\* (12:30)

Thank you.

**Mr. Ewasko:** I appreciate—or, thank you, Mr. Chair, and I appreciate the member from St. Vital, you know, not only bringing in his words from his background in regards to ag with silos, but also now taking some of the verbiage from his colleague from Concordia. Talking about the emphasis on urge.

So, when we start to talk about, as I said in my previous answer—and it's—I'm a little upset that he thinks that it's rhetoric, because I really—it's too bad that increasing nursing seats in this province, that the member from St. Vital—the member for St. Vital—is saying that it's rhetoric.

I really do think that these are steps that our government is doing, making a whole-of-government approach to try to alleviate some of the mess that we were left with. And again, this is a—this is not just a snap-your-fingers-and-this-happens type of situation. This is an ever-evolving situation. Post-secondary institutions were asked for their proposals as you know, because of course, it's out there. So it's not as if it's a big secret. We're going to continue to work with them to see exactly how we can add in these seats and, you know, that progress is being made. The dollar amounts as well is still being ironed out.

The announcement in the news release—I mean, we spoke about \$7.5 million. You know, making sure that we had that \$7.5 million. Now, the member might think that that's too much money. He can say that. He might think it's not enough money. He can say that.

We're talking about working with, again, our post-secondary education partners; our health-care system; so I do want to give, again—I'm not going to apologize for this, so I don't really want to be yelled at for this—I want to thank, again, our front-line workers. Our nurses.

It's been a tough, tough, tough, tough 20 months. And again, to sit back and do nothing—as I'm hoping the member from St. Vital is not suggesting—is just not on. And, you know, we're not going to be part of sitting back and doing nothing. We're talking about increasing the nursing—education seat allocation of \$400.

And again, I'll leave the other good news about the portal and the internationally educated nurses program to your next minister that you're going to be having questions and answers to, possibly—I don't know if that's going to happen today or if we're looking at not 'til maybe Tuesday or Wednesday, I'm not sure what the member's leader has decided for him.

So, with that, hopefully that answers some of your questions, and just to know that, again, this is a lot of moving parts. Many departments are involved and many professionals within the health-care sector are involved, so. Thanks for your question.

**Mr. Moses:** Maybe the minister can just endeavour to find out the specifics of the previous question around the funding and the seats in which institutions and maybe—don't have to answer it now. Maybe just can you endeavour to maybe find out the details of that?

I want to move on to discussing health care for international students. And I know there—of many international students who are—attend our post-secondary institutions across our province, and I know that they struggle oftentimes affording health care in our province because it's not being provided by the government.

And so, we want to know—and I ask—I just want to ask the minister plainly is he considering or have there been discussions—is the minister having any discussions about bringing back health-care coverage for international students?

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, thanks to my colleague from St. Vital for the question on international students and health insurance and that.

Just to sort of square the circle on his last point on the last topic there, we'll endeavour to keep him informed as well as, you know, the continued, again, working, collaborating with all our education partners throughout the province, moving forward on those endeavours and making sure that, you know, that not only the dollars and cents that follow but plans and all that moving forward.

Now, international students, I'm glad you're touching base on that. We know that international students—why are they coming to Manitoba? Because, overall, it's, again, third-lowest tuition rates in the country, lowest in Western Canada. They bring diversity and valuable skills to this great province of ours. The ones that—both the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses) and myself grew up here in Manitoba and decided to train and retain, so we both attended

school here and we both attended post-secondary here and we're both choosing to raise our families here, which I think when people come to Manitoba, they quickly find out that it is a great place to live, work, learn and play.

So, again, when we tie in the low cost of living, competitive international student tuition rates, and the international education stream of the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, which I'm not sure if the member's heard this before, but the Provincial—the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program was actually created in the Filmon government under my—one of my previous colleagues and great friends to this day, Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson, who was instrumental in creating that program back in the '90s. And so, when we start to have—when you start to add all this up, I mean, this just provides a very attractive immigration pathway for new Canadians.

We're committed to supporting the safe arrival of international students while protecting students and all Manitobans. Universities and colleges continue to work with private health insurers to offer coverage that meets the needs of their students, and these insurance plans now include COVID-19 coverage. We continue to work closely with our post-secondary education institutions, our public health officials, and the Government of Canada to ensure that international students can arrive, quarantine, and study safely. So, at times, I have no problems having those conversations with my federal counterpart.

You know, it was Minister Mendicino on immigration and IRCC. I don't quite know what's going to happen when Prime Minister Trudeau swears in his Cabinet, where and who's going to be in that chair for immigration, but I did have a chance on probably four or five occasions to have a conversation with Minister Mendicino and I—you know, I strongly encourage the member from St. Vital and other members of the House to stand with us when we're looking for the federal government to help the province with some additional funding to help with the various programs that we have for our new Canadians coming to this great province of ours—Manitoba.

That being said, I encourage the member, when he's done asking questions to the Economic Development and Jobs Minister, to maybe stay on the line and very—definitely can ask the Minister of Health the same question.

\* (12:40)

Thank you.

**Mr. Moses:** I think it's a little disappointing that the minister wasn't able to clearly say that he's going to be at least investigating or looking into providing health-care coverage for international students.

Just want to move on to something that's in the Estimates book and ask a specific question. Says there that there's four vacant positions in the Immigration Pathways that will not be filled, they're going to be gone.

So I want to ask specifically where and which areas are those four vacancies coming from, and those four positions that are no longer going to be filled, where are they specifically within Immigration Pathways?

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, in regards to Immigration Pathways: so, as the member knows, that—the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration was created beginning of January and as that department—as the department was created to—which makes a whole lot of sense as far as the linkages go between post-secondary education and the skills and then of course, the immigration component.

He knows—he won't want to admit it, but he does know—that the wait-lists and the backlog of applications here in the province of Manitoba was astronomical under the previous NDP government, and it just seemed like it was taking months and months and months, like we're talking six months to 18 months and—holy smokes. And I mean, that was just horrendous.

And I do want to give a bit of a shout-out to my colleague, the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) for working hard when he was the minister to reduce those—that backlog and the wait times for that—all that paper, those applications. We're down under 60 days and in some cases under 30 days.

The Provincial Nominee Program alone is actively nominating skilled workers who can contribute to long-term economic recovery and the growth of our province. The staff has done an absolute rock-star job within Immigration Pathways.

And so I know that the member from St. Vital—and I can see it in him, I can see the good in him, where the old ways of the previous government, under Greg Selinger and even Gary Doer, they inflated the bureaucracy much like the ever-known analogy just like the Selkirk water tower.

Well, for those of you in Manitoba, just to let you know that Beausejour's got a water tower, as well. And so just because you've got an inflated bureaucracy doesn't mean you can't get the job done. So we're service delivery. We're knocking it out of the park as far as making sure that those applications are coming in and getting processed. And again, under 60 days, most of them; some of them under 30 days, which is incredible.

And, you know, just in this year alone coming up, I mean, the federal government has given us an allocation of—

**An Honourable Member:** Clear us out.

**Mr. Ewasko:** There we go, somebody else is chiming in. That's good. I need all the help I can get. It's good.

The federal government has given us an allocation of 6,275 applications. So, I mean we're working hard and just because, again, the bureaucracy isn't bloated like under the NDP doesn't mean that the work isn't getting done.

I have more and more faith in my department staff every day, that I continue to learn from them and learn from them and work with them. And so, hopefully, to my friend from St. Vital, that answers your question.

**Mr. Moses:** My question was asking where those specific vacancies come from and I don't think there was a clear answer there on that so, no, it doesn't. But I'll move on to the next question because it clearly doesn't seem like you're able to or interested in answering that last part.

I want to—like to ask about the Welcome Place, 'interfaith' immigration council. Could the minister provide the amount of annual funding provided to Welcome Place for the last three fiscal years—and again, if the minister can't provide it now, it's fine. If he can just endeavour to provide those figures for the last three fiscal years and how much has flowed to Welcome Place for the current fiscal year.

**Mr. Ewasko:** You know, I don't think the member from St. Vital is intending to be a little flippant, the way he's asking questions or putting false statements on the record. I just really do think that he's in hurry-up offence, here to take a football and basketball analogy from his past days of sport.

But just because he's in a hurry, it doesn't mean that I'm not willing or unwilling or unable to answer any of the questions, so I am answering questions. I'm just, you know, it's too bad that there's certain little buzzwords that he's hoping to either hear or not hear

and picks and chooses what he is hearing from the answers.

So in regards to, you know, the vacancies and that, I thought I gave him an answer and basically said that those vacancies, those positions are not getting filled because more doesn't necessarily mean quality. And again, back to the water tower analogy, the NDP were bloated at the top without the front-line services being done.

\* (12:50)

And so I take exception to how the member from St. Vital phrased his comments. Wasn't really even a question; it was comments. So I'm going to switch gears and I'm going to assume that he was messaged those comments or something like that because that doesn't sound like that came from him.

In regard to Welcome Place funding, I mean, the federal Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada—so for the—I know he's got his pen ready, so IRCC for short—is responsible for settlement services that support newcomers in Manitoba.

I'm assuming now the member is now the critic for immigration. So I don't know, maybe there was a shuffle going on within his own team that happened maybe in the last couple of days, but that's great. We know that the provincial government had basically mandated or had taken over settlement services, and so—but what I do want to assure the member is that we collaborate with our federal partners so that all newcomers are supported and can contribute to Manitoba's economic recovery.

We have those dialogues. I've got, you know, some of our federal MPs, who just so happen to be in that Liberal caucus at the federal level. I've had discussions with them. And, again, that comes to something that—to reference that sasquatch analogy—that didn't happen under the NDP government. It did not happen.

You have to have open dialogue with your partners, and that's at all levels of government. So I've had those discussions with my federal friends across the aisle, so to speak, and we'll continue to. The conversations that we have with the federal minister, and, again, we're going to wait and see what happens, I guess, in the next few weeks. I forget what the date is that they're going to be swearing in their ministers and Cabinet, whatever, at the federal level. But we here in Manitoba apply a whole-of-government, a whole-of-Manitoba approach to immigration. And we continue to value our partnerships with our service-provider

organizations and the other levels of government responsible for settlement and integration.

In April, and I think, you know, I'm not sure, I think it's in there, and I don't know if the member's got the book or not, but we provided funding to the tune of \$486,000–\$486,300—to Welcome Place for the '20-21, so 2021-22 fiscal year. So the Manitoba Interfaith Immigrant Council—so, again, I see he's got his pen in his hand, so MIIC for short—through Welcome Place is delivering in Canada protection services to refugee claimants and sponsorship services to private sponsors of refugees or parties wishing to become private citizens.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** The minister's time has expired.

**Mr. Moses:** I'd like to provide some 15 minutes of time to the member—member from Tyndall Park.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, I'll recognize the honourable member for Tyndall Park.

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** I want to thank the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses) for allowing me 15 minutes here to ask some questions and just commend him, too, on the questions that he is asking here in Estimates. I think they are very good questions.

The questions I have are sort of from follow-up to what we're talking about right, specifically immigration, and it's in follow-up to the conversation I had with the minister a couple months back in his office, which I really greatly appreciated. I learned a lot and I have my book here in front of me for all my questions.

In the Estimates books, the Province shares their intent to work collaboratively to attract and retain skilled workers to meet employers' needs through the MPNP, and one way to do this is by working with federal partners; I can appreciate that. So the first question is, how has the government thus far tangibly worked with, you know, beyond conversation, federal government in attracting and retaining skilled workers?

**Mr. Ewasko:** I'd like to thank my friend from Tyndall Park for the question. And they're always respectful questions. And, again, absolutely I thank my colleague and friend from St. Vital, as well, for his questions, because we definitely need—that's where I think we need to continue on the collaborative working together on getting, you know, answers for Manitobans.

So, before I get fully to my friend from Tyndall Park's question, I am going to just sort of wrap up on the question from the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses).

So, the '21-22 year for 'welcomth' place was \$486,000—just over, so \$486,300, which was the budgeted. Previous years, there was some actuals as well. And—has to keep in mind that when he's looking through those documents that there's other expenses that actually get reimbursed, and because there's other partners involved or other sources that go to those service providers, he has to take that all into account as well.

So I'd like to thank my friend and colleague from St. Vital for his line of questioning, and I do know, like I said, at the end of the day, I think our goal is to make sure that our programming is solid and our education—post-secondary education 'remoot'—remains affordable for all of our students, not only today but into the future.

So, friend from Tyndall Park, here we go on tangible ways. So, as she knows—and probably closer hand than most—we're still waiting on the—still waiting on a little bit of the swearing-in to see who all gets certain positions at the federal government and that. But that hasn't really stopped my department working with IRCC and that at the federal level. You know, we, again, I'm looking forward to finding out who the Cabinet minister is for immigration.

But again, I did want to do a bit of a shout-out to—a congratulatory to all our federal MPs on being elected and re-elected in the province of Manitoba. It doesn't matter on, you know, what—no matter of party stripe. So we're going to continue working with the federal government.

The conversations—and again, I think she can actually find out some of this as well. The conversations that I've had the pleasure of having over the last I'll say nine months because of the federal election, with the federal minister has been very productive. We've had conversations with some of my colleagues across the country, as well, on mutual concerns or questions, and we've even seen some movement from the federal government, to a certain degree, moving forward on the immigration file.

I know that our department here in Manitoba is now, you know, touching base weekly, and I've committed to a bit of time with the member for Tyndall Park's (Ms. Lamoureux) counterpart, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), on Tuesday

to have a bit of a conversation, but I did want to touch on the collaborative efforts that we are having on the serious situation that's happening of—in Afghanistan.

\* (13:00)

It's a tough situation and it's heartbreaking at times, but then also at times, we see the positive fruit of all of our efforts to try to help out as much as we possibly can. So we're staying in contact with IRCC quite a bit because she knows as well as I know, Manitoba is the home of hope and living in a safe, secure environment is a basic human need that we absolutely, all of us, need to protect.

To date, Manitoba has welcomed 23 Afghan refugees as part of the evacuation; overall, roughly about 3,700 into Canada.

I'll take your next question right away.

**Ms. Lamoureux:** I understand that, currently, the provincial government is waiting for the federal government to be sworn into their positions, that makes a lot of sense.

Over the last five years though, since 2016, this government has been—this provincial government has been in power and I'm curious what they have specifically done to attract and retain skilled workers over that time, in collaboration with the federal government.

And maybe for the sake of time, I'll throw in a second question here: Is the Province currently waiting or relying on the federal—their federal partners to do anything specific to better support Manitoba here?

**Mr. Ewasko:** So I'm just going to ask—I'm going to turn it back over to my friend for just a little bit of clarification on—what do you mean by support and how is it equating to Manitoba? Just add a little bit of clarity there, please.

**Ms. Lamoureux:** I want to see Manitoba prosper when it comes to immigration, when it comes to refugees and we have all of this dialogue going back and forth about attracting and retaining the skilled workers here in the province. And so if we need to do a better job advocating here in Manitoba to the feds, I want to be able to do that but in order to do that, I need to know what we're waiting for, what can the call be?

**Mr. Ewasko:** So I think—thanks to my friend from Tyndall Park for that question.

I think—you know, some of the evidence is absolutely—again, I give that shout-out to my—some of my predecessors here since we formed government in working towards helping to clean up some of those backlogs and, you know, that was left by the NDP government—I'm not sure if some of those things were even just swept into the closet, I don't even know what they were doing—but basically cutting down some of those application times from 60 days to some of 30.

I mean, as the member knows and we've had this conversation in my office, it's a world-renowned Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program. We are the example across not only the country but, I mean, many, many other organizations around the world absolutely look to us, to how we do this.

I'd like to think that some of the partnerships in collaboration with the federal government, even within the last, you know, six, seven months and then happened within the last five years as well. I mean, so we've strengthened the MPNP program, we've—the federal government has increased our allocation as far as applications.

And I think the fact that we're working so closely with them, they've also—and this goes with the national collaboration happening within our partners—our other, you know, provincial immigration ministers across the country—the federal minister, Minister Mendicino, absolutely heard us all loud and clear that we needed to improve processing times at the federal level, and he's committed to doing that and he put that in the news release.

So I think, again, it's not coming in, you know, loud and stomping your feet but having those open, friendly dialogues across the aisle, doesn't matter—no matter of what party stripe, and having conversations about what's best for Canada, what's best for Manitoba. And so I'm encouraged by some of the commitments that the, you know, existing, right-now minister of immigration, I guess until somebody else is either sworn in or he stays there.

I mean, we know that immigration is key to our economic recovery and the member referenced the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy. I mean, it's a fact: we need people in Manitoba. We need skilled workers in Manitoba. So, with the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy, it fits in so nicely with post-secondary education, immigration and the whole north, east, south and west plan for the province of Manitoba post-pandemic, making sure that we're ready to recover.

And so that's why those partnerships and dialogues with all our service providers, with the partners on immigration, continue to happen respectfully because—the member from Tyndall Park, as I mentioned with the member from St. Vital—Manitoba is an absolutely incredible place to live, work and play and learn.

We all grew up here, went to school here, you know, raising a family or whatever else is going here, right? It is a great place. It's affordable; education is fantastic. We just need to do a better job tooting our own horns to make sure that across Canada they know that we're coming for their best and brightest and we're going to encourage them to come to Manitoba and, again, grow roots, raise a family and stay here.

**Ms. Lamoureux:** I do want to commend the government. They did a good job in reducing those wait times. I know at one point it was three to five years. People were waiting just to find out if they were going to be accepted and I do think that credit should go there.

With that said, though, I don't believe in the whole tooting your own horn, because you also added and implemented the \$500 head tax fee and this program, the Provincial Nominee Program, ran very successfully historically and there was no \$500 head tax. So it doesn't make sense to me; it doesn't equate there.

My last question, I believe this is my last couple of minutes to speak here, is specifically on the Provincial Nominee Program. Historically, when it was first implemented, it was—had this huge primary focus about reuniting families. It was all about the reunification of family members overseas, allowing opportunities for them to come here to Manitoba and contribute to the economy and be supported by their family members.

The program has changed significantly since then and the minister has explained it to me in the past, and I do appreciate the explanation. But my question is: Moving forward, are there goals to reintegrate the reunifying portion of the Provincial Nominee Program or a different stream completely to focus on reuniting families here in Manitoba?

**Mr. Ewasko:** Thank you to my friend from Tyndall Park for the question.

I am going to back on the—to chat a little bit about the fees and then I'll get into some goals and, you know, I'd be remiss to say that, you know, I know what you say about, you know, the tooting your own horn. I mean, it is pretty good, but as she knows, as

well as everybody—every Manitoban knows, if you think you're all that and two bags of chips, well, you're really not, right? And there's always room for improvement and there's always things that we can do better.

And when I say tooting our own horn, I'm saying trying to attract people to Manitoba, because we do—and I don't think anybody would argue—that Manitoba is a great place to live, work, learn and play, for sure.

\* (13:10)

When we're looking at some of the fees in regards to the provincial—Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, and keep in mind that these fees do go back to help out our various different organizations and that.

So when we talk about other provinces—so I'm not sure if the member's aware of this or not, and she probably is because I know how much work she puts into her various portfolios because of their three-member caucus—you know, British Columbia, their fee is \$1,150. Ontario ranges from \$1,500 to \$2,000. Saskatchewan's a touch lower than we are, but there is still a fee. And I believe there's another three provinces that have fees as well for their—for their applications.

Now, keep in mind—and this is something that I often hear out there, and it's definitely not disinformation, because nobody actually means to put it out there in a harmful way, it's just misinformation. I think, in some terms, people don't understand—and, you know, sign me up, you know, when I took over in beginning of January as the minister, I had of—I had a lot of learning on the immigration file to do.

And so a lot of these things, I think, it comes to education and putting it out there so that people can fully understand exactly how this process works—which, don't get me wrong, the amount of jurisdiction the feds have over what we actually have here in the province, it's astronomical on the—it's almost like a 98-to-2 ratio of thing—excuse me.

But, so we're allotted 6,275 applications. So what ends up happening in certain cases is that that doesn't necessarily equate to individuals because, you know, in some cases, we could have admitting 18,000, 20,000, you know, individuals in a given year. And, matter of fact, you know, we hit a record all-time

high last year with, I believe, just over 19,000. I can get you the exact number, but I believe that's what the number is.

So when we talk about these application fees that go back to help, whether it's families or people with applications, that's an application fee. That's not a per person thing and that's not, like, if there's 20—let's just say, let's just say if there's 15,000 applications, we're not charging all those 15,000 applications \$500. We're talking about the ones that get through the system to be able to apply. So the 6,275 or, you know, or so—that's where the \$500 comes into place. And it's not an individual. It's absolutely on a application basis.

So whether the person who applies is a single person or a person with a partner and seven kids, it's \$500 for that one application, and it's reinvested into programs.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Moses:** No further questions.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, seeing no further questions, we will now turn to the resolutions, beginning with the second resolution, as we have deferred consideration of the first resolution containing the minister's salary.

At this point, we will allow virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the question on each resolution.

Resolution 44.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$695,264,000 for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, Advanced Education, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 44.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$67,650,000 for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, Student Access and Success, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 44.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding three million five hundred and seventy-four—[interjection]

Resolution 44.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,524,000 for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, Immigration Pathways, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 44.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$60,000,000 for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, Loans and Guarantees Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 44.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$34,800,000 for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 44.1(a), the minister's salary contained in resolution 44.1.

The floor is open for questions.

**Mr. Moses:** I move that line item 44.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration salary be reduced to \$1.

**Motion presented.**

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** The motion is in order. Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Is the committee ready for the question?

**An Honourable Member:** Question.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Shall the motion pass?

**Some Honourable Members:** Yes.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Voice Vote**

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

**Some Honourable Members:** Aye.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** In my opinion, the Nays have it.

The motion is accordingly defeated.

\* \* \*

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, the last Resolution, 44.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,371,000 for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Economic Development and Jobs.

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

**Mr. Moses:** Yes. Can we recess for two minutes?

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** It's been suggested that we recess for two minutes. *[Agreed]*

The committee is now recessed for two minutes.

*The committee recessed at 1:19 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 1:36 p.m.*

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOBS**

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** 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 Economic Development and Jobs.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Economic Development and Jobs):** Yes, I do.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay. Go ahead, Minister, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Reyes:** Well, first of all, it's a pleasure to be here, my first time in Estimates and, you know, I'll be in this role for nearly three months now.

A lot has happened. We know that the pandemic has been—you know, it's taken a toll on Manitobans and in particular, the business community. I know that

I met also with my critic earlier this summer and we exchanged some good ideas, in a good, wholesome, non-partisan way. We come from backgrounds that are similar. Our parents are immigrants and we are both individuals of colour, and we know that the pandemic really hit hard on our Indigenous and BIPOC communities.

And I, as the minister, realize that there has to be, you know, some programs and services to help these individuals in terms of being gainfully employed and hopefully, as well, maybe able to run their own small business and bigger.

That's what we had discussed because it's not just about creating jobs, but creating meaningful jobs. And we know that there's a saying too as well: you know, governments really don't create jobs, public sector, yes; but from a private sector standpoint, we must create environments for the private sector to create those jobs.

And we know that in terms of, you know, the sacrifices that Manitobans have made and to the business, they've adjusted; they've been resilient. Even in the beginning of the pandemic, prior to being a minister—I'm sure with all MLAs—for me, grassroots is really important in getting feedback. So I am proud to say I was very proactive in the beginning.

People know that our government—or the other MLAs, I think, were very proactive—but I've reached out to business owners, getting their feedback in terms of, you know—I've been there before in their shoes but I've never had to run a small business during a pandemic. So my job was to gather their feedback so I can pass it on to our stakeholders, our relations department, to the minister, my predecessor.

And there have been programs in place where, you know, there have been supports, supports where we've offered just over \$400 million in support programs to small businesses, whether it's through Healthy Hire or Bridge Grants.

\* (13:40)

We've strategically established grant programs that have targeted wage subsidy as well. We've had, through a partnership with Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and Economic Development Winnipeg, invested \$50 million in the long-term recovery of sectors and workers who had been most impacted by the pandemic. We know that our economy's—since the beginning of 2021, our province posted the highest job growth in the country. Our labour force increased by over 18,000 workers in 2021.

As of this morning's Labour Force Survey release, Manitoba has the lowest unemployment rate in the country. Looking ahead, we need a clear vision for recovery. We must be inclusive, building on our strength as a diverse province. We must be innovative. We must be adaptive, a place where business can succeed and grow.

We are creating the conditions for economic growth and job creation, including investment in new actions to grow our economy, boost skills training and supports and attract newcomers to our province, supports for businesses—having the right supports in place at the right time. Been very happy that we've had, you know, regular calls collaborating with business owners, with our public health officials so that we can prevent shutdowns.

Two point two million dollars for the Innovation Growth Program to spur commercialization of innovative new products. Invest Manitoba, the economic development agency will facilitate and encourage economic development in Manitoba and provide advice to the government about economic policy and incentives for economic developments.

Moving forward with tax relief as well to ensure our province has a truly competitive taxation system, enhancing the Small Business Venture Capital Tax Credit, making the interactive digital media tax credit permanent, workforce training that will help businesses find workers and Manitobans to find jobs.

We've listened to stakeholders so we could respond quickly, effectively and strategically to all the needs of business owners and all Manitobans throughout the pandemic.

We're committed to listening to Manitobans to ensure we have the tools in place to help create the conditions for safe, economic recovery and continued growth to the Manitoba economy.

Our government's looking to support businesses in their economic recovery and to protect jobs during times of uncertainty. That is why we have invested over \$400 million to support programs. And our government will continue to engage with other Manitoba business and industry associations and focus on kick-starting the economy with the programs and supports from our government.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Thank you, Minister. Minister, can we get you just to move

your camera down a little bit? We're kind of catching your head above your shoulders and nothing else.

**Mr. Reyes:** Sorry, say that again.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** That's—if you can just move your camera down a little bit and get a little bit of a better shot.

**Mr. Reyes:** Okay, adjust it.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Sure.

**Mr. Reyes:** Sorry about that. My apologies. First-time rookie here—

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** You know it's all good.

**Mr. Reyes:** —in Estimates.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, you're looking—

**Mr. Reyes:** How's that?

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Thanks, Minister, you're looking great.

Okay, thank you, Minister, for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** No.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** No. Okay, under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for the department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 10.1(a) contained in resolution 10.1.

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Global.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Thank you.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Moses:** Look forward to spending some time with the minister and discussing some questions.

I actually wanted to start off discussing CEDF, economic development fund, and find out a little bit about that program from the minister. I understand

that it's—hasn't been for the few—last few years making any payouts to businesses who've been looking for funding in the North, that, you know, the northern region and Thompson and that part of Manitoba, outside of the—for businesses that are not in the—necessarily in the fishing industry. So for non-fishing industry businesses, they haven't been able to access that plan.

Wondering if the member—if the minister is looking at its—allowing funds to start again being loaned out to businesses in the North from the CEDF fund.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Minister, when you're ready, if you could just raise your hand and that'll let me know. Okay, Minister, go ahead.

**Mr. Reyes:** I'm sorry, I'm using my iPad here as my computer so I got to—so—

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Reyes:** Yes, so with—thank you for the question from the member from St. Vital. You can hear me loud and clear, right, Mr. Chair? Sorry, yes? Okay, thank you.

Manitoba's committed to long-term economic growth for northern Manitoba. CDEF is an important partner and we will continue to work closely with them to support the needs of northern business. CEDF is working directly with northern businesses and communities to respond to the impacts due to COVID-19. As a regular course of business, they help northerners connect to the programs and services needed for business development and growth.

Our government has invested more than \$470 million in financial supports to help businesses and non-profits throughout the province, including northern Manitoba, in response to the pandemic. As we emerge and recover from the pandemic, we'll continue to work with our partner's support needs of businesses in all regions of the province.

And I must also say that I am looking forward to one day going to visit northern Manitoba because I, for one—and I don't know if my critic agrees with me. I think the best thing to do sometimes, I know we do a lot of virtual meetings and we read a lot of reports, but to be there to see actually—you know, to be on the ground, to meet face-to-face, because that's the type of MLA I am and I think that's the type of MLA you are and we want to best serve our stakeholders and, in this case, CB—CEDF.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Moses:** I thank the member—the minister for the response. I just wanted to clarify again: so we know that fishers are receiving phones from CEDF. We haven't seen that for non-fishing businesses, and so they've had a hard time during the pandemic, too, and I'm sure they're looking for funding through the Communities Economic Development Fund.

Is the minister looking at allowing, once again, funds to flow through that money—through that program to non-fishing businesses?

**Mr. Reyes:** Our government will continue to work with northern Manitoba, including CEDF because we know that they're an important partner and we will continue to work closely with them to support the needs of northern businesses, all businesses. I don't know if the member's aware: we do have a Mineral Development Fund, which we've injected that \$20 million of funding to that area, and we will continue to listen and engage with stakeholders in that area.

**Mr. Moses:** Thanks, Minister, and thank you, Chair.

I also wanted to just reiterate, like, I appreciate you mentioning the mineral fund and I'm aware that the North has more than just mineral and more than just fishing. I think that's one of the benefits of the CEDF, that it provided funding for non-fishing businesses in the community provided some loans there and so I know businesses are calling out for it. They are interested in seeing that funds can once again flow from that program. It was flowing before. It stopped under the previous minister with this same Conservative—same government.

\* (13:50)

And so I want to know if the new minister has a new direction with this fund to potentially allow non-fishing businesses receive money from CEDF.

**Mr. Reyes:** Yes. Thank you for the question. CEDF will continue to advance the economic recovery and its Look North priorities through partnerships that support industry expansion and promotion with organizations, including non-fishing businesses and develop a—of optimization strategies that support key industries and drawing best fits in the North.

Since April 2021, Look North initiatives have created 31 jobs, five new businesses and one business expansion. They're going to continue to consult directly with all stakeholders, all businesses, mineral,

fishing, non-fishing businesses. We're going to continue to engage with them to ensure that we can support those in the North.

**Mr. Moses:** Thanks for that. I also wanted to move onto the volunteer paid sick leave and the program that was announced a little earlier this year; the Manitoba Pandemic Sick Leave program.

I know that applications are ongoing. I believe the deadline to submit is at the end of October—October 29th. And I'd like to know from the minister, so far, what is the uptake on the program? How many employers specifically have applied to the Manitoba Pandemic Sick Leave program? How many were approved, you know, rejected? But ultimately, how many employees are—is this program supporting?

**Mr. Reyes:** As I have said in my opening remarks, I'd just like to remind my critic that we have invested more than \$470 million in financial supports to help businesses and non-profits in response to the pandemic.

In 2020, we supported over 4,000 employers to hire or rehire nearly 17,000 employees through our wage subsidy programs. Our current programs have so far supported 1,100 employers, providing up to 7,200 jobs. And as of August 31st, the number of applications for the program that he mentioned is just over 1,200; approved were one—just over 1,000. And it benefited the—over 7,200 employees.

**Mr. Moses:** Thank you so much to the minister for the response.

I was also just wondering about how much the total budget was for the Pandemic Sick Leave program and how much has been paid out to date.

And I'm also aware that the program is slated to end October 29th. Does the minister have plans to extend it beyond that point? I mean, we are looking like we're in the midst of a fourth wave with the numbers increasing, so I'm wondering if there's plans for the minister to extend that program moving forward.

**Mr. Reyes:** So, with respect to the program, just over \$3 million has been paid out as of yesterday. We know that we are doing our best engaging with the business community stakeholders, grassroots, in terms of collaboration with our public health officials. We know that, you know, our economy, in order for it to grow, it has to recover.

And I appreciate the question that you're asking. We're going to continue to monitor and analyze the

funding available so that we are best prepared to help those in need in terms of our economy continuing to grow, meaning that opening–keep–remaining–the business to be open.

So—but we'll continue to evaluate. We'll continue to engage, which I have been doing personally and even in my time here as minister. But, thank you for that question.

**Mr. Moses:** So, with that, you just said you are considering the program, whether it's going to continue after October 29th.

Is that consideration going to be made, like you said, a little bit more based on the funds available, as you mentioned, or based on our health situation, with the number of cases in the city and its impact on businesses and its impact on our health-care system? Or is it going to be based on the budget and the funds that you have available for the Pandemic Sick Leave program?

**Mr. Reyes:** Protecting Manitobans will always be our No. 1 priority, whether it's pre-pandemic or post-pandemic and during the pandemic. So it's going to be based on the needs of the province and consultation—continued consultation—with our stakeholders.

**Mr. Moses:** Wondering if the minister is able to give an estimate on when he thinks he'll be able to announce whether the program will continue or not.

I mean, October 29th is, you know, already of—just a few weeks away. You know, there might be some planning needed if the program's not going to continue and—otherwise, if it is going to continue.

And so, you know, to—fairness of other Manitobans and businesses, who'll often need the time to plan, wondering when the minister anticipates he'll be able to announce the continuation or not of the paid sick leave program?

\* (14:00)

**Mr. Reyes:** Thanks again for the question.

Consultations are going to be ongoing, and with those consultations and getting feedback from the business community, we'll make sure when it's deemed fit there that—we'll make an announcement in due course.

**Mr. Moses:** Thank you for the response.

I want to ask the minister about Bill 41, which was previously passed, which describes the removal of the position of the Fairness Commissioner as a

real—and so I wanted to ask the minister whether that's already—what's the status of that. Has the Fairness Commissioner have—been fully removed and the director put into place? And if he can provide an update on that process.

**Mr. Reyes:** Thank you for that question, and I reference Bill 41, the Office of the Fairness Commissioner, which I must let him know and update him that it has not—the position has not been removed. The role and mandate continues.

I understand that, you know, when you have immigrants coming from different countries, whether they move from province to province, that we must ensure that we have someone available to assess their credentials, because we realize, as a provincial government and working with our federal government, that one of the issues has always been—and prior to going into politics—and, you know what, we've talked about this before—me and the MLA for St. Vital—how when they come to Manitoba, in this case, like if we need more—certain occupations, why we have these barriers in place, not recognizing their foreign credentials.

My background, obviously of being a—my parents came from the Philippines and my wife being a nurse, we know that there are a lot of nurses from the Philippines and from other countries when they come here, that we must ensure that we help them transition so that they're gainfully employed to the standards of our province.

But that hasn't always been the case. We know that there's some challenges, and me and my critic have openly talked about this. And, you know, we had a really enjoyable discussion about this because, you know, we're on the same page when it comes to ensuring that immigrants, newcomers that come here are gainfully employed.

In my role as—my prior role as the special envoy for military affairs, I mean, I saw this even when we had Canadians, your own countrymen and countrywomen, when they would move from province to province, but their credentials would not be recognized by this province. What's accepted in Ontario is not necessarily accepted in Manitoba, and what's accepted in Manitoba is not necessarily accepted in Alberta.

So that's one thing that we have to, as elected officials, work with, you know, in this case our federal government, the national regulatory authority, bodies in each province so that we can facilitate those moves

when they come here so that they're gainfully employed, so that they can support their families, so that they can support their children. That's the reason why they move to this province.

And right now, as I speak, you know the Office of the Fairness Commissioner has not been removed. Their role and mandate continues, and I appreciate the question and I appreciate the—know we can one day meet again so we can throw out these issues so that we can help these new Manitobans.

So thank you for the question.

**Mr. Moses:** I appreciate the response. It's good to know that it's continuing, it's being effective in helping Manitobans who are looking for that service.

I want to know in—I just want to clarify because in that bill, in Bill 41, it does lay out the plan to remove that position and replace it with a director role. So I want to know—if the Fairness Commissioner currently still in place, that's fine.

Is the minister planning on going ahead with Bill 41 and implementing that director into that position and removing the Fairness Commissioner, or has that, kind of, that plan no longer moving forward as directed in—as it says in Bill 41.

So will there be eventually a changeover from the Fairness Commissioner to a director?

**Mr. Reyes:** With respect to the position they will maintain the general authorities, but there will be a change in the reporting method on how the information is flowed to my department.

**Mr. Moses:** So just to clarify, the Fairness Commissioner position will stay in place. Is that correct, Minister?

**Mr. Reyes:** Yes. Thanks for the question. The position will transit into a director role, however the responsibilities will be the same.

**Mr. Moses:** Okay. So the responsibilities will remain the same, as you've said, but it will transition at some point over to that director role from the Fairness Commissioner, still doing the same role.

Do you have a time plan of when that will be complete or when the transition will be complete?

**Mr. Reyes:** Our intent is later this year. However, I will let my colleague know that we're working towards it, but the work in the office will be main-

tained. It will be the same. We'll ensure that newcomers get the—are served well, even during the transition.

**Mr. Moses:** Thank you, Minister. I wanted to ask about the Manitoba Economic Support Centre, and just to clarify the status of that program, the Manitoba Economic Support Centre, the 24-7.

Is that program still up and running, and for—a little bit about it. I just wanted to clarify from the minister if that program is up and running, and if it's not, when did the operation stop or when did their contract for 24-7—when did that contract end if it has stopped?

\* (14:10)

**Mr. Reyes:** Thanks for the question.

I want to thank that Economic Support Centre, the 24-7, for providing this service, providing questions about our support programs to those who have used the Economic Support Centre.

We've also communicated them through our other channels, social media being one of them, our news releases, and right now, it's still ongoing, but we have other means on how we're communicating those programs so that business owners are well informed through these supports. And, you know, you can go to the links, which I've gone sometimes—I actually used it as, you know, one of my standard messages if people are looking for programs, whether it's businesses or individuals.

So—but yes, the Economic Support Centre is still ongoing, but we are also communicating these support programs through other means.

**Mr. Moses:** Thanks for that response, appreciate the status update on that.

Wanted to know, in terms of that contract and that amount, working with 24-7, how much has been paid to 24-7 for that work, for their Economic Support Centre, and if they could maybe provide a stat on, for example, like how many calls have they received from businesses and if there's any information on how effective this was to actually support the business community?

**Mr. Reyes:** I just wanted to make clear with the member that EDJ does not hold the contract for the Economic Support Centre, but I'll make sure that the department responsible is aware of the questions that he's asked.

**Mr. Moses:** Can the minister clarify what department does hold the contract?

**Mr. Reyes:** Yes, thanks for the question. The department that's responsible for the contract would be Central Services, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Moses:** I'd like to move on just to discuss a little bit about the rural economic development office. I know that they began earlier this year with a new executive director in that position, and I know that they're starting to get up and running towards working in that office for rural economy.

I'd like to find out if the minister has—can provide us with the mandate and the specific outline of programs and goals that the department has, that that rural economic development office has, what they're going to be—objective for working is. And if he can't provide it now, maybe he can endeavour to provide, you know, written copies of that, if he needs to.

**Mr. Reyes:** I thank, again, my critic for that question in regards to rural Manitoba. Actually, one of my first meetings was with the executive director Margot Cathcart. I actually met her in Brandon, and I'm pleased to know that the—you know, she's up and running. We're going to be there to assist her in any way we can—my department will.

I noticed that she's—it's a lot like building a house; she's building the foundation of this new entity. But we know, we both know, that it's very important that we engage with rural Manitobans through this office so that they're operational, that they're able to collaborate with rural Manitobans because we know that there's lots of economic opportunities in rural Manitoba.

**Mr. Moses:** Yes, I think, you know, there's definite need for, you know, developing our economy in rural Manitoba. We've seen that over the course of the pandemic, and so many other regions in our province have struggled and are in need of a boost. Rural economic development has an opportunity to do that.

And so, does—can the minister provide the mandate to the—that the—that rural economic development office has, like what their mandate and their purpose is, their goals are? Can he provide that for me, either now or, you know, if he can endeavour to provide that for me later, that would be appreciated because it's important to know their goals and objectives and their mandate so that, you know, we ensure that they are going to be helping our rural communities.

\* (14:20)

**Mr. Reyes:** Thank you, again, to my critic, for the question.

I know that when I did meet with Ms. Cathcart in Brandon, she'd showed me a sincere—an introductory video—I think it, I believe it's on YouTube—with respect to her organization, an organization that represents Manitoba, rural Manitoba.

And, you know, because of the pandemic, you know, we—we're continuing to engage and update, you know, update, you know, the direction that these partners that we partner with, including rural Manitoba, to ensure that they're on the right track, so that we're on the same page. And I thank them for their work and I know that they'll continue to grow and develop their organization so that it'll be in the best interest for rural Manitoba and all Manitobans.

**Mr. Moses:** The—I was, again, asking for the mandate for the office. The minister wasn't able to state that. I'm wondering, does the office even have one? Has that been provided to them, what their goals and objectives are? Does that—the minister, has that even been laid out for them?

I know that I've met with Margot and I know that she's, you know, working on trying to build their office up. And I've met and we've discussed, you know, what direction they're going to be taking, and I think that there's a bit of frustration with what direction they should be taking. And that's why I'm wondering if there is even a mandate. Maybe the minister can clarify if he's even given a mandate to Manitoba rural—the development office.

Can maybe the minister clarify that point? I'd also like to find out what the budget is for that office. Maybe the minister can clarify both those points.

**Mr. Reyes:** Again, thank you for my critic for the question.

You know, each partner that we have, you know, their basic mandate is to ensure that their organization supports economic development and growth in their sector—in this case, rural Manitoba.

**Mr. Moses:** Can the minister provide what their annual budget is for the office and an update on the work they've done in the fiscal year so far?

**Mr. Reyes:** Again, thank you for—my critic for the question with respect to the office in rural Manitoba. We know that we've supported them throughout the year and they've just been established, as he knows.

We know that they're working with Chuck Davidson and Joe Masi and we are ensuring that they have the appropriate resources that they need so that their office is up and running and we will continue to do so, so that it'll benefit those in rural Manitoba.

**Mr. Moses:** Okay, so the minister's not able to provide what their budget is for the current year or any update—a little bit of an update there on what they've been working on, who they've been working with, but it'd be really great to understand so that people in the rural community can understand how much this government is investing into their rural economic development, especially after such a hard year.

So I'd hope the minister could, in his next response, provide how much money the—is budgeted for rural economic development.

Knowing I only have a couple other minutes here, so I did want to just ask about some of the programs that were sponsored through the chamber program, such as the dine-in relief program. Wondering if the minister can provide the budgeted amount and how much was paid out for that program as well.

**Mr. Reyes:** Again, thank you for the question from my critic. As he is aware and I have mentioned, we've committed to \$50 million support. The Manitoba Chambers of Commerce administer the long-term

recovery fund. Funding has supported, as he mentioned, the dine-in restaurant relief fund and the shop local campaign. The Dine-in Restaurant Relief fund, you know, was—has been used, I believe, it's just near \$9 million and, you know, there is some money left over. They just made an announcement, actually, that I shared, is that there will be some upcoming relief for restaurants, as well. So, very happy to be working together with their president and CEO, Chuck Davidson, in terms of these programs.

Programs that we've put together include the TRIP program that was very successful. I know that many people have used that program and, you know, we're going to continue to work with partners like the Manitoba chambers to administer these programs and to ensure that we benefit their members, because their members will benefit consumers who, in this case, are mainly Manitoban—

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** The hour being 2:30, committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

#### IN SESSION

**The Acting Speaker (Josh Guenter):** The hour being 2:30, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. next Tuesday.

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Friday, October 8, 2021**

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