

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

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

**Vol. LXXVII No. 46 - 1:30 p.m., Monday, April 24, 2023**

ISSN 0542-5492

**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Second Legislature**

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

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 24, 2023

*The House met at 1:30 p.m.*

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

We acknowledge we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

Good afternoon, Jets fans. Please be seated.

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

#### **Bill 240—The Remembrance Day Amendment Act**

**Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East):** I move, seconded by the member from Portage la Prairie, that Bill 240, The Remembrance Day Amendment Act, now be read for a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Isleifson:** Bill 240 will simply allow folks working in any business in Manitoba the ability to show their respect by wearing a poppy during Remembrance Day week, unless, of course, it has something to do against health and safety regulations in their workplace.

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

Committee reports?

### TABLING OF REPORTS

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** Together with the Opposition House Leader, I am pleased to table the new Estimates order, which is permanent, or as permanent as anything is around here; permanent for today.

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

#### **Winnipeg Jets in the NHL Playoffs**

**Hon. Obby Khan (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage):** Madam Speaker, what an exciting time to be a Jets fan. Having clinched the playoffs, we finally able to come together as a community once more to celebrate the return of the great Winnipeg Whiteout street party.

The Manitoba government is proud to provide a grant of \$75,000 'ter'—per round and to partner with Economic Development Winnipeg and True North Sports & Entertainment, who have been planning the home-game Whiteout parties to celebrate together in a safe and fun environment.

It has been an exciting first round, and we saw this excitement manifested in the crowds during the first Whiteout party this past weekend, at the first home game in the series. It was a tough loss in double overtime, but a valiant effort nonetheless to come back from being down 4-1.

Thousands of fans were in the streets, in attendance on Donald Street for the first public celebration of a Jets playoff game in four years. The party featured food trucks, snacks, giant screens, music and fun to watch the game and official Jets merchandise—and purchase official Jets merchandise. I was also given the immense honour to get up on stage and rally the crowd with a go-Jets-go chant.

But these Whiteout street parties don't just provide an excuse to celebrate and cheer on the Jets, Madam Speaker. Half of the proceeds from the ticket

sales will be going to the United Way, which is a great way to give back to the community and support those who work in the city's most—with the most—city's most vulnerable people. The parties will also have a positive economic impact on local businesses, which can benefit from the influx of people to Downtown during the playoffs.

We are so proud to support our Winnipeg Jets. We're proud to wear our Jets gear here in the Chamber. We are proud to celebrate together and to bring people back Downtown to our city.

Thanks to all the hard-working volunteers and staff who are making it all happen, and the best of luck to the Winnipeg Jets tonight. And we know they're going to win tonight and make the series 2-2.

Go Jets, go.

**Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak):** Like the others say, go Jets, go. The Winnipeg Jets are in the NHL playoffs once again and are currently facing off against the Vegas Golden Knights.

People are in the streets dressed from head to toe in Jets gear and white clothes to show their support and devotion for the Jets at the Whiteout parties. Sports bring people of all stripes and backgrounds together, and inspires common celebration for our city and our team. It's in moments like these that we feel most proud to be Manitobans.

In the midst of the daily strife that we all experience, focusing on the game that we all love and our home team provides us with a sense of pride and relief. In that, there is a positive reason to celebrate this city's accomplishments. The amazing feats of our sports team continue to spire—inspire other Manitobans.

Being in the pay—playoffs is worse—is worth celebration, and our province will be there to celebrate with you tonight in game 4, in the streets, at the Whiteout, at home and anywhere where the game can be watched across the province. We stand with you in celebration of your success, and I hope this gives you further motivation for more wins.

We look forward to seeing a massive Jets win tonight. Go Jets, go.

Ekosi.

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

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

**Ms. Lamoureux:** I am so excited to rise this afternoon and talk about the Jets.

First and foremost, a couple of fun facts. Did you know that our Jets read to students during I Love to Read Month? Hellebuyck even co-authored a couple of books this year about mental health and racism. And did you know that our Jets arrange hockey camps for youth all across our province?

Madam Speaker, the Winnipeg Jets do so much for our community throughout the entire year, and now it's our time to do everything we can for them today.

So, I personally am not superstitious, but if you are, make sure you wear, eat and do everything you did last Tuesday when we crushed the Golden Knights from 5-1.

If you're going to the Whiteout street party, you better not have a voice tomorrow; the Jets should hear you from inside of the rinks.

And if you're watching the game from home, or maybe going out, here is an opportunity to support local and wear your Jets gear.

\* (13:40)

Madam Speaker, our players are on fire. They're amazing and our goalie is unstoppable. Did you see that save at—on Thursday's game? The puck in glove there? Just wow.

And tonight, we're going to triumph.

So, Madam Speaker, while we may be divided on many subjects here in the Legislature, I think—and goodness, I sure hope—that we are all on the same page. Here today, we want to see the Winnipeg Jets bring home the Stanley Cup.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and go Jets, go.

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### Tony Kusiak

**Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips):** Madam Speaker, it is an honour and a pleasure to recognize Tony Kusiak for his strong vision and efforts in promoting and fundraising for the prostate cancer research involved in Ride for Dad.

Established in 2000, the Ride for Dad fight against prostate cancer is committed to saving men's lives and improve the quality of life for men and their families living with this disease.

Every year, thousands of participants, supporters and friends raise funds for ride-with-dad initiatives held in communities from coast to coast across Canada.

Proceeds are received by its charity, the Prostate Cancer Fight Foundation, to fund groundbreaking prostate cancer research and life-saving awareness campaigns to benefit the communities where the funds are raised.

To date, Ride for Dad has raised over \$39 million with all proceeds going to the Prostate Cancer Fight Foundation.

Tony is part of the Ride for Dad campaign and has raised over \$200,000 over the past 13 years.

Tony has been a member with the Knights of Columbus at Holy Ghost church council for a number of years, and for the last four years he became a grand knight and has raised over \$25,000 at various fund-raising banquets.

He has also volunteered hundreds of hours helping the Missionaries of Charity, Union Gospel Mission, Siloam Mission, Chez Nous, Main Street Project and as he is a Second Harvest food rescuer and has helped gather over 20,000 pounds of food to be distributed at locations to help anyone in need.

Please join me, colleagues, in thanking Tony Kusiak for his hard work and dedication in improving our community, our province and our country.

Thank you, Tony.

#### **Evans Premachuk**

**Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak):** Today, I would like to honour Evans Premachuk, a northern Manitoban whose philanthropic endeavours have continually benefitted our community.

Born and raised in The Pas, Evans and his wife, Mardene, began their philanthropy and development in the community after setting up a law practice in the community in 1963.

Evans' family remembers how he had such unique ways of engaging with northern communities. While Evans was still practising—was still a practising lawyer, and roads had been—had not been created between the many communities, Evans would fly his small plane into northern communities like Lynn Lake. He would take a folding bicycle out of the plane, and ride his bike to the local cafe where he would work as a town lawyer for a day.

As—after Evans left his law practice, he dedicated his efforts to helping Mardene operate the Wescana Inn and further grow communities in the North.

The Premachuks recognized that northern communities have often struggled with funding, and felt that it could best contribute locally by fostering growth from within. Over the decades, the Premachuks have donated more than a countless amount to the community through initiatives such as the Tri-Community Foundation, The Pas rotary and a large sum of \$100,000 to the Oscar Lathlin Research Library renovation at the University College of the North.

Evans also was instrumental in getting legal aid in northern Manitoba. He would keep track of all his clients he helped who could not afford a lawyer and relentlessly pursue funding for people, just like he now relentlessly pursues a medical school for The Pas, similarly to the one in northern Ontario.

Evans and his wife, Mardene, have offered support to local initiatives and foundations for decades, which has made a lasting impact for the community. Without generous donations like those of Evans and Mardene, many of our communities' beneficial programs may have struggled to find funding.

The strength of community spirit and, as he has described it, the northern charm fostered by locals is showcased perfectly—

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Leave.

**Madam Speaker:** There leave to allow her to complete her statement? *[Agreed]*

**Ms. Lathlin:** He was a friend of my late father, Oscar, and now I'm honoured to call him my friend. I enjoy having our early morning breakfast meetings at the Wescana Inn listening to his hopes and vision for The Pas, our hometown.

On behalf of the community, I would ask my colleagues to join me in sincerely thanking the Premachuks for their commitment to seeing the North, The Pas, thrive.

Ekosi.

#### **School Musicals**

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I'm thrilled to have this opportunity to acknowledge Windsor Park Collegiate and J.H. Bruns Collegiate for their spectacular spring musicals.

Last week, I had the pleasure of attending opening night of the Windsor Park Collegiate Newsies production.

Newsies is based on the true story of the 1899 New York City Newsboys Strike, when newsies went

on strike for two weeks and the two papers' sales plummeted.

This was my first time seeing this musical, and Director Kate Willoughby did not disappoint. The entire cast put their hearts into singing, acting and dancing and some of the cast members did cartwheels, backflips and tap danced on the stage.

The next evening, I had the pleasure of attending J.H. Brun's production of Matilda. Many of us know Matilda as a bright, talented girl misunderstood by her family and peers.

Director Justine Phipps brought this story to life. This musical was the first performance in their newly renovated theater and it was an enjoyable experience. Several cast members were performing in the musical for the first time, but that was not evident; their choreography was well rehearsed and so enjoyable to watch.

Madam Speaker, school productions involve students, staff, parents and the entire community in a celebration of the arts. One of the most important themes in both musicals is that children can and do indeed have power and are a force to be reckoned with and respected.

Congratulations to both schools' production teams, pit band, cast and volunteers.

Bravo.

### Addiction and Overdose Epidemic

**Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas):** People experiencing addictions, and their loved ones, deserve a government that takes real, meaningful action to support them. Unfortunately, this PC government has shown that they would rather play politics with people's lives than provide real support.

This is unacceptable. This—there is an addictions and overdose epidemic in our province. People are dying, and we have no time to lose.

In March of this year, the PCs promised to fund 1,000 addiction treatment spaces for those experiencing addictions. This addiction—the announcement should have represented hope. However, this government was not clear with Manitobans on what the spaces are. What we do know is that they are likely not permanent beds but, rather, temporary spaces that could be used by multiple people in the same day and counted as multiple spaces. This is misleading.

Instead of providing genuine, meaningful support for people experiencing addictions, this announcement was the PCs' attempt to look like they are actually doing something when they are not. Manitobans know that the addictions crisis has gotten worse under this PC government. We are in addictions crisis here, Madam Speaker, but this government is still not honest with Manitobans, or wanting to help those struggling.

They've consistently put up roadblocks for people struggling with addictions and refused to be transparent with the actual number of overdose deaths here in our province. Because of the NDP, we were able to stop Bill 33, which had put roadblocks up for those that were actually helping save lives here in Manitoba.

Their consistent blockage for safe consumption sites has led to more overdoses in our province, and this government continues to not put in the resources that those 80 organizations asked this government—they all signed on to a letter saying to this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), saying to this minister, we need to help save lives. These are Manitobans' lives, and they need to do the right thing. Open a safe consumption site; actually have 1,000 treatment beds—

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

\* (13:50)

### Youth Hockey Champions

**Hon. Obby Khan (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage):** Madam Speaker, today is hockey day in the Chamber. Today I am happy to stand and recognize five youth hockey teams in Winnipeg south that won city championships with the Fort Garry North Hockey Association.

Congratulations to the U11 A3 Team Orange, U13 A1 Winnipeg Storm, U15 A2 Winnipeg Storm, U18 A1 Fort Garry Flyers, U18 A2 Fort Garry Flyers.

The U13 Winnipeg Storm had an especially exciting victory, defeating their season-long rivals, the Rockets. After losing to the Rockets for the third time in regular season, the team devoted much of the next month to playoff preparation and strategy. Madam Speaker, practice pays off. As they rallied around each other, they played their best hockey of the season during the playoffs, and they were able to defeat the Rockets in game 4 of the five-game series.

Much like the U13 Storm, the U18 A2 Fort Garry Flyers were able to achieve victory by perseverance and the willingness to learn, grow and work as a team, finishing their season with an amazing 12 and 0 record.

It would not be possible for these teams to have so much such success without their coaches' and parents' dedication to countless hours of practice, tournaments, games and much more.

I would like to take this time to recognize head coach Brendon Schewchuk and Scott Estabrook [*phonetic*], who are here with us today, along with all the other assistant coaches and team managers for their time and dedication to our kids.

I would also like to take a second and thank the greatest team manager of my son's Fort Garry Flyers U11 A2 team, Jeff Eastman, which did not win the championship this season.

To the teams continuing on to provincial finals, good luck and have fun.

I would like to ask now, Madam Speaker, that all members rise in the House so that we can recognize the players, the coaches and parents with us here today from the Fort Garry North Hockey Association.

### Introduction of Guests

**Madam Speaker:** We have some guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce to you. We have seated in the public gallery from Morning Glory School, 21 grade 11 students under the direction of Walter Pankraz, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen).

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

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### Health-Care System Consulting Firm Costs

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Madam Speaker, for years, the PCs have ignored the voices of front-line health-care workers. They've refused to listen to the voices of nurses, of doctors, of paramedics and other allied health-care professionals.

And now we learn that this government turns around and goes to higher—a high-priced consulting firm, Deloitte, for advice on how to fix the crisis on health care that the PCs themselves have made.

Will the Premier tell the House how much she has paid to this consulting firm instead of investing in the front lines?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** Well, Madam Speaker, we will continue to make record investments in our health-care system in the province of Manitoba—

almost \$8 billion this year; a 9.2 per cent increase over last year. We'll continue to make those investments.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force for the incredible work that they're doing. Almost a 32 per cent reduction in the diagnostic backlog and surgical and—the diagnostics and surgical backlogs, Madam Speaker, encompassing nearly 26,500 individuals who got the care that they needed when they needed it.

We want to thank the diagnostic and surgical task force for everything that they do to help get health care to Manitobans.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, the Premier excludes people waiting for hip and knee surgeries. We don't think that's right. We stand up for everybody on this side of the House who need surgeries in Manitoba, not just the numbers that are convenient for this government.

The question I ask goes to the heart of the problem that the PCs have created in our health-care system: too much emphasis on bureaucracy and consultants, not enough emphasis on the front lines.

As staff are burnt out, nurses, doctors, allied health-care professionals leave the profession, what do the PCs do? They spend more money on consultants, more money on bureaucracy.

So, I'll ask the question again: Just how much money did the Premier spend on this Deloitte consulting report, money that could've gone to the front lines instead?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, Madam Speaker, I think that Manitobans need to know the facts. And the facts will never be delivered by the Leader of the Opposition when it comes to some of the wonderful things that we are doing to ensure that Manitobans get the health care that they need, when they need it.

And I really want to give special credit to the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force for the incredible work that they do. Dr. Peter MacDonald, Dr. Ed Buchel; all of those individuals that we're taking advice from on that task force, Madam Speaker.

As a result of that task force, we're getting 200 more hip and knee surgeries at the Grace Hospital, Madam Speaker. There's also going to be a new OR—new surgical operating room at Concordia Hospital, well—we'll see more than 1,000 more hip and knee surgeries done every year.

That's moving forward in the right direction to ensure Manitobans get the care that they need, when they need it.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, I feel compelled to remind the House that all of last week, day after day, we heard about how doctors were quitting this government's task force because those physicians are being ignored, and their proposals to improve surgeries in our province are being rejected by this government.

Here's a fact check for the government: 7,000 allied health professionals are on the verge of a strike. Those are rural paramedics. Those are lab techs and X-ray techs who keep local hospitals open. They're on the verge of striking because of this government.

And what does this Premier turn around and do? She hires another out-of-province high-price consultant to deliver another report. We already know what the report's going to say: the PCs have made a mess of health care.

So, will the Premier please tell the House how much of money that should've gone to the front lines did she instead spend on Deloitte consultants?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, Madam Speaker, what we do know is that there were almost 24,000 Manitobans who were able to get diagnostic and surgical procedures, because we wanted to ensure that we contracted out those services so that Manitobans could get them as quickly as possible.

And each and every one of those individuals would've been denied access to the health care that they need, want and deserve, if the NDP was in power in our province.

We don't think that's right, Madam Speaker. We will stand up for Manitobans each and every day.

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

#### **Vital Statistics Office Staff Vacancy Rate**

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** You know, Madam Speaker, Manitobans aren't just waiting for health care, they're also waiting to get their IDs. Thousands of Manitobans are waiting for birth certificates, for marriage certificates, for wedding certificates because of the cuts that the PCs have made to Vital Statistics.

This is a basic function of government. When a Manitoban is born, the government ought to be able to provide them with a birth certificate, and yet the PCs are failing even to do that, Madam Speaker.

Now we know why: FIPPA documents that we've received show that there's a 40 per cent vacancy rate at Vital Statistics.

Why did this Premier leave so many jobs empty that should be providing these important services to Manitobans?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** Well, Madam Speaker, first and foremost, we want to ensure that those Manitobans get those certificates as quickly as possible. We do know that there was a worldwide pandemic; maybe the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite have forgotten about that.

But, of course, Manitobans recall that well, Madam Speaker, and they know that there has been some challenges when it comes to these things as a result of the pandemic. We also know that there is a shortage of skilled workers across the country.

We're, of course, working towards that with the federal government, with others, through our provincial nominee program, and ensuring that we increase immigration to the province of Manitoba.

\* (14:00)

So, we are taking action, Madam Speaker. I'll remind members opposite and all Manitobans that while we're taking action, the NDP is voting against those actions that we're taking every day which is going to provide solutions to the problems that we're talking about today.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, you ever notice how the PCs have trouble hiring people in areas where they cut jobs? First in health care, now in Vital Stats.

The Vital Statistics is supposed to be providing important pieces of identification for Manitobans. We're talking about birth certificates so that children can access important services. We're talking about marriage certificates so newlyweds can get their new lives started in a good way together.

This is a basic function of government. This is what you pay your tax dollars for, and yet the PCs are failing to deliver this service.



Now we know why: they've let 40 per cent of the jobs in this department sit empty. And here's the kicker: that 40 per cent of the jobs sitting empty, that happened after this government cut the total number of jobs in this area by 15 per cent.

Why is the Premier failing to deliver this basic service that every Manitoban should expect?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, Madam Speaker, we take this issue very seriously.

And, of course, we recognize that there is a shortage of labour, not just in these areas, but in all areas; not just in Manitoba, but right across our country.

So, we are taking actions. As I alluded to in the previous answer, Madam Speaker, we are taking actions to make sure that we address these issues. And, in fact, in the last month, we are making significant headway to ensure that we are hiring people into those positions. We are making headway.

We recognize, of course, that there's more work to do, and we'll continue to make sure that we move in the right direction.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, the reason why there's a labour shortage in Vital Statistics is because this Premier cut the number of jobs by 15 per cent. After you cut jobs, yes, you are short the number of workers in that department after the fact.

It's no wonder that the Premier is failing to deliver this basic service to the people of Manitoba. This is why you pay your taxes, and the PCs are failing you. You should be able to expect that if you have a baby born to your family, that you will be able to get a birth certificate. You should be able to expect that when you get married, you will be able to get a marriage certificate.

You could certainly expect that with a Manitoba NDP government, but you're just not getting that from the PCs.

Why is the Premier failing this service for the people of Manitoba and how does she justify leaving 40 per cent of the positions at Vital Stats empty? By the way, I'll table the documents that prove the case.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** As I mentioned before, we recognize that there is a labour shortage not just here in Manitoba, but right across the country.

But I know that we've been working diligently to ensure that we're filling those vacancies and I know in Vital Statistics alone, in the last few weeks, we've hired seven individuals to ensure that we help to get at those backlogs, Madam Speaker.

I want to make sure that every Manitoban who needs a certificate gets their certificate, and we will take the action to make sure that that gets done.

### Health-Care System Government Record

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Day after day, week after week, we continue to confirm that this Health Minister doesn't think that she's accountable for the current state of health care in Manitoba.

The PCs are putting their ideology of cuts and privatization ahead of patient outcomes. And we know they ignore pleas from the orthopedic surgeons at the Grace to increase procedures, and forced them to go public instead with their concerns.

Madam Speaker, my question is for the Health Minister, the so-called minister of the possible: Is it possible that her PC government's continued cuts and inaction over the past seven years is the reason that nobody in Manitoba has any trust in her?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I want to thank all the physicians that have provided input to the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force, including the physicians that work at the Grace Hospital. That is what has helped the DSRTF to eliminate the backlog in cataracts, CT scans, ultrasound tests, cardiac catheterization lab tests, pacemaker surgeries, pediatric neurodevelopment assessment, urology tests and more, Madam Speaker.

I thank them for coming to the table of solutions.

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

**MLA Asagwara:** This PC government is now shifting to the next phase of their plan, and this Conservative Premier's intent is on privatization and—  
[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Asagwara:** —contracting out the delivery of health-care services. They're sending patients out of province at a great expense, even though there's existing capacity right here in Manitoba that they refuse to invest in.

Instead, this minister's task force actually directed the Grace Hospital to cut their surgeries by 20 per cent, Madam Speaker.

Will this Health Minister tell Manitobans why she decided that it's not possible to direct-fund into the front lines of our public health-care system, and fund orthopedic surgeries right here at home?

**Ms. Gordon:** Madam Speaker, I am pleased that through the incredible work of the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force, we are adding 200 more orthopedic surgeries at the Grace Hospital, and funding the building of a fifth operating room at the Concordia, which will bring us 1,000 more hip and knee surgeries.

Our government is investing in the public health system, and I ask the member for Union Station to get on board with the art of the possible. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

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

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, it's—you know, it's sad. I think it's really sad that this Health Minister still thinks that after seven years of cuts and chaos, that their decisions have been the right move.

Manitobans are correct in their assessment that this PC government cannot be trusted when it comes to their health care, while she hides in her office with her so-called table of solutions, just sitting in her office hiding away from the media and Manitobans, while she ignores advice from medical experts and health professionals, Madam Speaker.

This minister needs to answer for Manitobans: When will she stop the talk and actually lead by example by investing in made-in-Manitoba solutions for health care?

**Ms. Gordon:** Once again, the opposition members continue to mislead Manitobans, but there are nurses at the Health Sciences Centre, the Grace Hospital and the St. Boniface Hospital that know I haven't been hiding at all, Madam Speaker.

I've been at the front lines meeting with them, hearing about their concerns, delivering on the health human resource action plan, which—and those meetings brought forward the incentives that are part of that plan, Madam Speaker.

I know members opposite don't like when we go to the front lines and talk to front-line workers and hear of all their failures, Madam Speaker, but I'm

going to continue and members on this side of the House are going to continue to listen to Manitobans, as well as front-line workers.

### **Project Nova Implementation Costs Request to Call MPI to Standing Committee**

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia):** We still have a lot of unanswered questions when it comes to the PC boondoggle, also known as Project Nova.

Costs continue to skyrocket, there's no transparency in sight and ultimately, no accountability from this government. The latest records show that Project Nova is \$200 million over budget, and counting.

I'm tabling documents here, Madam Speaker, from an MPI board meeting—board of directors meeting. These minutes made—make it clear the minister's own board approved an untendered contract of \$12 million to the private consulting firm, McKinsey.

With millions of dollars already wasted on Project Nova, how can the minister still have confidence in his board?

\* (14:10)

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable—*[interjection]*

Order.

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation):** We know that under the NDP, they let the computer system at MPI deteriorate. They didn't fix it. They never repaired it. I don't know, maybe they had a plan that they were just going to privatize MPI anyway, so they didn't want to bother to actually upgrade the computer systems.

But for many, many years, it continued to—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Goertzen:** —get worse and worse and worse, and only when this government came into place did we decide that MPI is a Crown jewel. It actually should be protected. It should be enhanced. It should be bettered.

So, we're improving the computer system that they never did when they were planning to sell MPI.

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** Madam Speaker, well, we know that the minister talks to his board at MPI every couple of weeks. So, that means that he would know that they approved this contract with McKinsey. It's clear he did

nothing to stop it. And that's more wasted money, that's more of taxpayers' money down the tubes.

Manitobans deserved answers. Crown corporations like MPI belong to the people of Manitoba and the minister can't keep approving millions of dollars in overspending without being accountable and answering to the public. We need to get to the bottom of this, Madam Speaker.

So I ask: Will the minister call MPI to committee today so that it can be, and he can be, accountable to Manitobans?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Madam Speaker, when I discovered that under the former NDP government, there were dozens and dozens of untendered contracts at MPI valuing tens of millions of dollars, I sent a directive—that the NDP never did—that now prohibits untendered contracts from being issued by MPI over a certain value.

We continue to find the mistakes that the NDP made and we continue to correct them, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** While the minister continues to defend his board at MPI, the Consumers Association of Manitoba has made it clear that untendered contracts are, quote, bad practice.

But that's exactly what this minister's board did: they're throwing more money—good money after bad—at a private consulting firm, while at the same time raising Autopac rates for all Manitobans.

That's unacceptable. Manitobans shouldn't have to pay for this government's mismanagement. Families shouldn't have to foot the bill for another private contract with no oversight.

Will the minister call MPI to committee, so that Manitobans can start getting answers about his boondoggle at MPI?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Madam Speaker, \$4 billion of unnecessary spending at Manitoba Hydro is a result of that former government's work at Manitoba Hydro. That member said nothing during that time, and now Manitobans are paying more for their hydro rates as a result.

The last time that that computer system was upgraded at MPI, Pokey Reddick was in net for the Winnipeg Jets. We had Morris Lukowich, who was on the right or the left wing. The Finnish Flash was doing his great work in Winnipeg. That was the last time that this computer system was upgraded.

We're going to upgrade it, just like we're going to ensure that the Winnipeg Jets get on to the next round by cheering them on tonight, Madam Speaker.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

### Allied Health Professionals Collective Bargaining Negotiations

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** Madam Speaker, thousands of front-line health-care professionals have voted in favour of a strike and continue to hold information pickets, protesting their lack of a contract from this PC government.

It's a clear sign that they've had enough disrespect from Brian Pallister and now the Stefanson government. They've had enough of a five-year wage freeze, and some allied health professionals working in community have gone even longer without a contract.

Why has the government forced allied health-care workers to vote in favour of a strike?

**Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services):** Let me begin by saying just how grateful I am and our caucus is for the incredible work that these health-care professionals do in our province, day after day, week after week, throughout the pandemic and continuing today. We greatly value what they do and we appreciate that.

We have—Shared Health is the employer, as the member opposite would know. They're the one in negotiations with the union. We want both parties to come to an agreement, and we're encouraging the bargaining to continue.

And that's where it should belong, not on the floor of this Legislature.

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

**MLA Marcelino:** Madam Speaker, everyone in Manitoba knows that the PC government does not respect collective bargaining. Ultimately, this PC government is the employer, and they set the mandate for Shared Health's negotiating team. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Marcelino:** That's why 99 per cent of allied health professionals—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Marcelino:**—feel disrespected by the Stefanson government and her PC MLAs. A wage freeze for

five years during a cost-of-living crisis: that's the policy of this PC government.

Why has this PC government failed to give them a fair deal?

**Mr. Teitsma:** Madam Speaker, it's disappointing that the member opposite would continue borrowing from the playbook of the Leader of the Opposition and misleading Manitobans.

The simple fact of the matter is that one contract after the other within our health-care system has been concluded, and every single one of those contracts included compounding increases; every single one of those contracts included retroactive pay.

For this member to suggest anything else is disingenuous and does a disservice to those health-care workers and to all Manitobans.

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

**MLA Marcelino:** Madam Speaker, on this side of the House, we respect allied health-care professionals.

Everyone in Manitoba knows that the PCs have made a mess of our provincial health-care system. Lab and X-ray techs, pharmacist assistants and techs, radiation therapists at CancerCare and over 190 other allied health professionals have had their wages frozen for five and as long as six years and counting. That's during a cost-of-living crisis where inflation has risen by over 20 per cent.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) give allied health-care workers a fair deal today?

**Mr. Teitsma:** Madam Speaker, the tactics of the member opposite and the tactics of the Leader of the Opposition are clear and the same: to promote a narrative of their own making in the hopes that Manitobans will believe them, at the same time knowing full well that they shouldn't.

The trouble with their tactic is that they have no credibility. The Leader of the Opposition has no credibility, and his caucus knows it. They heard it at the doors of Kirkfield Park; they heard it at the doors in Fort Whyte. I suspect they'll continue hearing about it in the fall.

I say to them that they're the ones—the NDP caucus is the ones in this Chamber who can do something about it, choose a better leader; that's what we did.

### **Brokenhead Ojibway Nation Highway 59 Safety Improvements**

**Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook):** On March 10th, I rose in question period to request that the minister address community safety concerns and listen to Brokenhead Ojibway Nation and decrease the speed limit of Highway 59, which runs right through the community. The community wanted a speed limit reduction to avoid the risk of pedestrian-vehicle accidents.

But last week, their worst fears came true when a community elder was struck and killed while trying to cross Highway 59 in her community.

It's clear now that more than ever, the speed limit of Highway 59 in Brokenhead needs to be reduced.

Will the minister commit to doing that today?

**Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure):** Our government reached out to the chief and the community after the incident occurred by offering our deepest condolences to the family, friends and many of the people who are part of the tragic incident.

Every fatality on Manitoba roadways are tragic and undergoing thorough review. At this time, the RCMP are currently investigating this incident, Madam Speaker.

We will continue work with Brokenhead First Nation regarding this stretch of highway to look for a long-term solution.

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

**Mr. Bushie:** Last Thursday night, a community elder was struck and killed while trying to cross Highway 59 in Brokenhead Ojibway Nation. Chief Bluesky is calling on the PCs to make safety improvements to prevent future fatalities. He wants to see the safety concerns addressed today.

The community wants to see a reduction in the 80-kilometre speed limit, improved lighting and safe pedestrian crossings.

\* (14:20)

Will the minister commit to implementing these requests today?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Madam Speaker, we recently installed temporary speed-reduction signs, and our government is actively looking at additional options to enhance safety in the area.

Recent discussions with Chief Bluesky as the community was asked for this for decades to have the improvement of safety along this highway.

I look forward to presenting the solutions to Chief Bluesky in the upcoming weeks, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. Bushie:** Madam Speaker, for the record, those are only speed notifications; those are not reductions that happened.

We know the backlog for speed zone variance requests in Manitoba is much too high. That means that communities like Brokenhead Ojibway Nation are having to wait far too long for action. It's clear the situation is urgent.

Last week, an elder was killed when trying to cross Highway 59 in Brokenhead. Community members, including young children, have no choice but to cross that highway every day. It's time for the minister to act and reduce the speed limit of Highway 59 in Brokenhead.

Thoughts and prayers from this government will not get results. The community is demanding that these safety concerns be addressed now.

Will the minister commit to these safety concerns today?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** The member for Keewatinook, I said before in my last second question's answer, was that for 20 years they were looking for reduced—a reduction of speed limits in the—in that community and, Madam Speaker, in 1991 our PC government at that time reduced the limit to 80 kilometres.

This time we are looking at reducing it again, and when we—they'll be talking to the chief and his council in the next couple of weeks and making sure that we look at safety opportunities and look at long-term solutions. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** We're investing billions of dollars in our infrastructure, making sure a community like Brokenhead will be safe for people and the pedestrians and for people on the highways, Madam Speaker.

#### Well-Being of Health-Care Employees Manitoba Health Report Findings

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** We all know Manitoba's health-care system is in crisis, and we've

obtained a report from Manitoba Health dated from April 2022 explaining exactly why. On page 5 it says, and I table: In Manitoba, quote, burnout is higher than in other areas in Canada, as is the proportion of employees seriously thinking about leaving their job. Over two thirds—68 per cent—report burnout, and nearly one third—29 per cent—say they've missed work due to burnout.

Half of all employees say they've seriously thought about looking for a new job and, quote, many of these structural and systemic factors existed before the pandemic. The situation is unlikely to improve without focused and targeted interventions.

Why was this report kept secret, and why has its many recommendations from health employees been ignored?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** We appreciate, value and respect all the individuals who work in our health system. Whether they work in the Department of Health, whether they work in community health or in acute care, we value and appreciate all their efforts.

It's been a tough time, Madam Speaker, for everyone living in this province, coming through a very difficult pandemic. We recognize that there are vacancies, that those vacancies need to be filled, and we are committed, as a government, to providing the resources that are needed.

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

**Mr. Lamont:** Madam Speaker, again, this is a quote from page 5, which targets the problem. Quote: There is no co-ordinated employee well-being strategy. Ongoing health systems changes have left employees and management working in overdrive for the past two years. Many employees have faced wage freezes, despite higher workload, causing attrition and low morale. Employee resilience and well-being in Manitoba is at a point where, without change where change is needed, the current state of employee resilience and well-being poses risk to employees, to patients and to the health system.

These are detailed recommendations for monthly progress to—none of it has been done, and this is from April 2022, a full year ago.

Why is this critical information about our health-care system been buried and its recommendations ignored when action is desperately needed?

**Ms. Gordon:** Madam Speaker, health system leaders are committed to ensuring that employees are working in a supportive and safe and healthy environment. They want to ensure that the whole of the individual is protected: mental, physical, spiritual. And I commend the work that they've done in the past and continue to do, to listen to the front-line workers and employees and their branches and divisions.

We know, Madam Speaker, more work needs to be done, and all the members on this side of the House, regardless of which department they oversee, is committed to getting the job done.

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

### Health Coverage for Work Permit Holders Eligibility Requirements

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** It's been brought to my attention that Manitoba Health is denying health coverage to some individuals here on work permits because of a technicality.

Under the current legislation, a person must reside in Manitoba for 12 months straight in order to get health coverage. For the most part, this requirement is met. However, some work permit holders are a few days shy. We're talking two to three days, and they are being disqualified for health coverage.

Madam Speaker, work permit holders in Manitoba contribute to our economy. They pay taxes just like everyone else.

Will the minister ensure those who are here on work permits are eligible for Manitoba Health coverage?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** Madam Speaker, I'm really pleased that the member has raised this here in the Chamber because this is one of the issues I was going to approach the members of the Liberal Party to discuss, because some of this issue—these issues stem from federal rules and guidelines around work permits and when they expire and when they need to be renewed.

And the Department of Health has been working very closely with individuals who've come forward with this concern, and I call on the members of the Liberal Party to call their federal counterparts and really begin to move this issue forward in terms of the work permits' expiry dates, Madam Speaker.

### Environment and Climate Incentives Government Announcement

**Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips):** Madam Speaker, last week was Earth Week, and unsurprisingly we heard nothing from members opposite. I don't know if it's because they have nothing to say or if they're embarrassed about the Auditor General's back-of-the-napkin comment when it came to the NDP's environmental record.

However, on this side of the House, our minister has been busy. Where the minister—or, the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) is too busy moonlighting in court, our Minister of Environment and Climate is enlightening Manitobans about the work we are doing on the environment.

Can the minister share some of the accomplishments of our government?

Thank you. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Kevin E. Klein (Minister of Environment and Climate):** Thank you to my colleague for that fantastic question.

First of all, I'm—I was a little shocked and somewhat appalled that the self-acclaimed environmentalist in the NDP did not ask a single question on the environment last week. Not one, and it was Earth Week, which would explain why the Winnipeg Sun said the NDP's climate change plan was fraudulent from the very beginning, driven almost entirely by NDP spin and propaganda. In fact, the headline in the Winnipeg Sun was correct; the NDP's climate change plan was a disaster.

On this side of the House, we are getting the job done. Just last week, I announced expansion of the Manitoba watershed district's successful enhancement of the Lake Friendly emission—

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

### Silica Sand Mine Extraction Project Water Supply Contamination Concerns

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** In Manitoba, the biggest barrier we faced tackling environmental issues is this PC government.

Residents from the hamlet of Vivian in southeast Manitoba fear that the Sio Silica mine would permanently damage—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** –the freshwater aquifer they drink from every day.

You don't get to be an Environment Minister if you can't stand up in this House and protect Manitoba water.

So, will the Environment Minister stand up and finally, today, say to the people of southeastern Manitoba you will guarantee that they will have safe water to drink?

**Hon. Kevin E. Klein (Minister of Environment and Climate):** I appreciate the opportunity to tell all Manitobans exactly what we are doing, as this government, to address safe water drinking. It was this government that actually asked the Clean Environment Commission to hold hearings.

\* (14:30)

It was the members opposite that ignored the Clean Environment Commission, ignored science and went ahead and just kicked the can down the road when it came to the North End treatment plant, which continued years and years under their leadership to pour phosphorus into Lake Winnipeg, affecting everybody's drinking water.

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

**Mr. Wasyliw:** You know, for all this minister's talk, concerned Manitobans get greenwashing.

The proposed Sio Silica project will drill thousands of wells across the region, and if the mine is approved, wells will extend deep past the limestone aquifer, where many residents draw their water, and into the sandstone below.

Will the minister confirm today that the PC government will announce a decision on the Sio Silica mine before the provincial election?

**MLA Klein:** You know, it is—it's very disappointing and disrespectful to Manitoba taxpayers, who actually pay our salaries, to continue to be misled by these statements that are only pretending to be questions. They don't have any basis to their questions whatsoever.

Everybody knows the truth. The fact is that it's being reviewed by the Clean Environment Commission. And people remember that it was the NDP that committed to climate change and emission reductions to the act. In fact, they legally bound Manitoba to reduce emissions by 6 per cent below 1990 levels by 2012.

And what happened? The NDP failed miserably. They didn't even come close. But what did they do? They raised the PST in taxes.

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

**Mr. Wasyliw:** This minister continues to hide behind the environmental commission. He will be the ultimate decider. He's going to decide whether or not the people of southeastern Manitoba are guaranteed—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** –clean drinking water or not.

Now, the Manitoba Auditor General says that the PC government has failed to fully implement 90 per cent of recommendations from the past several years, including a full third of the recommendations on the drinking water safety.

Why should Manitobans trust this PC Environment Minister to protect our water when all we get are task forces with no financial commitments and delayed plans to implement water protections?

**MLA Klein:** Please allow me to enlighten the member across the floor, who's been busy at court, about all the things that we have been doing.

And, again, we've done the successful enhancement of the lake friendly initiative, \$10.5 million in GROW and conservative trust product. We supported Take Pride Winnipeg! in their clean-up efforts; over 1 million kilograms of batteries diverted from landfills; educational initiatives for industrial and students through Conservation and Climate; and the unprecedented announcement of collaboration between the City of Winnipeg and the government with a task force to address the North End pollution centre to ensure that things get done.

Under this government, we don't raise the PST for no reason. We get things done.

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

**An Honourable Member:** Point of order.

#### Point of Order

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Union Station, on a point of order.

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Madam Speaker, I rise on this point of order keeping in mind that you have made mention in this House very

recently that the behaviour in this House needs to shift, and it needs to shift in a better direction.

And, you know, a few weeks ago, in this House, members of the PC caucus started—and I'm actually slightly embarrassed to even have to say this—started growling, making growling noises in the direction of members on this side of the House. This has carried on now for some time. However, it's gotten more specific, and it's been directed at particular women in our caucus. *[interjection]*

And I raise this—Madam Speaker, I raise this because there were—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Asagwara:**—a group of students in this Chamber—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Asagwara:**—who saw this happen today and I was hoping they would still be in the Chamber when I raised this point of order. Just because they are no longer here doesn't mean it still shouldn't be addressed.

And so our colleague, the MLA for Notre Dame, on her second question there were members opposite—the member for Kirkfield Park (MLA Klein); the member from McPhillips—who started calling her angry, and then proceeded to growl at her.

And then, on her subsequent question, her final question, when I had hoped that, in fact, a number—all of them would stop that behaviour, it increased. And many members of that side of the House began growling at her during her final question.

Madam Speaker, I raise this in the hopes that we can all collectively agree that that kind of behaviour is not okay, and that when it is done in such a targeted and consistent manner, there is an undertone of sexism to it, whether members want to acknowledge that or not.

And so I raise this point of order in the hopes that this behaviour will no longer continue moving forward and to make sure that, you know, our colleagues on this side of the House, and anywhere in this House, knows that we can stand up, call out that behaviour and it will change.

Thank you.

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** Madam Speaker, at various times during this session, but in previous sessions, I think that you've rightly cautioned

all members about demeanour and behaviour in the House. But you've cautioned all members.

There is a reality in this Chamber that heckling happens. Sometimes it happens more than other times, sometimes it's because of the subject matter, sometimes it's because it gets closer to an election campaign, sometimes it's because it's a Friday morning. There's a lot of different reasons why sometimes things change in this House.

And you rightly say that we all need to hold ourselves to a higher standard, and I think that that's true, and I think that that's true for all members. We all need to ensure that we are doing better when it comes to demeanour in the House. And I think steps have been taken in that regard and I know that you're taking further steps, Madam Speaker.

However, what I observe in this House, and I've seen it for a variety of different members of different genders when they're asking questions that there are often heckling and other noises that are happening at them. It's not specific to one particular member. It's not specific to one particular gender. It is something that all of us need to work on, regardless of who is asking the question or who is answering the question.

And so the member, to raise the point about an issue of civility in the House is, I think, an issue that all of us can take to heart, but it's not because of one particular member. And that, I think, is something that the member should reflect upon, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Madam Speaker, I rise to comment briefly on this matter.

Clearly, as the member for Steinbach has said, that the heckling is a problem. I think we all recognize that. I think there's a particular concern this time that one member, the MLA for Notre Dame, was targeted. I think that that's unfortunate and I think it's time that you, as Speaker, were a little more forceful in cutting back on the heckling that's happening at the moment, because there's still too much and, clearly, some members are being significantly affected by it.

Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** I would like to just point out something on this point of order and some of it relates to what the member from River Heights said. A Speaker can only do so much in this House, as I have learned over the last number of years as Speaker.

More responsibility belongs to all of you who are in this Chamber and the behaviours that you want to exhibit. A Speaker can only do so much, and I've certainly



learned that over many, many years as I've raised issues about heckling. Heckling is an issue and heckling is a challenge. And I don't know that we'll ever get rid of heckling but there comes a time when we have to be careful that it does not cross over lines.

\* (14:40)

I'm going to point out something, too, here, that that growling started many, many decades ago under a previous government too. So that's not something new in this House.

Do I like it? No, I don't, but I'm going to say that it was something that has occurred here before. And I just want to say to everybody that, you know, when we're asking questions, answering questions, that we do need to be respectful, and I'm not sure how many times I need to bring this up. But, you know, the issue of our behaviour here is sort of, you know, it is a point of order in some ways, but it's something that you are all responsible for too.

I can only do so much. I can stand up here, and sometimes I have stood up and I have asked for respect for the Chair. The moment I've sat down, it starts right away. So that's your responsibility. I did my job, but I can only do so much. There is a bigger responsibility by members that are elected here by the people who are watching this and do get discouraged when they see democracy that is not functioning as well as it should.

Democracy is fragile right now. It's very fragile, and it's fragile not here just in Manitoba, but in Canada and across the world. We do have to be more careful, and that responsibility falls on all of us here—me and you as well. And I'm going to indicate that there was no specific rule that I can actually rule on, other than to say that I do hope that heckling can decrease in this Chamber. It does need to. We do need to show more respect for the people that are answering and asking questions.

So I'm going to just put that on the record for now and I do leave it up to you to try to be better.

## PETITIONS

### Provincial Road 224

**Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Provincial Road 224 serves Peguis First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation and surrounding

communities. The road is in need of substantial repairs.

(2) The road has been in poor condition for years and has numerous potholes, uneven driving surfaces and extremely narrow shoulders.

(3) Due to recent population growth in the area, there has been increased vehicle and pedestrian use of Provincial Road 224.

(4) Without repair, Provincial Road 224 will continue to pose a hazard to the many Manitobans who use it on a regular basis.

(5) Concerned Manitobans are requesting that Provincial Road 224 be assessed and repaired urgently to improve safety for its users.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure to complete an assessment of Provincial Road 224 and implement the appropriate repairs using public funds as quickly as possible.

Madam Speaker, this petition has been signed by many, many fine Manitobans.

Ekosi.

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

## Foot-Care Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

#### **Security System Incentive Program**

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Cities across Canada and the United States, including Chicago; Washington, DC; Salinas, California; and Orillia, Ontario, are offering home security rebate programs that enhance public safety and allow for more efficient use of their policing resources.

(2) Home security surveillance systems protect homes and businesses by potentially deterring burglaries.

(3) Whole neighbourhoods benefit when more homes and businesses have these security systems.

(4) A 2022 Angus Reid Institute poll found 70 per cent of Winnipeggers surveyed believed crime had increased over the last five years, the highest per cent found among cities in Canada.

(5) The same survey reported half of Winnipeggers polled do not feel safe walking alone at night, and almost 20 per cent of them said they were a victim of police-reported crime in the last two years.

(6) Although the public understands what the criminologists and community advocates point to as the main drivers of crime, namely the larger issues of lack of food, addictions and poverty, they support

rebate programs like these as they help the most vulnerable in our community by removing financial barriers for personal protection.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to work with municipalities to establish a province-wide tax rebate or other incentive program to encourage residents and businesses to purchase approved home and business security protection systems.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

**Madam Speaker:** Any further petitions?

If not, grievances?

### **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

#### **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

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

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

### **COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)**

#### **ROOM 254**

#### **ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE**

\* (15:00)

**The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Environment and Climate.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Kevin E. Klein (Minister of Environment and Climate):** Yes, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Okay, Minister of Environment and Climate.

**MLA Klein:** Good afternoon to all my colleagues that join us here today.

I want to take a moment at the start to recognize and give appreciation to all the staff that work in the

Environment and Climate Department, of which there are many. Of course, we have our senior staff, but there's also many that work in the field, testing water, testing pollution outcomes and many different requirements that happen throughout the province on a daily basis. And without them, of course, we would find ourselves in an awful lot of trouble. So I recognize their efforts and their work and I thank them for what they're doing.

I had the opportunity to meet a number of the staff in Brandon, which was just a wonderful experience for me to learn and listen directly to staff that are getting the job done on a daily basis.

What I'd like to do is also talk about some of the things that this department has accomplished and some things that were just recently accomplished, as well as some other things that we have been working on and look ahead to.

Of course, last week, we announced the expansion of the Manitoba watershed districts—that was very successful announcement for us—as well as the enhancement of Lake Friendly Initiative, which is very important to Lake Winnipeg and our waterways. We also announced a \$10.5 million in the GROW and Conservation Trust projects.

We gave support to Take Pride Winnipeg! for cleanup efforts that they do, not only in Winnipeg, but they're starting to supply products for—in municipalities and areas outside of the Perimeter.

We announced, in conjunction with our partners at two—Call2Recycle, over 1 million kilograms of batteries diverted from landfills, which was a significant achievement; educational initiatives for industry and students through the Conservation and Climate Fund.

And, of course, we announced the unprecedented new collaborative task force with the City of Winnipeg and my former colleague and good friend, councillor Brian Mayes, where we will focus on the North End pollution control centre to ensure that the project gets done and that everyone remains on the same page, working towards the same goal.

We are very proud of this work and also some of the other work that has been done over the last several years in the Environment and Climate Department, not to mention the water strategy. This is the first strategy that was released since November—or, since 2002, and we announced that strategy in November of '22, and we are looking forward to announcing the water management plan here in the next coming weeks.

We, of course, continued our enhancement, as announced, with the watershed program. We have successfully implemented six of the 18 recommendations from the Office of the Auditor General report on Provincial Oversight of Drinking Water Safety.

In the past year, we have rescinded 15 boil water advisories, and we're very proud of that. And they were, in fact—they were in effect for longer than one year, including 10 long-term boil water advisories that have been in effect for more than five years.

We passed legislation to give Manitobans the choice to be able to purchase and use cosmetic pesticides already registered with Health Canada, and they can put them on their lawns. However, our department felt it was important to continue with the legislation that protects children and pets by continuing to restrict pesticide use at schools, child-care centres and hospitals. And we added on new restrictions on municipal playgrounds, picnic areas, dog parks and provincial parks.

We also completed the remediation projects through the orphaned and abandoned mine site rehabilitation program at two high-risk mines: the Ruttan Mine and the Sherridon mine.

Budget 2022 announced the additional investment of \$50.7 million over the next five years to further expedite the remediation of these orphaned and abandoned mines.

There's much more we will talk about, I'm sure, during the questioning with my colleagues, but I'll be happy to share with not only you, Mr. Chair, but others, as the proceedings progress.

**The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** And we thank the minister for those comments.

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

**Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry):** We do not.

**The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Thank you.

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

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

**An Honourable Member:** It's my pleasure to do that—

**The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** The Minister of Environment and Climate.

**MLA Klein:** Oh, sorry. My pleasure to introduce the staff, Mr. Chair.

We have Jan Forster, our deputy minister; Neil Cunningham, the assistant deputy minister, Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office; we have Elliott Brown, the assistant deputy minister, Water Stewardship division; Shannon Kohler, assistant deputy minister, Environmental Stewardship division; and Todd Callin, the executive financial officer and assistant deputy minister of the Finance and Shared Services Division.

As well, we have Grant Jackson, special assistant, from my office joining us today.

**The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Okay, thank you very much for the introductions, and welcome to the table.

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

Therefore, the floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** I'm wondering if the minister can tell us if he believes that pollution should be free, or that a government should subsidize businesses and individuals who pollute?

\* (15:10)

**MLA Klein:** My thanks to my colleague for the question, although it is somewhat leading.

First and foremost, I think it's important to once again state that our government is hard on polluters and we have been hard on polluters and we'll continue to be hard on polluters, and that we do not subsidize polluters. And I think that it's important, also, to get on the record that our department and our government believes in a polluter-pay principle.

However, that said, the government does need to be a partner to spur innovation in green solutions. It's an ever-changing market, and there's new concepts and opportunities that are coming forward on a regular basis that we have to make sure that we understand and that we work with others if it will help address polluters.

In our department, licensing and permitting is the tool that we use to ensure pollution does not happen. We put conditions on all businesses to ensure pollution does not occur. And, if it does, we hold them accountable. If we have to clean it up, we hold them financially accountable.

Our government is taking steps, as evident with the mines, the orphaned and abandoned mines, that were left empty and dangerous to residents by the former NDP government, and we've invested money to address those and make the environment cleaner for all residents of Manitoba.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** I want to thank the minister for the response. I wonder if Manitobans should be concerned that it took him 10 minutes and a army of skilled professionals to come up with that.

But I'm wondering if the minister can advise whether he has read his own government's Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan, 2017?

\* (15:20)

**MLA Klein:** Just one comment off the top, about my colleague's personal shot. I don't think its necessary in these meetings that we try to attack each other personally. I think that we can be professional in this room, and I hope that we can be moving forwards.

I, unlike a lot of people, take my time before responding. I do my due diligence because facts are important. I don't want to just throw out comments in hopes that they will stick, or that I'm saying something that might work good on a video.

Absolutely I've read the Climate and Green Plan. I'm proud of the work that it—that has been done on the Climate and Green Plan. It is one of the reasons I joined this government, especially with my track record at city council, putting forward more motions to protect our environment than others in that four-year period. And I'm proud of the fact that we have a whole-of-government approach, and not just one department. We're looking at it as we should.

I've had meetings with our executive advisory council that is doing fantastic work, and I'm excited about the new members of the Youth Advisory Council and look forward to the next generation helping us in planning sustainable actions for our province.

We must of course talk about the Expert Advisory Council, and the fact that they have presented the next Carbon Savings Account 2023-2027 goal of 5.6 megatonnes of cumulative reductions and is working hard on

delivering its mandate, including providing advice to the minister on the green economic recovery for the province.

We must mention emission reductions and energy efficiency in the province are being supported with over 40 Efficiency Manitoba program incentives. Increased biofuel mandates for transportation fuels, support for fuel efficiency in the heavy-duty trucking industry and yearly decommissioning of fossil-fuel generating stations by Manitoba Hydro.

The Conservation and Climate Fund has grown from an initial \$600,000 fund in 2020 to \$1.5 million in 2022, supporting initiatives across the province in sectors that address climate changes and promote sustainable outcomes.

Important policies and programs are under development to help Manitoba be competitive in the low economy—in the low-carbon economy, sorry—of the future, and resilient in the face of climate changing, focusing on clean energy and transportation innovations, as well as adaptation work to support communities facing extreme weather challenges.

We are getting the work done, listening to the experts, working with the experts to ensure a pristine environment for Manitoba today and well into the future.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Well, I certainly share the minister's desire to have a respectful exchange this afternoon, but, you know, the minister sets the tone when he takes four minutes to answer a basic yes-or-no question. I don't think anybody would view that as respectful, so hopefully we can have a better exchange this afternoon.

So, does the minister agree with the plan, and is this plan still the guiding policy for the Stefanson government? Again, something very easy and very quick to answer. *[interjection]*

**The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Order. Order. Order.

**MLA Klein:** Again, to my colleague who continues to want to bring up the time that lapses in 'bequeen' questions, I believe ensuring that the answer I give the taxpayers is correct and factual is of the most importance.

And heckling from NDP MLAs, trying to be bullied into answering quickly is just not necessary, and it's not going to change my approach to providing Manitobans with the facts. I'll do my due diligence

and make sure that the answers I'm providing the taxpayers who are paying for this session get the facts.

I certainly wouldn't want what was said about the former NDP government in the Winnipeg Sun to happen to us, where the Winnipeg Sun said the former government's climate change plan was fraudulent from the very beginning, driven almost entirely by government spin and propaganda. It had no basis in science, contained no real planning and had no realistic mechanisms to reduce emissions. That's from the Winnipeg Sun.

\* (15:30)

Of course, we believe in climate and we believe that our document is a living document, as it should be. As with all science and governments, we need to be able to pivot as opportunities in science changes.

We are getting the job done, and I am proud of the staff of Environment and Climate for the work that they're doing on a daily basis.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Okay, so, I want to just read a passage from the plan; it's page 8, if the minister wants to follow along. And it's about, you know, towards the end of the page, and it's talking about the climate pillars.

And it says, the climate pillar's mission is to reduce GHG emissions, 'invest' in clean energy and ensure Manitoba adapts to climate change impact. It contains carbon pricing as a principal tool to help reduce emissions.

So, the basis of the Manitoba green plan under your government is carbon pricing. And so I'm wondering if the minister would agree with that statement and agree that that's the central focus for climate change plan in Manitoba—is carbon pricing.

**MLA Klein:** I want to thank my colleague for his question. And we, as many people know, as the government of Manitoba, put forward a made-in-Manitoba plan. And it was the NDP-Liberal coalition at the federal level that denied our made-in-Manitoba plan, a plan that had evidence that showed it would lower overall cost to people, and it would reduce emissions in a greater capacity than that of the NDP-Liberal coalition in Ottawa.

But, as I said earlier, the document is living, and we had to pivot because of that decision. And we created not a brutal cost-of-living crisis that we're witnessing today, fuelled by that NDP-Liberal coalition inflation. We didn't want that. The NDP-Liberal escalating carbon tax has shown absolutely no evidence

of reducing emissions, only reducing the amount of money Manitobans have at the end of the day.

We continue to take actions. There are over—well, we've already started 115 government-wide initiatives. We've blended fuel requirements and reduced 500,000 tonnes of emissions. The Efficient Trucking Program reduced 100,000 tonnes. Mr. Chair, 77 per cent of natural gas savings target reduced 50 tonnes over two years.

I'm proud of the work that we're getting done and I'm proud of our approach.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Page 13 of the report: a carbon levy is simpler and more effective for Manitoba. It can cover more emissions in our economy, leading to more reductions.

Page 14 of the report: the Manitoba government has committed to introducing carbon pricing to help tackle climate change.

So, the minister makes the incredible statement that carbon tax—there's no evidence it reduces emissions. Yet, his own report that he supports says that is the principal area for reductions. So, I'm wondering if he can clear up that confusion. Does he believe a carbon tax—which he says is the method to be used in Manitoba—doesn't work?

\* (15:40)

**MLA Klein:** Thank you to my colleague for the question.

And for the record, I understand the wordplay game, but I didn't—did not say I believe a carbon tax works. In fact, what I was insinuating and saying is that good management is a group of people and an organization that has the ability to pivot and make change when necessary. And that's what we need in government is good management, and good management that was able to pivot from our proposed offer to the NDP-Liberal coalition, which would've lowered the overall cost to the residents of Manitoba, the people who pay our salaries, and would've reduced emissions by a greater amount than the NDP-Liberals have put forward.

Our plan, that is referenced there, was not accepted by the NDP-Liberals. They simply wanted to tax the consumers more, which they have done, which they continue to do, and that has created, as any financial analyst will tell you, that has created the affordability crisis that we have not only in Canada but in Manitoba.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So, the minister knows full well that he could bring forward a made-in-Manitoba carbon plan tomorrow and that would supersede the federal backstop, and that this government has been in power for seven years and is in the driver's seat when it comes to what type of carbon tax we have in Manitoba. But instead of putting in a made-of-Manitoba carbon tax, this government has deferred to the federal government.

So, I think it's a little rich to call it a Liberal-NDP coalition. It sounds more like a Liberal-PC coalition and a Liberal-PC carbon tax because this minister has the power, has the authority to make it his own and refuses to do so. And the only conclusion that Manitobans can take from this is that he's very happy with the federal Liberal carbon tax.

So, I'm wondering if the minister could answer the question, because he's now said two things: Does he actually believe a 'carbon' tax works? Because in an earlier response, he said it didn't. Does it work, does it not work and why haven't you brought in your own carbon tax?

**MLA Klein:** In response to my colleague's question, I'm not sure, but I believe what my colleague is saying, that the NDP are going to raise the carbon tax immediately, and I guess the PST, because that's what I'm hearing. And no matter how you spin the wording, people do remember that the NDP committed to The Climate Change and Remissions Reduction Act to legally bind Manitoba to reduce emissions by 6 per cent below 1990 levels by 2012.

And the fact is that it's irrefutable that the NDP failed miserably and didn't come close to that. Members know the provincial plan—any provincial plan put forward to the federal government has to be greater than that of the federal tax. That's the plan of the NDP-Liberal coalition: make the taxes higher and we'll agree with it.

This government is taking a balanced approach to reducing emissions while making sure that we support Manitobans through an unprecedented—unprecedented—cost-of-living crisis.

What we're hearing is: Let's tax people and hope that brings down our admissions. And that's something this government will not support.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** It's disappointing that the minister is using his time to sort of give us all a master class in gaslighting.

It's a very simple question, Minister. You have the power to bring in a carbon tax that you like, and you're refusing to do it.

So, are Manitobans taking from that that you enjoy the PC-Liberal carbon tax and want to keep it in place?

**The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Just before I call on the minister on that one, just a reminder—*[interjection]* Order, order.

Just a reminder for those asking and answering questions, please channel them through the Chair and not directly to each other, please.

And with that, we'll call on the Minister of Environment and Climate.

**MLA Klein:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, very much for that.

There's no question there; it's just a political statement that has absolutely no fact to it whatsoever, so I'm not going to entertain answering a statement.

I'll answer questions about the budget.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So, what is this government's alternative to the PC-Liberal carbon tax?

\* (15:50)

**MLA Klein:** Mr. Chair, if we could get some clarity.

I'm not aware of any PC-Liberal carbon tax, so if the member could explain what he's talking about, that would be helpful.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Well, can the minister please outline what this government's alternative would be to the current carbon tax, given that their previous offering was rejected?

And am I and the rest of this committee to believe that there actually isn't an alternative on the table and that this government is tired and out of ideas and they have nothing to offer Manitobans?

**MLA Klein:** Thank you to my colleague for the question.

I think being repetitive is necessary sometimes to ensure that we all understand that—the facts. And again, as we've said on a number of occasions now, the fact is the NDP-Liberal coalition demands that a carbon tax be higher than theirs in order for a province to change it. So, they are demanding that it be higher.

We do not believe in that. What I think I'm hearing is that the member opposite and the NDP are more than willing to increase carbon tax on Manitobans almost immediately, along with that of the PST.

However, this government is taking action and we're getting real results in carbon emission reductions.

And I'll just give you a couple of examples. The Efficient Trucking Program will save 25 million litres of fuel and reduce GHG emissions over the life cycle of the equipment. Manitoba Hydro's last coal-fire generating unit was shut down and the natural gas units in Selkirk were phased out, all ahead of schedule, in 2021. These actions have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by over 56,000 tonnes.

Maybe the member opposite could tell us today what the plan is for the NDP. How high are you going to increase the carbon tax if you're given the opportunity?

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I think the minister's made it perfectly clear that he supports the PC-Liberal carbon tax, and will not make changes in Manitoba.

So, I will move on because life's too short. I want to ask the minister some questions about Sio Silica mine. As he's aware, that mine would remove sand over two large freshwater aquifers that supply drinking water to southeast Manitoba. The company is wanting to use an experimental technique that has never been used before, and experts are concerned that there will be contamination between the two aquifers that'll pollute the drinking water for that region.

As the minister, you have the final say on the project, regardless of whatever recommendations the environment commission comes up with. I've certainly asked you numerous times in the House, that the residents of southeast Manitoba are worried about their safe drinking water supply. And this government can make a commitment to them that regardless of what the commission reports or regardless of those recommendations, that this government will stand with southeastern Manitoba and guarantee safe drinking water supply.

And I'm wondering to the minister why he has refused, probably half a dozen times now, to answer that question, and why he won't commit to safe drinking water for southeast Manitoba?

**MLA Klein:** Once again, Mr. Chair, maybe my colleague can be more clear, as opposed to trying to put false statements on the record about my inability or unwillingness to answer a question, which is not true. Could he be clear on what the question is, because I'm not sure he's asked a question yet?

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I can talk slower for the minister.

My question for the minister is: Will he, on the record today, guarantee to the residents of southeast Manitoba, that regardless of what the recommendations are from the environment commission, he will guarantee safe drinking water to those residents?

**MLA Klein:** I notice my colleague's getting a little angry and, again, going off with some comments that aren't becoming of a professional—[interjection] And there's some heckling now.

I think it should be known that it was this government that called on the Clean Environment Commission to take a deeper look into the proposed Sio Silica mines. Nobody has made any decision. In fact, our government is listening to the experts.

And that's something that is unfamiliar to the members opposite, who ignored the Clean Environment Commission when they were told decades ago that the North End treatment plant had to be upgraded. They ignored it; they kicked it down the road. They also ignored scientists, and they ignored the facts, when they went ahead with the Keeyask project.

So I'm not going to sit here and get into a word-play game for the sake of somebody's video on social media. The facts are—and these are the facts, and they're irrefutable no matter what you hear—no licensing decision will be made until the project is thoroughly reviewed, and the evidence can be fully considered by experts. Not pretend politicians who think they have all the answers. We will go to the experts and get the answers.

And I can tell you that not only my track record as a city councillor—to get phosphorus out of going into Lake Winnipeg—but our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and this government's promise is to keep our water supply clean and protect the environment. Those are our top priorities. Not spin, not personal political gain. We will do full due diligence, and that will occur during the licensing process.

\* (16:00)

And again, to be clear, no licensing decision will be made based on politics; it will be based on science and the health of Manitobans.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** There are families now who have poured their life savings into properties in this community and don't know whether the bottom is going to fall out on their property values because they fear that their safe drinking water will become unsafe.

There are families who thought that they were going to spend a generation in that community, who

are selling and leaving for fear that their water will not be protected and it will not be safe.

There is panic in the community because of this issue. The government could responsibly ease that panic by making a very public, very verbal statement that they support the residents of southeast Manitoba and you will guarantee that they will have safe drinking water no matter what the decision ultimately is made. It should not be a difficult matter for any government minister to make that commitment.

And my question to this minister is: Why won't he make that commitment to southeast Manitoba?

**MLA Klein:** I think it's very important, given the line of questioning, that we get something on the record.

A minister is not able to just sign away and make a decision on their own. There's nobody watching this, or that will read about this hearing, that wants a politician to make those kinds of decisions.

That is why this government sent it to the Clean Environment Commission, the very commission that my colleagues in the NDP ignored on more than one occasion. They ignored the science. They ignored the experts.

We are listening to people's concerns. We heard from hundreds and hundreds of people through the Clean Environment Commission, those that are opposed, those that are in favour. We heard from stakeholders; we've heard from scientists, which is why we required more and more discussion on this particular matter because we will make the right decision.

And, again, it's not a minister's decision.

In fact, we have non-partisan civil servants and a director that are experts in the field that take their job and the lives and safety of Manitobans seriously. They don't play politics by trying to scare people. They don't play politics by spinning the facts. They are there to do their job, and their job is to review all the evidence, to review all the concerns of those for and those opposed to this project, and they will bring forward a decision, which at what—at that time can also be appealed.

So, as opposed to getting into the politics of this because of a pending election, the facts speak for themselves. No licensing decision will be made until the project is thoroughly reviewed and evidence can fully be considered by experts.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** Can the minister provide an update on the timeline for a decision on the Sio Silica mine



environmental licence, and will a decision be made before the election?

*Mr. Blaine Pedersen, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**MLA Klein:** I thank my colleague for the question—a very reasonable question, I might add. But unfortunately, I feel there's an undertone of politics being played to see if it can be twisted into a video, so let me put some facts on the record.

This is certainly, like my answers that he was unhappy with, take time to research, to review, to have the experts look at.

But most importantly, now that the Clean Environment Commission has completed their stakeholder engagement and that they are working on their report, we now have started section 35, consultations, which the members opposite are well aware of. And I know that they respect that process; to hear from all of our Indigenous leaders and communities about the impact on the potential mine, if you will.

We know that in the past, my colleagues of the NDP did not respect the Indigenous wishes when they went ahead with Keeyask. They did not do those consultations, but I assure residents in the area and all across Manitoba that we will take the time to listen to our Indigenous communities and their leaders.

We will review in detail all of the information that comes forward from the Clean Environment Commission, and that this will not be a political-based decision, which is kind of where I think the question is leading, but that's my opinion.

The reality is we have experts—non-partisan experts, scientists and those people will consider all of the information that comes forward.

And, again, I want to go back to the most important part of this because Manitobans need to know the facts: no licensing decision will be made until the project is thoroughly reviewed and evidence can be fully considered.

The safety of Manitoba's water, every drop, is our main concern.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** When I'm asking these questions to the minister, it's certainly on behalf of the residents of southeast Manitoba, who are worried about having to move their children because they could not have a safe source of drinking water.

\* (16:10)

They certainly want a resolution to this, and I think it would strain credulity to believe that the minister's department doesn't have timelines and that they don't know when this is going to wrap up.

It's a simple yes or no answer: Will we have a decision before the election? Yes or no?

*Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**MLA Klein:** Again, we'll stay on this merry-go-round and continue to put the facts on the record, because we're leading into a more political line of statements than actual questions regarding the budget.

This is about the budget and how much money of—taxpayer hard-earned money we're going to spend protecting the environment and the actions we're going to take. But it's clear that this would—is more of a campaign-style election forum, if you will.

And we've heard clearly that our members on the opposite, the NDP, just want to increase the carbon tax. And in this case, they're—you know, clearly have no regard for the residents of the area, because they're happy to instill fear.

I respect the people that work for the climate and environment department. I know that they're non-partisan, I respect that they're non-partisan and I respect the process, which I would hope all elected officials do. We may not like the speed at which the process goes, but it's important to the residents that we follow this process.

And it's equally important that we respect the Indigenous leaders and community members through the section 35 consultation. We are not going to rush our Indigenous communities. We are going to give them the same time and the respect that they deserve to provide comment, just like we did the Clean Environment Commission.

I think the people in that area do trust the process. They don't trust the fact that when the—my—the members opposite, the NDP, was in power, Lake Winnipeg, Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis fisheries were declared the worst managed in the world by Seafood Watch. They don't trust the fact that Lake Winnipeg was declared the most threatened freshwater lake in the world while the members opposite were in charge.

We will take our time. We will review all of the evidence, we will review all of the science and we will not make a decision until such time as we are confident in the decision that will be announced.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Wondering if the minister can explain why he is refusing to tell the residents of southeastern Manitoba whether they'll get a decision before the election.

**MLA Klein:** Again, I want to—and I'll use this if they put out a video—get back on the record that this is about the budget, about how we spend your money.

And, obviously, the members opposite do not care how your money is spent, and they have no interest in knowing how your money is spent. They simply are looking for political fear mongering and for the ability to increase not only the carbon tax but the PST at the first opportunity.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Do you think that answer would satisfy the residents of southeastern Manitoba?

**The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Again, I'm going to just remind the member to put the questions through the Chair and not in third party, please.

**MLA Klein:** Again, as we talked about at the start, it's very politically motivated, and our government has been very, very clear with residents and our track record speaks for itself.

The member's opposite's track record, the NDP, also speaks very loudly about their inability to care for the environment. They ignored the Clean Environment Commission, which is why we are facing billions of dollars in cost, and we continue to put phosphorus and other chemicals into Lake Winnipeg because members opposite, the NDP, ignored the science, ignored the Clean Environment Commission. They ignored the Indigenous communities and science. They didn't even ask for approval with Keeyask, costing you millions upon millions of dollars.

The health and safety of all Manitobans is our priority, and that's why this government called on the Clean Environment Commission to listen to hundreds and hundreds of residents—real people, not made up people for a political question, real people that were able to put their thoughts, concerns on the record. They were heard, and all of those thoughts and concerns will be considered by the experts, as well as those of our Indigenous leaders and communities through the section 35 consultation.

I think it's really unbecoming of an elected official to say, well, we're going to make a decision or not because we're the guys in power and we're going to do that; that's our ability.

That's not what we're here for. We're here to make sure that the right decision is reached based on evidence and fact.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Has the minister spoken with those real people that are speaking out against the Sio Silica mine due to the potential risk of contaminating their water?

\* (16:20)

**MLA Klein:** Once again, we are not talking about how we spend taxpayers' money.

It's obvious; it's evident that the members opposite, NDP, don't have any concern about how money is spent. They simply will raise the carbon tax that we've heard during these meetings. They're happy to raise the carbon tax immediately, and, of course, we know the PST would be raised shortly after they get the opportunity.

The member opposite should know that an environmental review process has already been done with the public. Our department takes public input very seriously. In fact, that was done prior to the Clean Environment Commission, because our experts, our civil servants, the people that are paid to work for taxpayers in Manitoba and to take their safety seriously, heard, during the environmental review process, that some were very concerned. That's why our government made the decision to engage the Clean Environment Commission. We wanted to give residents another opportunity to share their concerns and their fears.

We're not fear mongering them like some others. We're listening and giving more opportunity for people to speak, unlike the members opposite of the NDP, who ignored the Clean Environment Commission, who ignored Indigenous communities, who ignored scientific facts when they went ahead with Keeyask, when they refused to replace the North End treatment plant, which has been polluting Lake Winnipeg for decades because they ignored the science.

Our civil servants, the dedicated individuals who are educated in this—they are the experts in this field—are listening to residents. And now that we've done the review process where we listened to all the people and we took what they said and we've sent it to the Clean Environment Commission, now we're listening to the Indigenous communities through our section 35 consultations, which is required and is necessary. And we will give them the time and respect they deserve to provide their feelings towards this project.

And, again, I would ask my colleague not to fear monger here. We are taking the process of using experts and not playing politics with it.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I wonder if the minister can tell the committee what question he was answering.

**MLA Klein:** I've been answering the same question he's asked about 15 times, trying to make a political statement.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I wonder if the minister can tell us what question he was answering.

**MLA Klein:** This is like being in school again and taking legal 101.

Asked and answered.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I will ask the question again because the minister obviously—didn't register with him.

Has he personally met with the residents that are speaking out against this Sio Silicol [*phonetic*] mine due to the potential risk of contaminating the drinking water? Yes or no?

**MLA Klein:** Mr. Chair, again, for the residents that are in that area that are concerned about this process, I'm not going to play these games; I'm not going to politicize your health; I'm not going to politicize this decision.

I'm going to ensure you, on behalf of our government and my colleagues, that we take this very seriously. We will continue to take this seriously and not play political games with it.

We will listen to the experts from the C-E—Clean Environment Commission; we will listen to our Indigenous communities and leaders; and we will allow experts to do their due diligent before any decision is made.

It is unnecessary and unbecoming to make this a political game.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** The fact that the minister won't meet with these residents is political.

Will the minister commit today and now to meet with the residents who are affected—directly affected—by this potential risk of contamination of drinking water?

**MLA Klein:** I appreciate my colleague changed it from his false statement of saying that I refused.

Again, I'll explain this to the residents there, because that's what's important to me. How my colleagues use videos is not important to me. What's

important to me is the residents in that area that are concerned and those that are in support of this project.

I want to make it very clear yet again. We have listened. We have listened through the environmental review process. We heard that there were concerns. And our experts said, because there were concerns, they suggested we send it to the Clean Environment Commission, which we did.

That's a fact. It's irrefutable. No matter what is said, that's a fact.

We sent it to the Clean Environment Commission, where residents—hundreds of people—got the opportunity to once again share their concerns or support for the Sio Silica mines project. Now, as the Clean Environment Commission prepares their report and puts it together for review of the experts, we are now following section 35 consultations, which will allow our community, Indigenous leaders and their communities to also share their support or their fears with the project.

We are doing what you want us to do as a government. We're managing the process properly. We're not playing politics. We will not make a decision until we have the evidence in front us and the experts have reviewed all information from all of these various reviews and consultation processes.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I think anyone watching this hearing, and hearing the evasive and non-responsive answers of the minister can only come to one conclusion: that he has not met with these individuals, nor will he commit to meet with these individuals. And if I'm wrong about that, please correct me on the record.

Has the minister attended any Clean Environment Commission hearings himself?

**MLA Klein:** Again, during this time that's been allotted through taxpayers' money, we are not talking about the budget; we're playing politics. The member opposite should know, and probably is not aware, given the actions of his leader recently, that the Clean Environment Commission is a non-partisan process; that, in fact, government officials should not be present, that we should allow the experts to listen to the residents, which we did.

And we allowed them to speak freely, not be inhibited if they feel they are, or that it be seen that we're trying to interfere, as the members opposite and NDP have been noted to do in the past through media reports. We know that they don't respect the Clean Environment Commission. We have proof of that by

them ignoring the Clean Environment Commission when it would've only have cost \$300,000 to replace the North End treatment plant, that the Clean Environment Commission heard from residents, heard from experts must happen; it had to happen at that time, and they ignored the Clean Environment Commission.

We will not do that. We will take these consultations seriously. We will talk to the experts and we will make an intelligent decision based on the facts. We will not ignore science, like our members opposite did when the NDP went ahead with Keeyask, costing millions and millions of dollars that your grandkids and their grandkids will be paying for for years to come. We will listen to the experts.

More importantly, we will ensure the safety for all Manitobans and their drinking water. To this government, every drop counts, and you will be safe and the decision will be based on scientific fact and evidence.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Will the minister commit today, on the record, to attending to Vivian, Manitoba, and to touring the affected land sites with the area residents to hear first-hand their concerns?

\* (16:30)

**MLA Klein:** Once again, it's more evidence of trying to insert a politician into making a decision. And I respect Manitobans far too much to let a politician make a decision when it impacts the health and safety of drinking water. I would call on the experts and the scientific evidence to make any decision. The mere mention or thought of a politician making that decision—quite frankly, that's the biggest fear to me.

And I think that's what we're hearing from the member opposite, because the NDP has done that before: they've ignored science. They've ignored the experts. They've ignored residents. They've ignored our Indigenous communities when they had—went ahead with Keeyask. They didn't even ask. They just went ahead and did it. That is not something we will do.

And I also want to add that I believe, Mr. Chair, the statement that affected land is somewhat argumentative. The member is indicating that, based on some scientific expertise that the member opposite might have, that they know it's an—it's affected land. It's a generalization statement, and we know that generalizations are not what residents want. They want facts.

In fact, we know that this is an independent, non-'protisan' process. And furthermore we know—we've seen the evidence—that the—my—the members opposite

in the NDP have no respect for residents. In fact, we know that the Winnipeg Sun reported that the former government's climate-change plan was fraudulent from the very beginning. Very beginning, Mr. Chair.

Driven almost entirely by government spin and propaganda, Mr. Chair; which, one would argue we're seeing today. It had no basis in science. This is the NDP—the member opposite's—we're being told this by a Winnipeg Sun article: it contained no real planning and had no realistic mechanisms to reduce emissions.

Our plan is to protect your safety and your drinking water, and we will follow this process. We will not rush it. I would be happy to tour the area with our staff, and, in fact, I will put that on my summer to-do list because I want to make sure that people understand the truth. They understand the facts, Mr. Chair, and that is, we are listening to them and we are listening to experts.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Well, it's—we've made some progress this afternoon, that the minister's prepared to go out there and tour it with his staff. I'm wondering if he would add the actual residents who are concerned to his tour schedule.

But I'll ask another question, the minister—has the minister or any of his staff—or ministry staff—met or had any discussions with representatives of the Sio Silica mine directly?

**MLA Klein:** It is a necessity of all elected officials to meet with organizations and residents to hear about proposed projects, for the Province to hear concerns and to ensure that everyone is aware of our policies and legislation as things move forward.

This is a common courtesy, and it's a traditional business practice that we do listen and that we do meet, unlike our NDP friends—the members across the floor—who ignored everyone, including scientists and Indigenous communities when they went ahead with Keeyask.

Our government does listen and we will listen. And, in fact, it's part of the process. We have heard concerns from the members of public and stakeholders regarding the potential impact of the silica extraction process. We will not make a decision, and we will not make it political until all the facts and evidence are in.

And this is something that I think is most important to all residents to know, that we're not going to make this political. We're not going to make a decision

without facts like the members opposite have proven time and time again—just ignore.

That's why the former minister of Environment and Climate did request the Clean Environment Commission to conduct an independent technical review and hold public hearings to fully understand the project and any potential—potential—environmental impacts so that they could be considered by the experts that serve on our civil servants—service.

These are experts that take great pride in their drop—job. That are well educated and that care about your safety, not politics. That's what we're hearing here today is politics.

The Clean Environment Commission has completed two independent technical reviews and has held the public hearings in February and March because our former minister of the Environment and Climate demanded that and requested that after our environmental review process where we'd be listening to you, to residents in Manitoba.

This was the next step. This—we're not taking this lightly. Everything will be done in a proper process. We will talk to all parties, opposed and in support.

We will listen to our Indigenous communities and our leaders. No licensing decision—despite any of the spin that you might hear—no licensing decision will be made until the project is thoroughly vetted, reviewed, and that the evidence can be fully considered and confirmed.

\* (16:40)

This decision will be based on what's best for Manitobans, not political parties.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister can tell us how many meetings or discussions has he had with Sio Silica mine; him personally, any of his staff, the ministry staff.

Give us a ballpark. Is it 20 occasions? Is it 100 occasions. Is it 150 occasions?

**MLA Klein:** Mr. Chair, there was about 50 questions in there.

Can the member opposite be clear? If he wants to ask about each person in the staff separately, I'd be happy to answer those questions, but this was kind of a—again, one of those generalization statements that would be used for political pundits.

So, maybe we could get some more specifics, and then I would be able to answer the question fully and properly.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Will do.

So, how many opportunities has the minister actually met or spoken with Sio Silica mine?

**MLA Klein:** Thank you for that—thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for that—for rephrasing the question so I can answer it directly.

None. I've never met with them.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** How many opportunities has your staff either met or had 'conversations' or discussions with representatives of Sio Silica mine?

**MLA Klein:** Mr. Chair, if I may, could the member opposite, again, be more clear?

We have a number of staff in the Environment and Climate Department, and obviously he's on a fishing expedition. So, maybe we could get a more precise question that is important to the residents of Manitoba.

Is this part of the process? Is he asking if we've met outside the process? I have no—I mean, he's just making a generalized statement, and generalizations are not appropriate for this type of hearing.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Well, I'll begin with your political staff, those that are hired by the ministry's office, and then provincial government staff.

I would like to know the numbers for each of those different units that work with you.

**MLA Klein:** Thanks to my colleague for that question.

I can certainly speak to the political staff since I became Minister of Environment and Climate, and can confirm that none of our political staff have met with any of the people from Sio Silica.

As for government staff, as the member knows—and that's why this is what they call a—we used to call it in the media, a fishing expedition, leading questions from politicians. It was quite fun watching from the stands—government staff meet with, as I said earlier, all organizations and speak to residents that have concerns. It's part of their job.

We certainly want to make sure that we're providing clear information on regulations. We want to make sure that we're providing clear information on not only the regulations, but also the Legislature. And often people will call us on a couple of occasions, and they'll talk to staff to ensure that they have the

particulars as they advance through their process and they advance through their application.

So, of course—of course—government staff would be talking to representatives of the organization. And that's why I say this is a silly game. The reality is, is that I have not met with silica sands; none of my political staff have met with silica sands. And I'm only aware of one meeting that a deputy minister—or, at a deputy level—that had met with silica sands, and that was to review the process and to answer some questions.

And that's what we're here for. We want to ensure the safety of Manitobans. So we will ensure that we provide clarity any time it's required to the policies and to the legislation, because our job is to enforce legislation. We enforce the environmental act, and we will make sure that everyone is aware of the details so that when we make enforcements or make decisions, that it's based on scientific fact and not political partisanship.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Wondering if the minister can advise whether or not he's had any discussions or any meetings with David Filmon since becoming the minister.

**MLA Klein:** So, if I have met with David Filmon was the question.

Again, not an efficient use of taxpayer money that all of us are getting paid to review the budget, but happy to answer: No, I have not.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Has his political staff had any discussions or met with David Filmon?

\* (16:50)

**MLA Klein:** Again, I want to make it clear to the taxpayers paying—well, just in this room alone—hundreds of thousands of dollars per year to review and manage how their money is spent.

And we have spent next to no time understanding what the expenditures are in the Environment and Climate department. We instead are on a fishing expedition, which I've been privy to several times, not only as a media person but watching from afar. And, again, it goes back to what the Winnipeg Sun said, that most comments are driven entirely by government; it's called spin and propaganda and that's what we're seeing here.

None of my political staff have ever met with this gentleman, and I'm not why they would, to be quite honest, but obviously this is something that I recall

sitting in on the Economic Development process and something the NDP want to use in some political way.

But let me clear to the residents. This is about the project that is before a Clean Environment Commission—experts. And we are now in section 35 consultations with Indigenous groups and communities.

We are awaiting evidence, information and content from you, the people that pay our salaries, to ensure that the decision made is the right decision, that it's based on facts and it's based on science and it's based on evidence.

We will not ignore the evidence. We will not ignore the facts. And we will not make your drinking water political.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Here's some facts for the minister. David Filmon is the son of former PC Premier Gary Filmon. He's also a partner at MLT Aikins law firm in Winnipeg. He also happens to be a board member for Sio Silica mine.

And I'm wondering if the minister can advise whether he was aware that a prominent member of the PC Party has a direct financial interest in this project.

**MLA Klein:** Unfortunately, I have witnessed the personal attacks and falsehoods of political MLAs or other elected officials during my short time in politics because, I guess, as noted by members of the opposition, I fight back on that.

I'm not sure what the personal feelings are or relationship between the member opposite and Mr. Filmon, nor do I think it has any relevance on the Sio Silica decision because that—again, I'll reinforce this because I don't want residents to be played as pawns in a political game: this is very important to us.

And, in fact, ensuring Manitoba's drinking water supplies provide safe drinking water from source to tap is a main priority. And you know this from my work to have the City of Winnipeg to act immediately to reduce the phosphorus. You know this from my work with my colleague and close friend, Brian Mayes, also a member of the NDP party, to eliminate and to work towards the elimination of combined sewers. You know this because we've launched a task force to address the North End treatment plant.

My record is there. The personal feelings towards and individual and trying to put some relevance behind that is unnecessary and a waste of your tax dollars and time.

The reality is, through legislation and supporting policies, we regulate approximately 1,000 drinking water systems and also provide guidance, technical expertise, up-to-date information and education materials about water safety to water suppliers and the public on a regular basis.

Our staff are experts. Our staff believe in what they do and they will ensure that no decision will be made, nothing will be made, until the consultations are done, and that includes the section 35 consultations with our Indigenous leaders and our Indigenous communities.

And they will base their decision on evidence, not names that are being thrown around for whatever personal purpose. I don't understand that and I don't want to play into that.

I want to think about the residents that are very concerned about an application that's come forward, and I want to ensure those residents that the proper decision is our top priority.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** The minister didn't answer my question, and I think the residents of southeast Manitoba want to know this.

Was he aware that a prominent member of the PC Party had a direct financial interest in this project?

**MLA Klein:** Once again, I wanted to, on the record for residents walking—watching, sorry, my apologies, that there is no relevance to this line of questioning whatsoever; that the decision will not be based any one individual or any politician, like the NDP have proven to do in the past.

They have shown that on a couple of occasions by ignoring the Clean Environment Commission and by not listening to residents or Indigenous communities or, in fact, scientists when it came to the Keeyask project.

This decision will be made based on evidence. This decision will be made by experts. This decision is not made on political ramblings of trying to make somebody guilty by association. That's just a waste of your time and the taxpayers' time.

These staff are professionals at what they do. They are here to answer questions and help me answer questions that are important to you so that you get the facts. I will continue to sit here and provide the facts and not play politics.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Well, the minister can start with providing the fact of whether or not he was aware that a

prominent member of the PC Party has a direct financial interest in Sio Silica.

**MLA Klein:** Again, to my colleague who is a professional at this, at spinning questions in a court of law: there is no relevance to this. The—an individual—

**The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Order. Order.

The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

## ROOM 255

## FAMILIES

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Families.

Questions for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

The honourable minister—[interjection]—I apologize, it has to go to the honourable member for St. Johns.

**MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** I think that the minister probably has some stuff she wants to share from last time, so I'll let the minister go first.

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families):** We'd ran out of time during our last session to get to the answers about how Manitoba funded Peguis First Nation, so I'm pleased to share with the member that, for last fiscal, Manitoba provided \$11.35 million, which reflects the amount the agency received when it was providing service under provincial law.

And then this fiscal year, we're providing Peguis First Nation with \$10.8 million. The lower amount reflects the fact that some cases of the non-Peguis First Nations have been transferred to the provincial system, and there are fewer cases, if you will.

**MLA Fontaine:** Miigwech for that.

So, I kind of want to go back to numbers. And, for the life of me, I don't remember where I put my notes. I had jotted everything down, but they are somewhere between caucus and my office downstairs.

So, I kind of want to get a better sense of—I think the numbers that you had quoted—or the minister had quoted from March 31st of 2022 was like 9,100, give or take, if I remember correctly. I want to spend some

time to understand how those numbers come about; if there are different categories of children, how that works; post-majority children, if—are they included in those numbers?

I really want to get a sense of how that operates.

**Ms. Squires:** So, to recap, last week I'd shared with the member that there were 9,196 kids in care. That is between the ages of zero and 18. That includes all different types of care, whether that be foster care, under a kinship agreement, group care or receiving care at an emergency placement.

\* (15:10)

What that does not include is the 1,124 young adults that are receiving service through an—a young adult agreement. And, during the pandemic, we had advanced over \$7 million to ensure that kids weren't aging out of care, and we were extending those supports beyond kids who have reached the age of 21. And last month we had announced—after the budget, we had announced an annualized fund to ensure that kids could receive care up to the age of 26.

We wanted to mirror what was happening with federal—with the federal system, where kids could receive supports up to the age of 26, and so we've paralleled the provincial system to reflect that. And so, right now we have 1,124 kids on an AYA.

**MLA Fontaine:** So—and again, we don't know what the numbers are this year. You're hoping to get them relatively soon. But, let's just operate from the 9,196. So, that's kids in foster care, kinship agreements, all group homes, emergency placements and then 1,024 for young adults.

**Peguis:** So, the numbers for children that are now under the co-ordination agreement with Peguis, are those included—I mean, I assume they would still be in this number—but moving forward, will those numbers be included in the overall, or no?

**Ms. Squires:** They will not. When an Indigenous governing body signs a co-ordination agreement and those—and they assume jurisdiction, their children in care are not counted under the provincial system.

**MLA Fontaine:** And I believe you gave me these numbers, but I'm not—I can't remember for sure. But when Peguis signed the co-ordination agreement, how many children were taken out of, then, the total numbers for Manitoba children?

**Ms. Squires:** Just over 400.

**MLA Fontaine:** And so, any child that comes into care, there's not—and I know, again, you've said kinship, foster, group, emergency placement—there's not different categories.

So a child comes in, whatever, they're in a group home. There's not different categories for those numbers, like some children could be considered, like, not part of the numbers, the provincial numbers?

I don't think I'm being clear. Let me be clear: Any children that have contact with CFS—let's just put it that way—any children that have contact with CFS; are there some children that would not be counted towards the total number of children, if that makes sense?

**Ms. Squires:** So, children in non-paid care are not included in the total number, and they're reported separately.

And what that means is that children in the own-home placement, meaning that they are back with their parents and they are—there's circumstances that they're waiting for, whether it be a court order to revoke a permanent guardianship—to revoke that—and it takes a while for the courts to provide that. But, at that point, the parents are not receiving per diems for their children and that's why it's called non-paid care.

Those kids are not in these numbers.

**MLA Fontaine:** To—so how many children are we talking about and when did that start?

**Ms. Squires:** So, for last year, that 'incounted' for 560 children in own-home placements, and the reporting mechanism came into place in 2018-19 to ensure consistency in—all agencies were to count in the same manner to provide reports in this manner, and we've outlined them in our annual report each year since then.

**MLA Fontaine:** So, the 560—and again, we're still operating on the March 31st, 2022. So—but that's—is that a cumulative number, or is that just for 2022?

**Ms. Squires:** It is a point in time, so the number, as of—on that March 31st date.

**MLA Fontaine:** So—please bear with me; I'm trying to get a—so, in 2018-2019 there was a new counting mechanism that was kind of rolled out, and that's across the province. What would be the numbers if—so—in the new kind of, like, for a lack of a better word, criteria; so, own-home placements, right?

\* (15:20)



And so, for 2022, we saw five-sixty come off the provincial total. I'm not sure if you would have those numbers, but what would it have been like in 2020–2018-2019, 2019-20, 2020-21? What would those numbers be?

**Ms. Squires:** We're going to endeavour to get those numbers within the next hour or so.

**MLA Fontaine:** While we're getting those numbers, if it's possible—is it possible to get the numbers in its totality from 2015-2016 up until, again, March of 2022? So, by that I mean—so, yes, these own-home placements but, of course, that just starts at 2018—but the provincial numbers starting from like 2015-2016, each year, if possible.

**Ms. Squires:** Okay, I think what might be very helpful for the member, because this is—there was two separate tracking systems. So what it—might be helpful is if I read into the record the number of children in care each year starting from March of 2008 going up to March of 2022.

And then I will indicate the year break between March in 2017 and March of 2018 is when, consistently thereafter, no in-home kids were counted. Prior to that, between March of 2008 and 2017, I am unable to get the number of in-home kids in care, because they weren't tracked.

So, starting in March of 2008, we had 7,837—

**An Honourable Member:** Sorry, can you go slow?

**Ms. Squires:** I'm going to go slow. Okay.

March of 2008: 7,837. March of 2009: 8,629. March of 2010: 9,120. March of 2011: 9,432. March of 2012: 9,730. March of 2013: 9,940. March of 2014: 10,293. March 2015: 10,295. March 2016: 10,031. March '17: 10,714. March 2018: 10,328. March 2019: 10,258. March of 2020: 9,849. And March of 2021: 9,850. And March of 2022: 9,196.

**MLA Fontaine:** Okay, so to recap, up until 2018—so, the March 31st of 2018 would have included or wouldn't have included the home—own-home placements?

**Ms. Squires:** Mr. Chair, 2019, when there were 10,258 kids in care reported, was the first year in which the in-home kids were not counted.

**MLA Fontaine:** So, before I get to some of these numbers, like, what was the rationale in 2018-2019 to remove own-home placements from the overall number?

\* (15:30)

And I know that the minister had said there were some things that were—you know, you were waiting to revoke permanent guardianship, whatever. But typically and historically, they had been considered part of the overall number.

So what—so, how did that new direction kind of come about, and what was the rationale for that?

**Ms. Squires:** So, when the decision was made to count kids who are in-home and receiving in-home care by their parents, it was a move towards counting the number of children who are receiving supports in-home but are well on their path towards reunification with their families and are receiving varying levels of support, but we know that there's a solid and strong reunification plan in place.

We would like to see those numbers continually increase. Unfortunately, since we started counting those numbers, and, as I've mentioned earlier, there wasn't a consistency to the numbers of in-home arrangements prior to the move that was made in the '18-19 fiscal year, but I can say, for the last four years, the numbers have fluctuated, but there is a bit of an upward trend.

So, in 2018-19, that number was 420. In the following fiscal of '19-20, there was 527; the next year, a decrease, down to 379; and then the fiscal year ending March 2022 was back up to 560.

**MLA Fontaine:** I'm just struggling to understand that if these children were still within the system, why they were taken out of the total numbers.

I'm—I don't understand why those numbers—other than to make it look like numbers are going down, right? Because if you—if we look at, let's say, 2022 numbers, so—oh, brother. If we look at 2022 numbers, I mean, they're going down, but not—and I know that the minister has repeated in the House that, you know, the numbers have gone down substantially, but they're not.

But if you put those numbers back in, the decrease, which, let me just say for the record, is a good thing, certainly, right? Like, we don't want—we want children to be with their families ultimately, right?

But the number, it—the decrease in the overall number—provincial numbers for children in care aren't as significant as one would be led to believe if those numbers were still included. And again, I'm struggling to understand, you know, the rationale as to why they would be taken—if they're still in the system.

**Ms. Squires:** So, in—when the change was made, it was made after the authorities and the Province had worked together at a consistent definition of what constituted a kid in care.

So, the definition that was agreed upon when these changes were made read as follows: that they were under the age of 18; placed in care by a CFS agency; that they were under apprehension, a permanent ward, a temporary ward, under a voluntary surrender of guardianship or under a voluntary placement agreement; and/or whose care needs are financially supported by government.

So, the in-home kids weren't always necessarily meeting this criteria. And so, they weren't receiving financial aid, necessarily, from the Province. And they weren't in the care of a CFS agency. And so, the authorities came together with the Province and agreed upon this new definition of what constituted a kid in care.

And it is—the numbers do fluctuate and I do recognize where the member's coming at—coming from in terms of grappling with these numbers and trying to see whether not we are headed in the right direction with fewer children in care and decreasing the extent to which the child welfare system has in many families' lives, which is certainly what the goal of the department is and the goal of the Province is, to ensure we are supporting families towards prevention and apprehension.

So, I think what might be helpful, as well, is just to read a few other numbers, the number of apprehensions by year—and the member can see how it fluctuates—as well as the number of family reunifications. And that might be helpful in terms of creating that fuller picture in regards to the child welfare system.

\* (15:40)

So, the apprehensions in '14 and '15 were 3,438. The following year, in 2015-16, it was 3,597. The following year it was 4,176; '17-18, 3,797; in '18-19, it was 3,582; '19-20, 2,859; 2021, 2,314; and '21-22 is 2,175.

And so, let's also compare the number of reunifications per year: For the same years, in '14-15 there was 2,419 reunifications; '15-16, 2,715 reunifications; 2016-17, 2,586 reunifications; '17-18 there were 2,814; '18-19, 2,776; '19-20, 2,406; and 2021, 1,856; and '21-22, 1,611.

And so, from these numbers that I've provided, which I believe are in our annual report, it's easy to

see the downward trend of apprehensions and that the reunification work continues to progress and proceed.

And certainly we recognize that more work needs to be done and the reunification in all cases. I think these families are all supported with greater investments from the Province in respite and in other preventative measures that we will continue to invest upon until we see these numbers be, you know, more reflective of a transformed child welfare system.

**MLA Fontaine:** Thanks for that—those numbers. So, just—and again, I'm just taking some quick notes here, but I have a bunch of questions.

Who initiated the discussion with the authorities to change or revisit or reimagine or revision the definition of a child in care? I'll ask that one first.

**Ms. Squires:** On February 10th of 2016, there was a change to the way Manitoba counted kids. And at that time, then-minister Kerri-Irvin Ross had announced that voluntary placements would no longer be counted in care. And there was a one-year period where that was the methodology that was met with opposition from community and the authorities and the care providers.

And so a working group was struck at that time to come up with a consistent approach to counting—to providing counts in the CFS system. And so, kids that were in voluntary placement were certainly put back into the methodology for counting.

But then that is—this working group's recommendation at the end of that was to include all kids, voluntary or otherwise, in the statistical data for kids in care and then recognizing the differential with kids in home care that were already on their path towards reunification.

**MLA Fontaine:** Okay. So, starting in 2015, there was a working group, and—brings us up to the new definition. So, that working group was doing that work.

Who was a part of that working group?

**Ms. Squires:** The working group comprised of members of all four authorities—southern, northern, Métis and general authority—as well representatives from the Department of Families.

There were no political appointees on this committee; the minister was not part of the committee, nor were any political staff were part of this committee.

**MLA Fontaine:** So, I want to just kind of go back to the numbers here. I appreciate that history; that's really important to know.

So—and again, you know, I think that the definition and that history is—actually, let me just ask one more thing.

So, I'm assuming that the recommendation would've come forward in respect of this new definition. Were there several definitions that were provided, and was it the department, was it the minister, ultimately, that decided—like, yea or nay'd this new definition? Like, how did that work?

\* (15:50)

And was it that everybody, like the four authorities and government representatives all kind of, like, you know, based on consensus, developed this definition? Were there a couple definitions?

**Ms. Squires:** I have to admit that neither myself nor my team was on that working group at the time, and so I don't have that history to provide the committee on the—how that committee was structured and how they dealt with their recommendations.

What I can say is that the new definition was reported in the annual report, which—the annual reports are always signed off on by the deputy minister and the Minister of Families. And so, that's the ultimate approval that would have come from those signatures, that would have gone onto the annual report and been reported.

The—all—the totality of the recommendations that came out of the working group, I do not have them at hand.

**MLA Fontaine:** Miigwech for that. I don't even know what I did last week, so I can appreciate that something was—that was a couple of years ago.

So, I just want to kind of revisit the numbers, because, again, I, you know—and, again, you know, I want to recognize that this was apparently recommendations that came out of a working group.

And I'm just raising this—and I'm sure that the minister is aware why I'm raising this—because the minister has taken many opportunities to say that the numbers have gone down. And, of course, if you look at this new definition, then the numbers have gone down, right?

But if we add those numbers, which have traditionally always been a part of those numbers, right? And, again, starting from, like, I think, we would have

said, like, 2019 was the first year recording that, I believe. So, if we add the 420 back in, that's 10,678 children in care. If we add the 527, that's 10,229. If we add the 379—or, that's for 2020; 2021, if we add the 379, that's 10,229.

So—and then 2022 is actually the first year, even with those numbers—if we put back those numbers of 560—is actually the first year that we see a true decrease in numbers. Do you see what I'm saying? Because when we talk about the numbers, the overall provincial numbers, and—you know, I understand why the 'minister' would say that the numbers are going down. On the surface, it looks like it's going down.

But when you put those numbers back on, actually the numbers got worse from when—because, the minister will know that, you know, often folks will say, well, the NDP did this and did that, and I'm not here to disabuse or have that argument here at—in any way, shape, or form—but like, if we were to say in 2016—so March 31st, 2016, which was really at the end of the NDP era, there was like 10,031 children. But that included the numbers that are now taken out, right?

So, I kind of just want to—I want to put that on, you know, for the purposes of Hansard and for the record here—that it's not entirely accurate that the numbers have been going down each and every year. In fact, 2022 is the first year that we can say the numbers have gone down.

So, I don't know how the minister feels about that, and I—you know, I think it's important to recognize that it's not really comparing apples to apples then.

When we talk about what—and again, let, you know, let me just say this: at the end of the day, we want less children in care, right? That's the ultimate goal for all of us, I imagine, every—doesn't matter where we sit on the side of the House. We want children—we want less children in care, we want them with their communities, we want healthy communities, healthy families, healthy children.

We all want that, I would imagine. But my concern is that when we go out in to the public and say that, you know, the numbers have steadily been decreasing year after year, it's not the same comparison, because the comparison into previous years included these numbers that now no longer include those numbers.

So, I just wanted to put that in the—on the public record. I had a meeting on Friday with a bunch of agency directors, including my own director for

Sagkeeng, who I absolutely love. I think Frank Daniels is a good human being; loves our community, loves our children.

And so, every opportunity that I get to support and hang out—and I once was a judge for karaoke, which is actually a lot harder for—within the families and CFS—it is a lot harder than you would imagine.

But all of the directors, there was a common theme. And what they talked about was the need for prevention dollars. And what they also shared was that the prevention dollars that they do get fundamentally, or primarily, come from the feds.

And that there is not a significant level of dollars for prevention that comes from the province. So, I'd ask that the minister—to comment on that.

\* (16:00)

**Ms. Squires:** Of course, we are going to split hairs a little bit about the number of kids in care, and really do want—I do want to point out the trend line: that we are moving downward regardless of, you know, even when the own-home kids are in the count.

And I'd also want to point out that there wasn't a consistency in the numbers reported prior to the change in '18-19; and, of course, as we know, there was a year in which voluntary placements were taken out of the system. And so, the count—the way kids are counted in the system was not consistent, and what I can say is that it has been consistent for the last four fiscal years.

And we do see a significant reduction in the number of kids. Do we have a long way to go? Absolutely. Do we want to continue investing in prevention and supports for families? That is absolutely what we're going to do.

And so, in regards to the conversations that the member had with those on the front line, I appreciate the feedback that was received from those agencies and the authority. And I think what might be helpful is for me to just put into the record the funding for Southern Network. And, of course, if—in subsequent answers, if you'd like me to read into the record the numbers of dollars given to the other authorities, I'd be happy to do that.

But their total funding for '23-24 is \$170.4 million. Of that—and so, the new funding in their envelope includes \$2.3 million, which is a reallocation from case transfers. So, if kids came into the general authority, initially those dollars would go to the general authority and then we would ultimately reconcile and flow those dollars out of the general authority over to

the Southern Network. So, they got \$2.3 million for that this year.

The cost of—the inflationary costs, we provided \$3.3 million in inflationary costs. An additional \$3.5 million for increased salary and operations. And then this year, Southern Network, we also provided \$1.4 million for national standards. This is to reflect that the new standards have come into place where family priority—family, kinship and community placement is a priority, and there are certainly extra expenses at times to go with those standards, so we provided \$1.4 million.

So, that included a total of \$10.6 million more this year than a previous year and then, in addition to that, we did support for young adults of \$2.5 million for '23-24, and that's to reflect that kids can stay in the system longer, 'til age 26. And then we enhanced—we did a one-time wage relief for the Southern Network, and that amounted to \$5.26 million with recognition of—that the wages hadn't been—hadn't changed in a while.

So, in total, a total of \$27 million is committed towards supporting the CFS sector, which includes \$13.9 million in increased allocations for agencies and up to \$11 million in one-time funding to address those retroactive wage pressures, and the—southern got the 5.2, as I stated.

We also gave 2.4 to First Nations CFS authorities to support the implementation of the national standards, of which southern got 1.4 and the Northern Authority got \$1 million of that to support those national standards, including customary and kinship care. And then, over and above this, we did provide that \$4.6 million for youth exiting care that was allocated in this year's budget.

In regards to multi-year funding, through—for prevention, I'll just name a few initiatives. We provided \$369,000 more for StreetReach Winnipeg; \$900,000 for StreetReach North; \$68,000 for Clan Mothers; \$1.5 million for the Neecheewam Eagle Embracing You initiative, which member probably knows, it's an Indigenous-led treatment facility to support sexually exploited youth; \$250,000 for the consortium led by Ma Mawi, the community helpers program; and \$400,000 for respite in—that's called Granny's House, that is organized by Blue Thunderbird Family Care.

And, hopefully, I get an opportunity in subsequent answers to provide a little bit more in terms of what we're doing in one-time funding for enhanced service delivery.

**MLA Fontaine:** So, thank you for giving me those numbers.

So—there's so many things here. Again, I know that the member kind of mapped out the dollars that the authority gets for its agencies—for the southern authority. I mean, we could go on for all of them, but let's just concentrate on the southern authority.

But, again, the directors that I spoke to just on Friday were saying that there were not preventative dollars, so—that the Province allocates. And then one of the other thing—I'm trying not to conflate a bunch of different issues here, but one of the other things that I—so, I'd like a little bit information on this.

One of the other things that they said, each of them consistently, talked about the wages that social workers get. And, you know, they had indicated that, you know, Justice and Health had got increases, particularly over COVID to kind of, you know, recognize the work that they were doing, but that their staff, their—they haven't got an increase in wages.

And so, but I'm seeing here, you're saying that in 2023-2024, there's a wage relief of \$5.26 million. Is that new dollars? Like, were—was there wage relief or increases to their—for their wages for their staff in previous years? Because, like I said, I don't even know if that is the case if they even know.

And why I say that is that there were—there's—also what they raised, consistently among them, that there was a disconnect in respect of communication between the southern authority and agencies, right? So, consistently, when we went around the table, they talked about preventative dollars—they talked about a lot of things that I have here, so we'll be here for a couple of hours.

\* (16:10)

But they talked about a lot of things, right? Preventative dollars, blah, blah, blah. And consistently they all talked about wages, right? And what they said was that because their staff—their employees' wages haven't gone up, right, and certainly not in respect of inflation and all of the costs that we're all dealing with. What they're finding is that a lot of agencies, their staff are leaving.

And so they're leaving for Jordan's Principle, right? So, they mapped it out that, you know, Jordan's Principle—they could go from, like, 35 to 40 caseload at their current agency, making, you know, not a significant amount of dollars—and again, those increases haven't—they haven't increased—and go to Jordan's

Principle and have a caseload of 15. But also have wages that are, you know, significantly higher than what they're paying now.

So, that's a lot to say. There seems to be—something's disconnected; something's disconnected between the directors that are doing this work and are on the front lines, from what we're being told here, particularly in respect of wage relief.

So, I wouldn't mind to understand that a little bit more, whether or not these are new dollars, like, new wage-relief dollars for this fiscal year, and they just haven't been told yet and it's coming down the pipe. But then again, really to kind of map out the preventative dollars that agencies get from the 170 for this fiscal year, or in previous years.

**Ms. Squires:** So, in both cases, these are new dollars. So it certainly could be a situation where the authority hasn't communicated—hasn't received the money, and then hasn't communicated it to the CFS agencies. But we anticipate that that will be forthcoming.

This year, starting in this fiscal year—which began the beginning of this month—a total of \$27 million in new money was committed towards supporting the sector. And so, what that meant is that in—to—in salary and operations, and this money will flow in May: Southern Network will get the \$3.5 million, the Northern Authority will get \$1.8 million, the Métis authority will get \$0.8 million and the general authority will get \$0.8 million.

And then—those are annualized funding. So, that's built into the budget. Each year, they will now receive those additional monies in their allocation.

But what we did do as the one-time relief, in recognition of the need for recruitment, retention, stabilization of the sector and the great strain that the sector had, you know, experienced during COVID—as did many sectors—we wanted to also provide one-time relief. And this money is flowing this week, and that includes: \$5.26 million for the Southern Network; \$2.6 million for the Northern Authority; \$1.8 million for the Métis authority; and \$1.2 million for the general authority.

So, those dollars are flowing as we speak and, of course, that is that one-time wage relief funding. From the Province it goes to the authorities, and then is distributed down to the agencies. And so I certainly do hope that the front-line workers who definitely do deserve this recognition, that they receive this one-time bump in the next few days; and that in May they see that they've also received that ongoing increases based

on that commitment that our government had made to the sector and all of its employees.

**MLA Fontaine:** I appreciate that. It seems to me like there's a disconnect in respect of information flowing, right, which is actually quite concerning if you think about it, right? Like, the authorities were established to be that in-between or that conduit between agencies that are on the front line and government, right?

Somewhere along the way, there seems to be a disconnect and potentially or—you know, I'm trying to be very careful in my wording here—but, you know, some lack of communication, right, because this was only two days ago, three days ago, right, and they hadn't heard about this.

So, I'm curious in respect of, like, what are the mechanisms of accountability, right, from the Province—or, you know, between the Province and the authorities, so, i.e., to ensure that there is a proper flow of information and a proper flow of communication, but also vice versa, right? So, when agencies have issues, which was something that we also heard, they're forced to go to the authority. But there were some concerns on whether or not their concerns actually make it from the authority to the minister's office.

So, I'm curious on how some of that kind of operates, but—because here's a clear example—and my colleague from Keewatinook was at the meeting with me, as well, and he can back up that, literally, just on Friday, they had nothing—they had—they didn't have any of this information. So, here's a clear example of a lack of communication.

So, again, in respect of accountability and ensuring, you know, that everybody is doing their job that they're meant to be doing.

\* (16:20)

**Ms. Squires:** So, I will certainly be the first to admit that we don't have the clearest line of sight into the agency operations as per devolution.

We do have the relationship with the authorities and so, right after the budget was tabled, we did inform all four authorities of their new allocation, which included these increased dollars, and then they, in turn, have the responsibility of working with their agencies. They are still in the process, perhaps, of determining their allocations to each agency.

And so, they will be reporting back to us by the end of June on how they have allocated these additional monies and how that they have applied them to their salaries. But we have issued the directive that they

must include a 5.66 increase to their sector employees' salaries, and they need to confirm and report to us by end of June on how they've accomplished that.

**MLA Fontaine:** By 5.66 per cent increase?

**Ms. Squires:** Yes.

**MLA Fontaine:** Yes, so, coupled with what I just said in the previous question, one of the things that folks were saying around the table, as well, is that—again, and I guess I'm really trying to stress that there's a disconnect here.

So often—more often than not, agencies—it will be April 1st, and they don't have any clue what their budget is for the year, right? But they're required to do their own budgeting, right, and figure out what they're going to be doing, and often they don't—they're not advised of what the dollars that are going to be flowing to their agency until months later, in some cases. So, it makes it so that they're not able to properly plan in respect of their—that fiscal year for themselves.

So, I share that because I think it is important to know, right, that often they don't know what their budget is, which then, I would submit, then has an impact on—a direct impact on the work that they're—that they are able to do or wanting to do when you don't have that information.

So, I think that it's perhaps something for folks for, you know, everybody around the table, to be aware of, that there is this disconnect and that it does impact on the work of social workers—child welfare.

So, to go back to prevention dollars, because I know that—and I appreciate the minister, you know, mapping out and really taking the time to share in respect of all of the dollars. However, I haven't heard—unless I've missed it, which I could have—I haven't heard specifically out of this 170—out of the \$27 million of new monies, what specific allocation is towards preventative dollars?

**Ms. Squires:** So, in total, we give, each year, \$421 million to the four authorities, and now, if we include Peguis, the four authorities and the one Indigenous governing body. And this year alone, there was an increase in the \$27 million, but—to address some sector stabilization dollars and inflationary dollars, but there is discretion in these envelopes to do preventative work.

There is not a prescriptive line item from the Province on mandating certain dollars be put towards preventative. We provide the authorities, who then, in

turn, provide their agencies the dollars based on these envelopes.

\* (16:30)

And, apart from the sort of mandate for wage relief and salary dollar increases, we don't prescribe how those additional dollars are spent.

**MLA Fontaine:** Okay. Just quickly—quickly—clarification. I know you said—the minister said 421 for all four authorities, but the \$27 million for new money is just for the southern authority.

**Ms. Squires:** So, the \$421 million is the global figure for the four authorities plus the one Indigenous governing body. This year we increased \$27 million across the four authorities.

**MLA Fontaine:** So, perhaps I recorded this wrong. When you were giving the numbers for the southern authority, you had said, like, 174 and then you said—I can't even read some of my writing here—but, like, 3.5 increase salary, 1.4 national standards, 10.6 million for something that I don't know what the heck I wrote there.

But that was for all of it? Like, the global—I'm getting confused now. Okay.

**Ms. Squires:** I apologize. I will clarify. So, the global is 421, and the global amount of new dollars committed to supporting the Child and Family Services sector was \$27 million.

Of that \$27 million, \$18.36 million went to the Southern Network, \$8.8 million went to the Northern Authority, \$4.78 million went to Métis authority, and the general authority is—well, they had a surplus, so they didn't get any new dollars.

And I can elaborate on that in my—well, where that comes from is that they had to transfer out \$4.3 million from the general authority budget into the Indigenous authorities' budgets because they have fewer kids in care.

Because if a child comes into the general authority but is—appropriately belongs under the Southern Network, the child is taken into the general authority, is counted and they receive a—an allocation. Then the child moves out of the general authority, and we reconcile the dollars to make sure that the dollars flow with the child. But there's a little bit of a lag in that reconciliation period.

And so that reconciliation for this fiscal year was \$4.3 million. So they did not—it turned out that general

authority did not receive new monies for reallocation from the case transfers.

**MLA Fontaine:** Okay. Bear with me here: \$27 million dollars new money overall; 18.3 went to the southern authority; 8.8 went to the Northern Authority, 4.7 went to MMF and nothing went to general. But that's over \$27 million. That's—it's thirty-one million dollars, eight hundred.

**Ms. Squires:** So, \$27 million is the increase, but the reason the number that you're adding up totals 31 is because \$4 million was subtracted from the general authority, and—I apologize. I'm really trying hard not to be confusing, but it's because of the reconciliation work that gets done at the year end.

And we want to make sure that if a child comes into the general authority and then transfers out, that those dollars flow to the southern, the northern or to the Métis authority. So, 27 in new money from the Province, and \$4.3 million was subtracted from the general authority and redistributed to the Indigenous authorities. And that's why we have the increase totalling \$31 million for the three Indigenous authorities.

**MLA Fontaine:** Okay, I—just give me one minute here.

My son is in school to become a math teacher, I probably need him here right now. *[interjection]* Yes, where is he when I need him?

Okay, to be clear here, unless I'm doing something wrong here, 18.3, 8.8 and 4.7, comes up to 31.8. That's not including the 4.3 to the general authority. Unless I'm doing something wrong here—and I can probably text my son, but—because the 4.3, I didn't even include the 4.3.

**Ms. Squires:** May I suggest tabling this for the member's review?

**Mr. Chairperson:** You can simply mention that you are tabling it, Minister.

**Ms. Squires:** So, I would like to table the chart labelled, components of single-envelope funding child maintenance agency operations and authority operations and salaries, for the committee's review.

**MLA Fontaine:** This is like when we were trying to figure out the \$200 for young adults and—so again, clear as mud right now.

So—oh, boy. I want to talk a little bit about the young adults and so, I want to understand how is it determined that a young adult—what's the process,

how it's determined, what are the supports that are offered in these, like, post-majority agreements—I don't think that's called—they're called young adult agreements. What's the process for that?

And, in respect to the dollars, I know that the minister previously said that there is a 2.5 increase, or is that new dollars for young adults? And whether or not at this point the minister, or the department, or the authorities feel that that's enough financial support—and certainly in respect of other supports for these young adult agreements.

\* (16:40)

**Ms. Squires:** So, on the sort of global picture of youth aging out of care, we certainly do agree that much more work needs to be done to support youth who are coming out of care and to transition successfully into adulthood.

And as, you know, any parent around this table with adult children, we know that it takes a lot, sometimes, to launch a child. And those supports, at times, were not being received by children in care and that—much more work needs to be done to support the transition from adolescence to adulthood for kids who are in care.

So some of the measures that we've done in recent years is—and particularly COVID taught us a lot of lessons about the perils of aging out of care.

So we had made available \$7 million to enhance supports from youth to ensure that they didn't have to age out of care, and we extended those supports—those were between the ages of 21 and 26. Prior to COVID, there were no such supports for children at the age of 21.

And so we now have annualized that and that's where that \$4.67 million comes in, so that any kid aging out of care can establish care services that would be provided through the AYA agreement, which is the young adult agreement. And so, that has been formalized to support kids up to the age of 26.

We also recognize that not every kid coming out of care—some kids, when they reach the age of 18, they don't want to be a part of the system.

So what—and some kids who have been on an AYA agreement from 18 to 21, but then they reach the age of 21 and they want to be—move on from the system and they don't want to extend that AYA agreement.

And there was definitely a gap in service delivery for reaching these kids. So we've established these youth mentorship hubs. We are going out into an RFP

right now to establish them, particularly in rural and northern Manitoba, where we can have, if you will, a one-stop shop for a kid who was in care, who can go somewhere and talk to somebody who is not affiliated with a CFS agency—separate and apart from CFS agency—getting provincial dollars to work directly with that youth to help them access services, find housing, apply for benefits.

And then the other thing that is available to any kid who has exited CFS care or in a—even with a AYA agreement or without an AYA agreement, is what's called the Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit. It was, last year, a \$250-a-month portable shelter top-up fund. We enhanced that to \$350 starting April 1st.

And so what that means is any kid who was in CFS care can apply for this benefit and receive that to go towards their shelter benefit. The problem is, is the program was undersubscribed, which meant we need to do a better job of putting information out there so that kids exiting out of care can access the services that they're entitled to and to get the benefits that they're entitled to.

And so, there's a collection of work that's being undertaken right now to really support kids up to the age of 26 who have been involved in the CFS system. Is there more work to do? Absolutely.

I also was remiss in elaborating a little bit on some of the preventative work that we did—that we're doing. And while we don't have the specificity in the agreements that we have with our authorities—based on single-envelope funding, they don't have the prescriptions from the Province to spend X amount of dollars in various categories apart from their wages—we invest in preventative care outside of the allocation to the families.

And so some of the other initiatives that we're doing is the, you know, we established the second Granny's House site. We fund the Super Dads program through Mount Carmel Clinic. We are providing naloxone kits to many of our service providers within the CFS and the CLDS system and respite—other respite initiatives.

**MLA Fontaine:** I'm curious about the Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit a little bit more, because it's the first time that I've heard about it.

And, certainly, people need it, right? So—which I'm going to share on my social media, because I think it's really important to get that information out there. So, I appreciate that the minister and the department



know that there's probably some more work to do there to get that information out.

So, youth who had been in care or are currently still in care, with an AYA or not, can apply for this benefit, or is it that they're just completely out of CFS care? So, just a little bit of clarification. That's \$350 per month to help subsidize their housing needs, their rent. That \$350, if they're on social assistance, does that claw back any dollars that they would get?

\* (16:50)

**Ms. Squires:** I appreciate that the member is going to help spread the word about the Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit, and she will certainly be doing it in real time as we're announcing this. We do have the allocation approved to go up to the \$350, but apparently we haven't announced it yet, so we'll be doing that tomorrow, as well. So, we can do it simultaneous, that's no problem.

So, prior to our announcement, like last fiscal, it was \$250; we bumped it up to \$350.

So, just to clarify, any kid who reaches the age of majority, 18, they are now—legally, they're classified as having exited care, irrespective of whether or not they have an AYA or not.

Some kids, at the age of 18, enter into an agreement, but they're still a kid who's exited care and now are on an AYA agreement. And then there are other kids who have exited care and don't have an AYA agreement. Both classifications are entitled to this Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit of \$350, effective April 1st—retro to April 1st.

And there is no EIA clawback, but it doesn't exceed your rent. So, for example, if you are living in a place where your rent is \$800, and the discrepancy between what you receive in your rent from EIA and the amount that you would receive under this \$350, if it totals the—if it exceeds the amount that your rent is, you only get up to the amount of what your rent is. But if you are living in a place with a higher rent charged, and your rent is \$350 more than what you're receiving from EIA, you get the full benefit to take you up to that level.

**MLA Fontaine:** So, the announcement tomorrow is that it's gone from \$250 to \$350. Okay.

And I'm on the website now, because I'm very excited about this. Where's the application? I don't see, necessarily—hold on. Okay, here we go. Okay.

Okay, well, like I said, I think that that's actually important information to get out to folks who are—you know, like it's—I don't think we need to, you know, get into a great length of discussion about how hard it is to find housing right now, right? So, I think that that is really important issue.

And, like I said, on the—there's actually three streams. So, each of the three streams are actually equally important, right? People at risk for homelessness and mental health and addiction. So that's good to know. I'm glad that I was able to find that out today.

And so, from what I understand, then, there's kind of, like, once you're 18, there—is there two types of stream? So, 18 to 21 and then 21 to 26, so two different streams of—now, the 21 to 26 is an AYA, is the 18 to 21 an AYA, as well?

**Ms. Squires:** So, when it comes to the AYAs for kids exiting care between the ages of 18 and 21, they are receiving money from the Province under the CFS act. The CFS act does not allow, currently, to flow money to kids who have surpassed the age of 21.

So when we found ourselves in the middle of the pandemic, we really wanted to flow supports to kids between the ages of 21 and 26. And so, what we did is we formalized an expenditure under The Emergency Measures Act to support them, and that's where we flowed \$7 million during the course of the pandemic.

Now, what we've done for expediency purposes until we change the CFS act to allow supports to flow to kids—to young adults up to the age of 26, what we're doing now is providing grants under The Social Services Administration Act. And we call the funding envelope for young adults between the ages of 21 and 26 supports for young adults.

So that is why there is the differences in the two different agreements for supporting young adults exiting care.

**MLA Fontaine:** I appreciate that clarification because I was seeing the supports for young adults, but I was getting confused between the supports for young adults and then the AYA. So, that makes a lot of sense that it's a different flow until the CFS act is changed.

So, is there any intention of bringing forward that bill any time soon to make that change in the CFS act?

**Ms. Squires:** So, we do have a very robust amendment package before the House right now that I'm very hopeful—I'll do a plug right now, hoping for unanimous support of that bill before we lift in June. And then, there are certainly subsequent amendments

to our CFS act. I meet regularly with the leadership advisory council, which is comprised of members from the Indigenous agencies and—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

## CHAMBER

### ADVANCED EDUCATION AND TRAINING

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield):** 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 and Training.

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

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

**Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training):** Yes, thank you to the wonderful Chair for that opportunity to introduce my staff.

I have my deputy minister, Eric Charron here. I've got an ADM—assistant ADM—executive director—I'm going to promote you today—Amy Thiessen. And we have ADM Joe Funk from the department, and I have my SA Kaitlyn Gyles joining me.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Are there any staff the critic wishes to—*[interjection]*

We'll defer that then, perhaps, and when they get here we can give a moment to do that.

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):** To conclude some of our discussion around adult education from last time we were in meeting in the Estimates session, I'd like to ask the minister whether she has had a chance to read the report by Jim Silver, Building the Best Adult Education System in Canada: A Roadmap and Action Plan for Manitoba. It's a pretty well-respected report that outlines some of the work that can be done.

And I'll table the report, actually, if the minister hasn't had a chance to take a look at it. Table it here for today. And so it outlines many aspects that we can do in Manitoba to enhance our adult education system

and, specifically, talks about a hub model for adult education in Manitoba.

I wonder if the minister has had a chance to read the report, and whether she supports Jim Silver and other advocates' proposal of the hub model for adult education in Manitoba.

\* (15:10)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I think I would like to start off just by finishing a previous answer. We kind of got cut off, ran out of time last session.

So I know the member had been curious about some of the funding and some of the numbers from various years. I provided the number for the 2021 fiscal year, which was \$20.3 million and we had 8,200 enrolled.

The year '21-22, the funding was 20.3 million, although we saw the enrollment of 6,800, and of course, that was during the COVID years when we have acknowledged that we saw a number of adult learners not able to participate virtually, and that some of the classrooms were shut down.

So the numbers reducing was not a surprise there, but the funding remained at its level regardless of the lower enrolment.

We don't have final numbers for the '22-23 year yet. The program actually runs until June, so finalized numbers will be provided following that. And '22-23 again, we kept that funding at its \$20.3-million level.

The '23-24 funding in this year's budget is \$21.2 million for adult learning and literacy, overall funding.

So I just wanted to get that on the record so the member had the information that he had asked for previously.

And yes, in terms of Dr. Jim Silver's report, I know that my predecessor, Minister Reyes, had an opportunity to meet with Mr.—Dr. Silver and hear about the good research and a number of the key gaps that were outlined within the report, and I know the department has also read the report very thoroughly.

I look forward to hearing a bit more about that and how it is actually been considered in terms of our engagement with stakeholders as we are putting together the adult education strategic plan.

So we are addressing that hub model that is outlined within the report. We are very happy to have this information available to us and to help to steer us

towards—as some have put it—this untapped resource with adult learners.

So I appreciate the member bringing that forward and sharing a copy of the report, and I look forward to learning more about it.

**Mr. Moses:** After several years of underfunding to particular universities and, specifically, Brandon University, can the minister explain why BU did not receive an increase on par with other universities, specifically, University of Winnipeg or University of Manitoba this budget year?

\* (15:20)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** So, yes, this year, all post-secondary institutes did receive an increase in their operating funds, as well as the capital dollars for deferred maintenance as well as new build.

And in terms of University of Brandon, they were able to submit priorities last summer through the regular process of Estimates before setting the budget, as all post-secondary institutes were encouraged to do—new programming as well as existing programming, whether there's expansions or continuation of programs. And I know that under that consideration, Brandon University received a 5.5 per cent increase overall in the operating budget for their institute.

And then capital funding: they increased from \$450,000 to \$7.2 million, and that was in recognition of the submissions, that they do have some capital expenses that they really did prioritize and wanted to invest in, and that was actually quite a large jump in capital dollars that were earmarked for Brandon University specifically from their proposals and requests.

And I think when we're discussing, you know, funding, and you want to compare sort of various institutions, I think the one thing that we've been cautioned on by the post-secondary institutions is that they want to be treated individually and uniquely. Because they all provide quality education and quite attractive programs, which is why we have so many international students coming in, as well, seeking these courses.

But they want to be treated uniquely and individually because of the courses and programs that they offer—are very specialized to their student population. So that was taken into consideration when looking at the distribution, as well as what programs are offered. Not all universities offer the exact same programs or courses, so there needs to be a reflection

in terms of the needs within the labour market needs, as well.

So, some programs will be more costly. For instance, anything in the medical field will, obviously, cost a lot more to invest in for students than some of the other courses that are offered in other faculties.

So, as the member can imagine, it's quite a complicated process to go through and consider a number of different elements. I've been happy to meet with the president of the Brandon University, Dr. Docherty. We've had a number of conversations and he's expressed, you know, feedback about the budget process, about some of the investments that will be made.

I think, you know, what the member is sort of bringing up when you're comparing different amounts going to different institutions is that question of equity versus equality.

And I'll point out that, you know, the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology becoming a new designated post-secondary institute from sort of the K-to-12 system into that post-secondary realm did need a bit more of a boost and an injection of money which will not be seen year over year, but their operating funding jumped by 33 per cent.

And as the member opposite can imagine, we could not be providing 33 per cent to all post-secondary institutes. That would be quite irresponsible. This is taxpayer money that is invested, you know, strategically to have the best outcomes for students and for Manitobans, and to make sure that the educating institutes are supported and able to function and provide the programs that students are looking for.

**Mr. Moses:** Yes, I've had the pleasure of having good conversations with Dr. David Docherty at Brandon University, and so, I'm pretty pleased to have those relationships and listen to not only the administration, the faculty and students as well.

And what I've been hearing is that there's—frustration continues, knowing that this government has funded Brandon University, yet again, below the rate of inflation. And it means that BU is going to have to make tough decisions; with costs rising, they're going to have to decide, how are we going to make up the shortfall, potentially? Is it going to come from changes to fees, or is it going to come from cuts to services or supports?

And given that Brandon University is the university that serves western Manitoba, for that Westman region, I wonder if the minister thinks it's a good idea

to fund BU at a rate below inflation, given that it is the only university that serves Westman.

\* (15:30)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** And, of course, the, you know, question really surrounded, you know, some of the pressures that post-secondary institutes, and in particular, university of Brandon might be facing, including the inflation rates that we have sort of seen some quite large jumps over the last number of months.

And I think I just want to clarify that, you know, the funding amounts are not reflective of the—you know, today's or current inflation rates. There is a formula that is used, and it takes into account when the monies are going to be expended.

So inflation rates might be quite high in any given month, but, you know, my understanding is they've sort of dropped down quite a bit this last month from where they used to be, up and in around the 7 and 8 per cent; that was quite costly, and it certainly impacted Manitobans and their pocketbooks. And institutions as they were looking at some of their overhead costs.

So the formula will take into account that there are definitely inflationary pressures. There's, you know, the cost of salary pressures. There's a number of extra costs that do happen within post-secondary institutes, which they outline very well in the summer, before budgets are set. And they identify, again, the programs that will expand, or new programs that they're considering.

And then that's all taken into consideration as the Estimates process takes hold, and then the budget is put together, and identifying priorities of each institute.

So we agree that there have been more pressures; that's why that's reflected in an increase in the operating grant for Brandon University. We also recognize they had priorities of capital builds that they wanted to invest in, and enhance their programming in spaces for students, and I think that that's reflected in that quite large investment of \$7.2 million that was up from \$450,000.

So, is it everything that everybody wished for, asked for? I don't think that the member opposite is going to claim that he's going to give everything that everybody asks for if one day he gets the opportunity to sit in government. I would hope that he would be responsible with taxpayer dollars, and consider very carefully program requests and the needs of the labour

market as well as needs of students and faculty and institutions.

**Mr. Moses:** I think it's important—obviously, the minister when—comes to a decision of funding, you know, think about the real-world impacts that the dollars will have on Manitoba, and I think that it's important to note the rate of inflation because that has real-world impacts for institutions and the decisions that they can make in terms of the course offerings, the amount of faculty that they can have versus sessional teachers.

And, really, at the end of the day, that comes down to impacting students. And, you know, so I, you know—little bit disheartened to hear the minister kind of brush off some of the inflationary pressures that institutions might face, because I think it does play a big factor in the amount of funding the government should be concerting when it's looking at institutions across the province, as well as its impact for some students who may be, you know—our university in the Westman region would be someone's only option and coming to university in Winnipeg might not be in someone's cards. So, having a strong regional university is important.

And that brings me to my next question about University College of the North, which also received funding below the rate of inflation. It's not on par with universities inside the Perimeter, inside Winnipeg.

And it's a significant regional hub for learning for people in northern Manitoba, who, as we both know, you know, don't often—don't always come down to Winnipeg or to Brandon for a post-secondary education. So, University College of the North plays an even more critical role in the lives of many people in the North, particularly Thompson and The Pas and surrounding areas.

So, will the minister explain why University College of the North did not receive funding at—on par with other universities in Manitoba, specifically, the ones in Winnipeg, or did not receive funding—or did receive funding that was below the rate of inflation?

\* (15:40)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, so, to answer the member's question, again, I'm going to reiterate that, obviously, every post-secondary institute is unique.

That's been reiterated and highlighted multiple times in multiple discussions with various presidents of these institutes, that they want to be treated uniquely for the pros that they offer.

And, certainly, UCN has unique challenges. Being in the North and offering programs in the North, we recognize that there is a higher cost for these programs to be run. It's a challenge to attract instructors for the programs that they have.

It's tough to, you know, provide these programs in close proximity to different communities where they have learners who are eager to join in and be trained in various skills.

I was able to have a great conversation with Dr. Lauvstad—oh, actually, sorry, I just promoted him to—Mr. Lauvstad, where he was able to articulate a number of the unique challenges faced in the North for educational institutes and really highlight the need for creative planning.

Especially when we're talking about a number of mines potentially opening up and the need for tradespeople with specialized skill sets. And the North—northern communities have a very good access to communities with young youth who are eager to get employed in these various jobs and upskill their training so that they can have these very lucrative jobs that are going to be offered in the North.

I am excited to further those conversations and I know that, in future years, in Estimate processes, these will be programs that will be considered and looked at as how can it be expanded, or created in various areas, and those investments will be made.

And, of course, that's a process that Mr. Lauvstad does understand and will definitely be participating in. And he knows the value in looking at what the needs are in the labour market, and especially as it pertains to the North.

And he's been very good at reaching out and communicating those needs and, you know, we recognize that with the higher cost for training and for providing these programs to students in the North, they do require a higher rate of operating dollars per student.

That is reflected in the increases that they received this year. They are at the highest ratio in terms of operating dollars per student of all post-secondary institutes, and that is for that very reason.

I know that there had been discussions already with Mr. Lauvstad where he understands that there's some unexpended dollars within the department that will be earmarked for the labour market needs. He's already spoken of a couple of ideas that he's already put forward, that his institute has already put forward.

Those conversations will continue and he understands that, you know, operating dollars will be assessed year over year moving forward, based on the needs in the communities and the proposals that are submitted by the institutes.

**Mr. Moses:** Moving over to Manitoba Student Aid.

I have, and many members I know in the—in my caucus team have heard many complaints from students who have had to wait a long time for service and dealing with service staff of Manitoba Student Aid.

And there were many complaints about the length of time they have to wait on hold or deal with staff who maybe don't understand their particular situation.

And so, I'd like to ask the minister about that wait and just the fact that there is a significant wait for callers who call into Manitoba Student Aid.

So, I'd like to know if the minister can explain why there's a target of 23 minutes this year—and why is it the same as last year, when there are complaints in that system—sorry, the target for the next year is the same as it is this year—and why it's remaining the same, given that there are so many complaints.

\* (15:50)

Is the minister taking any effort to reduce that target down? And I'd like to also find out what is the current number of minutes that students who are watching this, or reading this in Hansard, can actually expect to wait on hold when they call Manitoba Student Aid.

**Mrs. Guillemard:** So, first off, the member was asking what the current wait times average for the last year was, and that's 34.7 minutes.

And that's reflective, actually, of quite a large increase in overall applications that were processed over the last year. We were at 19,341 applications, and that is a record amount that before had not been reached. So, certainly, extra pressure's put on the system and put on the department to process those, and that's reflective of \$193 million disbursed to almost 17,000 students who applied. We also had \$43 million disbursed to 13,800 students, and then the Manitoba Bursary had \$18 million disbursed to 11,214 students, of which there were 1,236 Indigenous students who received those bursaries. And, of course, there's the student grant also that goes out to students who apply.

And, I think that we—it's important to make note here that in response to these extra pressures and sort

of unprecedented numbers of applications that we've seen, our department has put forth a request to increase by three FTEs within the department so that those wait times and the student services can be enhanced. And I would encourage the member to consider voting for the budget so that we can go ahead and hire those FTEs, which is required to have this budget passed in order for us to move forward with that. So the sooner that gets passed, the sooner we can help students process their applications in a timely manner.

**Mr. Moses:** I think it's quite clear that, you know the—quite telling, actually, that the minister talked about how much additional pressure Manitoba Student Aid has had recently, because it's a clear sign that post-secondary education is becoming more expensive for students, becoming more unaffordable. More students are requiring student aid because this government is putting it out of reach for so many Manitobans.

And so, I think she should reflect on that a bit and see that despite what she says during question period, that the reality is that university and colleges are getting more and more expensive, more out of reach for many Manitobans and many people who want to seek higher education. So I would urge the minister to reflect very carefully on that and consider making concrete efforts to make university and colleges and post secondary in Manitoban more affordable for Manitobans. But, having said that, we know that, right now, there is a six-week turnaround goal set for Manitoba Student Aid applications.

So I'd like to know if the 'miniker'—minister can explain—if she can clearly explain how many are being met during that six-week time frame the government has set out, as well as—so, how many are being met within that six weeks, as well as if she agrees that that six-week time frame is the appropriate target in the first place.

\* (16:00)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** You know, I know that the member opposite, you know, wants to emphasize how he feels that tuition rates are unaffordable for Manitobans and students, and I would counter that with, you know, Manitoba has the lowest tuition rates in all of western Canada.

So I think that the member might want to reflect on some of his own comments. I think that what we're seeing, in terms of tapping into Student Aid, certainly, there is affordability issues, but that's in general: the inflationary pressures; the cost of food; the cost of living; a myriad of reasons.

But we also are seeing people return to school to up their skills, or even finish a post-secondary degree after having children and recognizing that we have programs in place that actually make this a reality and possible for them, whereas before, they may have not felt there was an avenue to go back to school and have some of the extra costs covered.

But Student Aid—I know that students talk to one another, I know that they've shared how, you know, streamlined the process can be and that you can access the extra supports necessary so that the consideration of pursuing your post-secondary education becomes a reality for more people than before, and I think in this new reality of virtual learning, as well. I know that Student Aid can apply to institutions that are outside of Manitoba that you can take virtually—here in Manitoba. You can still access Student Aid, if it qualifies and it's assessed.

The second, sort of, aspect to the question, I know, is talking about the process times. And a lot of the delays in processing times, you know, there's a target for six weeks to process and disburse the funds. Sometimes there are missing documents and, of course, you know, if a student is a new student to this process and learning what documents are necessary and how to access those documents, sometimes they submit their application and there are some documents that are missing. And that can take time for them to be notified that they are missing some of the application documents, and for them to locate those and then submit them.

Ultimately, the applications, when they're qualified, will be processed once we have the proper documentation. And the staff, I know, have been working very hard in order to accommodate that and communicate what, possibly, documents are necessary for the processing. We—there is—the member's right, that there was a target put into our supplements brochure, or booklet, here, of 75 per cent. It's the first time that a target has been set, and I think that that's very important to make note of; so, we don't have comparables year over year.

But it is important for departments to have targets, to aim for targets. And whether that's processing time, whether it's wait times, we'll—we continually better ourselves and try to meet those targets. Without a target, there's really an impossible task, to try to measure the success of a department or the output of the efforts that are put in to serve these students. So I view that as actually a positive, that the targets are set, that there is an actual goal to aim for and to measure

against, so that we can be looking at our systems and how can we improve them to better serve students.

And, again, I hope that the member opposite will keep that in mind if, one day, he has the opportunity to sit in government, that he sets goals and targets, and encourages departments to help attain those for better services for students and Manitobans.

**Mr. Moses:** I think it's clear the minister—it's—her response didn't really provide an answer to my question, which was how—what percentage hasn't met that six-week timeline, the target that was set. And I think that's pretty telling. I know a lot of people who have reached out to my office and complained about Manitoba Student Aid have expressed frustration with the long wait times. And the fact that the minister today, when given the opportunity, couldn't even articulate how long the wait actually is, and what percentage of applications go longer than that six-week target.

For the sake of time, Mr. Chair, I will move on to a slightly different question. And I'd like to ask the minister that back in July of 2021, her government announced close to 400 new nurse training seats, that they would be added over the course of a few years.

\* (16:10)

Now, in Estimates with the previous minister of Advanced Education, he articulated that there are 259 seats and broke them down by institution. This was in Estimates in the fall of 2022.

So I'm wondering if the minister can provide a current update to this. How many seats have been added to date? What institutions are they? And when will they reach that announced number of 400 new nurse training seats, and which institutions will they be located in?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I do want to sort of address the initial preamble that the member had indicated: that the reason why we're not giving you the numbers is because the year hasn't concluded yet.

So the final numbers are not available yet. Yes, it goes right up to June, so that'll be probably a question you might want to bring back next year's Estimates. They'll have solid numbers for you.

In terms of the nursing seats, the member's correct that there've been a number of announcements that refer back to the 400 seats increase of nursing seats in our post-secondary institutes. And the number that the member had from last fall was 259. We are currently at 289 funded seats—nursing seats—[interjection]—89,

yes, 289. That's an increase of 30, which was located over at the Red River College Polytechnic campus.

Another increase to the programming, we have a one-time increase of 25 seats at the Neepawa rotating site. That's going to be, again, next winter session, so, January '24. Now, that's not going to be an ongoing permanent site at this time. Right now, it's being treated as a one-time injection of 25 seats, so, to address, obviously, the needs in the rural areas of Manitoba, to have rurally trained nurses.

And, of course, we announced last fall that there was a capital fund at Red River College Polytechnic for the simulation centre, which will be—and that was October of 2022—and the capital construction will be completed by the fall of '24. That will host 115 nursing seats in total.

So, as you can see with those numbers, that actually puts us above the 400 target, which is actually very good news for Manitoba and for the health-care system.

**Mr. Moses:** Can the minister just clearly explain how much money has been set aside for those expanded nursing seats? And I think it's important to note that nursing seats includes, you know, for the faculty, but also, as we know, people who go into those schools need to have—to take elective courses in other faculties and departments. And so an increased enrolment in nursing means that there is increased programming demands in other departments and universities. And so those subsequent departments might need funding increases as well.

So maybe the minister can—if she can clearly identify how much she's—expanded budget she's allowed for the increased nursing seats.

**Mrs. Guillemard:** So, the total committed amount through the department is \$65.5 million towards the 400 new nursing education seats. So the breakdown of that would be \$50.7 million, which funded the 289 current funded seats; \$12.5 million for the expanded capital costs over at Red River; and then another \$2.1 million for the two-year program at the Neepawa rotating seat site.

So that's broken up into two years of operating funds plus an injection of \$500,000 of capital costs to renovate the space for the training.

**Mr. Moses:** I wanted to now just shift over to Research Manitoba, and I know that it's an interesting topic because it's—under previous ministers, it's been the part of EDIT and it's been part of Advanced

Education, and so, undoubtedly, it plays an important role in universities and the funding that many professors get—and for the research, the ability to attract researchers to Manitoba is an important role.

\* (16:20)

And we know that research is one of the powerful spill-off impacts—positive spin-off impacts into not only universities but into our economy. And, you know, I think it's important to also note that funding for Research Manitoba has decreased under this current government from roughly \$18 million down to—17, 18 million down to about \$12 million or so now. That means that there is less research dollars floating around in Manitoba—makes it harder for researchers to attract national grants.

And so I wanted to ask the minister, instead of talking about the specific funding for Research Manitoba, what she thinks the impact of that change to Research Manitoba's funding has had on colleges and universities, and the opportunities for people to be doing good research here in Manitoba, and whether she's urging her government to take a different course or not.

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, I can confirm that, you know, the research funding aspect is still within the economic development and investment and trades department. I think I got that acronym correct.

So, those discussions are better held, in terms of the funding amounts and the dollar amounts, those details could be found by asking the minister for that department.

In terms of my opinion, my opinion is absolutely one of respect for all the researchers here in Manitoba and abroad. I know that they have done amazing work, they have been at the forefront of a number of breakthroughs and discoveries that really puts Manitoba on the map.

My personal support for them is quite high, if that's what the member is asking about and, certainly, that's been discussions with fellow colleagues. We absolutely value what Research Manitoba has brought to the province, and then, essentially, brought that expertise out to the world and benefited the world by the work that they do.

And I know that the department, the EDIT department, absolutely, is in talks with Research Manitoba, and, in fact, I understand that the deputy minister sits on Research Manitoba board. So, I know that those discussions are continuously being had.

I know that the support continues from this government for research and the continued research and discoveries, you know, both presently and into the future that will happen here in Manitoba.

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** I would like to ask the minister if she has any information regarding the grants available to internationally educated nurses to continue their accreditation process. In my—from the information that I have, the grants amount to about \$23,000 for them to—for IENs to be able to finish their accreditation process. I was just wondering if—how this program is going, what kind of uptake this program's had, how much money has been spent so far for this grant—from this grant allocation?

Thank you.

\* (16:30)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** So, in reference to the question about international, educated nurses and the grant program, that does sit within the Economic Development, Investment and Trade Department. So that grant program is earmarked; the \$23,000 is a grant offered for internationally educated nurses in order to complete their language assessment and clinical assessments preparation, and a number of the people who are accessing these grants, sort of, are needing a little extra language training to reach certain benchmarks.

The only interaction that our department has with that is there's a bridging program through Red River College Polytechnic, and that is to sort of augment some of the language needs or benchmark programs needed to prepare the internationally trained nurses in order for the clinical assessment. But we don't deal with the grants.

We have a fully funded program that comes at no cost to the students, but it helps to prepare them for their next stages of getting licensed here in Manitoba.

**MLA Marcelino:** I'd like to thank the minister for that clarification and just continue on, then, with some questions about the bridging program.

I know that they're offered at Red River College, and I was just wondering, has the budget for this bridging programs increased over the last few years? What's the budget for this year's bridging program costs?

And, secondly, I was wondering if the minister has heard or would be open to a student loan program for internationally educated professionals?



**Mrs. Guillemard:** So, that was kind of a two-part question in there.

And I think we have to understand how the—this particular funding comes about. And it is based on a—sort of a formula and the market needs which comes through Health and what they have identified for seats and funding for that seats. And that will increase or decrease depending on the demand and the need to assist individuals who are seeking this particular bridging program, which actually is named—the program itself is named Nurse Re-Entry Program. So, make sure we get the proper title on the record.

\* (16:40)

And the second part of the question was, you know, whether we would consider a loan—a student loan for international health-care professionals, and our provincial student aid programs align with the federal Canadian programs, and that does have a prerequisite of having a permanent residency status.

So those are set at the federal level and we align ourselves at the federal level in terms of the requirements and who would be eligible for student aid. In order to consider any other programs that might provide some aid to international students, that would require a whole brand new program, or a change at the federal level for this coverage.

So I think that that's where we have to, you know, leave it in terms of the answer to that question. We need to stay in alignment with the federal program as we are actually trying to align our programs and streamline the student aid process.

**MLA Marcelino:** I'd just like to clarify for the minister that many internationally educated professionals are different from international students because internationally educated professionals often come here already with the permanent resident's status.

They usually come here through provincial nominee programs or other things like that, so yes, they do have the permanent residency status already.

I'm just hoping that the minister would consider maybe starting talks to—with the federal government or with their department—to start looking at the possibility of a student loan program for internationally educated professionals here in Manitoba.

It's something that many IENs and international medical graduates have indicated would be a very helpful asset to their path towards accreditation.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I appreciate the clarification and, of course, anyone who is coming to learn in Manitoba, regardless of the program that they will be taking, if they are permanent residents and they have that permanent resident status, they would be eligible to apply through the student aid program currently.

So that is available to internationally trained professionals as long as they meet those criteria and they have the permanent residency status.

There's no need to create a new program or set-aside program because they would be eligible under the current program with that status. And I think that that's what the member was looking for clarification on.

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** I'd like to thank the minister for allowing us the opportunity to ask some questions of the department.

Earlier this morning, I had the opportunity to meet with CFS, the Canadian Federation of Students, and we talked about many different subjects. But one specific question was—and I'm hoping to start off the dialogue here—was asking that if there are any plans in place for international students who do not have private health-care plans to begin receiving coverage for reproductive and prenatal health care.

**Mrs. Guillemard:** And before I attempt to answer, just to clarify, did the member specify prenatal health care?

**Ms. Lamoureux:** Yes, specifically prenatal health care, as well as reproductive health coverage, was the language being used with me.

\* (16:50)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I do appreciate the question from the member opposite. I know that when we're sort of talking about health-care coverage—and certainly what we're looking at is quite a large segment of a student body that would proudly be affected by, you know, the needs for prenatal care or reproductive health care.

I know that, when I had met with the CFS Manitoba chapter in the last—what, three weeks, I guess, it was, already—we had a very good discussion about health-care coverage. And one of the main points they made was that they really would like to look at more comprehensive coverage.

They're not—I mean, every—anybody would jump at the chance to have no cost at all, but they recognize, having been in other countries as well, that there is a cost to health care. And they're willing to pay it but they want the proper coverage for whatever condition

that they need assistance in. I encourage them, at that time, that I would absolutely encourage them to talk to the administration of their post-secondary institute—and they represented various post-secondary institutes—in terms of negotiating various packages. One had mentioned that they'd be willing to, you know, even spend a little bit more money if they know that the package itself was more comprehensive, more accessible sort of areas that they could get the care from and the needs they would have.

And I think that that is a very creative approach to look at what kind of negotiated packages could happen at post-secondary institutes that might be more comprehensive than the current three levels that are offered. I know there's three different packages offered at the U of M right now that range in cost from \$600 to \$1,300. So, you kind of, in some respects, get what you pay for. But then you have to understand what is within those packages.

So, I think that there might be some opportunities for, you know, post-secondary institutes to have discussions with the insurance companies to see what packages might be augmented for maybe specific needs, maybe for the prenatal or reproductive needs, and negotiate those into packages that can be a choice for students to buy into.

**Ms. Lamoureux:** Just for the sake of time, here, I'm going to ask two questions together, and if the minister and the department can do the best to answer.

The first question is: Can the minister explain the reason why the percentage of 'apprentinship' certificates issued within six weeks of exam date is decreasing from 95 per cent in 2022-2023 to 80 per cent in 2023-2024? It's found on page 20 of the Estimates book.

As well as, can the minister break down how many individuals are currently receiving financial support to attend post-secondary education?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Just wanted to clarify some numbers.

So, the total amount of students being aided by some of our programs, we've got for the student—or, Manitoba loans, 13,818 students were able to be aided through that program.

The Manitoba Bursary Program was able to help 11,214 students. The Student Aid program was allowed—or, was able to help 16,957 students.

And just as a qualifier, some of those students sort of received money from each one of those programs, so I wouldn't say it's a cumulative number that represents that many students, but some of them were able to be aided by multiple different programs. But those are the numbers that we can provide for those supports.

And then the second question was about the apprenticeship certificates. This was the very first year that we set targets, so it was definitely an 'ambitious'—ambitious target.

And, of course, coming out of the pandemic, it really was unpredictable, you know, come—kind of what the demands would be and all of the outside external pressures that would be.

We feel that 80 per cent is a reasonable target to meet year over year within that six-week time-frame. You've got to verify the credentials, you've got to do a lot of internal work to make sure that you're sending certificates to the people who have earned them.

So, that 80 per cent is reflective of the realities of what we've learned over the last year and some of the demands coming through the department, and we feel that's a much more reasonable goal that we can achieve.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Are there any further questions?

Seeing no further questions, we will now turn to the resolutions, beginning with the second resolution, because we have deferred consideration of the first resolution containing the minister's salary.

At this point, we will allow the 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 His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$814,917,000 for Advanced Education and Training, Advanced Education, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

**IN SESSION**

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield):** The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Monday, April 24, 2023**

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