

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

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey  
Speaker*

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Third Legislature**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
ALTOMARE, Nello, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JACKSON, Grant	Spruce Woods	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon.	Notre Dame	NDP
MOROZ, Mike	River Heights	NDP
MOSES, Jamie, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
MOYES, Mike	Riel	NDP
NARTH, Konrad	La Vérendrye	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon.	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
OXENHAM, Logan	Kirkfield Park	NDP
PANKRATZ, David	Waverley	NDP
PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
SALA, Adrien, Hon.	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHMIDT, Tracy, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
SCHOTT, Rachelle	Kildonan-River East	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SIMARD, Glen, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
SMITH, Bernadette, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Tuxedo	

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 28, 2024

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

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon. Please be seated.

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

**The Speaker:** Introduction of bills?

### COMMITTEE REPORTS

#### Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Seventh Report

**MLA Mintu Sandhu (Chairperson):** I wish to present the seventh report of Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

**Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish):** Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development—

**Some Honourable Members:** Dispense.

**The Speaker:** Dispense.

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

### Meetings

*Your Committee met on May 27, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.*

### Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 29)** – *The Body Armour and Fortified Vehicle Control Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur le contrôle des gilets de protection balistique et des véhicules blindés*
- **Bill (No. 30)** – *The Unexplained Wealth Act (Criminal Property Forfeiture Act and Corporations Act Amended) / Loi sur les richesses inexplicables (modification de la Loi sur la confiscation de biens obtenus ou utilisés criminellement et de la Loi sur les corporations)*
- **Bill (No. 31)** – *The Captured Carbon Storage Act / Loi sur le stockage de carbone capté*
- **Bill (No. 33)** – *The Change of Name Amendment Act (3) / Loi n° 3 modifiant la Loi sur le changement de nom*

- **Bill (No. 34)** – *The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis*
- **Bill (No. 36)** – *The Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les professions de la santé réglementées*
- **Bill (No. 201)** – *The Manitoba Emblems Amendment Act (Provincial Stone) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les emblèmes du Manitoba (désignation de la pierre provinciale)*
- **Bill (No. 211)** – *The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Manitoba Parks Licence Plates) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les conducteurs et les véhicules (plaques d'immatriculation des parcs du Manitoba)*

### Committee Membership

- Mr. BALCAEN
- MLA CHEN
- MLA MOYES
- Mr. NESBITT
- MLA PANKRATZ
- MLA SANDHU

*Your Committee elected MLA SANDHU as the Chairperson.*

*Your Committee elected MLA CHEN as the Vice-Chairperson.*

### Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record:

- Hon. Min. ASAGWARA
- Mr. EWASKO
- Hon. Mr. MOSES
- Hon. Min. NAYLOR
- Hon. Mr. WIEBE
- Mr. WOWCHUK

### Public Presentations

*Your Committee heard the following three presentations on **Bill (No. 31)** – *The Captured Carbon Storage Act / Loi sur le stockage de carbone capté:**

*David Grant, Private citizen  
Andrea Pelletier, Manitoba Energy Justice Coalition  
Eric Reder, Wilderness Committee*

Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 33) – The Change of Name Amendment Act (3) / Loi n° 3 modifiant la Loi sur le changement de nom:**

Jade Null, Private citizen

Rowan Moyes, Sunshine House

Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 36) – The Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les professions de la santé réglementées:**

George Fraser, Private citizen

David Grant, Private citizen

### **Written Submissions**

Your Committee received the following written submission on **Bill (No. 31) – The Captured Carbon Storage Act / Loi sur le stockage de carbone capté:**

Heather Fast, Private citizen

Your Committee received the following written submission on **Bill (No. 201) – The Manitoba Emblems Amendment Act (Provincial Stone) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les emblèmes du Manitoba (désignation de la pierre provinciale):**

Ben McGillivray, Private citizen

### **Bills Considered and Reported**

- **Bill (No. 29) – The Body Armour and Fortified Vehicle Control Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur le contrôle des gilets de protection balistique et des véhicules blindés**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 30) – The Unexplained Wealth Act (Criminal Property Forfeiture Act and Corporations Act Amended) / Loi sur les richesses inexplicables (modification de la Loi sur la confiscation de biens obtenus ou utilisés criminellement et de la Loi sur les corporations)**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 31) – The Captured Carbon Storage Act / Loi sur le stockage de carbone capté**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 33) – The Change of Name Amendment Act (3) / Loi n° 3 modifiant la Loi sur le changement de nom**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 34) – The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 36) – The Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les professions de la santé réglementées**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 201) – The Manitoba Emblems Amendment Act (Provincial Stone) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les emblèmes du Manitoba (désignation de la pierre provinciale)**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 211) – The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Manitoba Parks Licence Plates) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les conducteurs et les véhicules (plaques d'immatriculation des parcs du Manitoba)**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

**MLA Sandhu:** Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for the Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Schott), that the report of the committee be received.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The Speaker:** Tabling of reports? Tabling of reports? No? Ministerial statements?

## **MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

### **LRSB Indigenous Education Team**

**MLA Billie Cross (Seine River):** I'm proud to rise today to honour the Louis Riel School Division Indigenous Education Team, a team that I was part of before becoming an MLA and whose work in educating both students and staff in the Louis Riel School Division is transformational.

They are represented here today by eight members, seated in the gallery. Rosemary Bird, Lorraine Bitchok, Sean Oliver, Joël Tétrault, Earl Skead, Veronique Reynolds, Kelsey Lenaghan and Corey Kapilik.

This team goes into different schools, day in and day out, teaching students and staff about the true history of Canada. They provide education about treaty relationships, land acknowledgements and they empower Indigenous students across the division.

They open themselves up to students and staff and share their personal stories to ensure that others learn in an authentic and meaningful way.

They have done amazing work, like taking students to Culture Camp at Fisher River Cree Nation, and allow students to experience ceremonial activities like sweat lodges. They teach languages like Anishinaabemowin and Cree to students of various ages, but most of all, they challenge colonial thinking.

Their work extends beyond the students, and through their professional development programs, they have helped to educate staff of all levels about the barriers that Indigenous students face and how they can help decolonize systems. They help ensure that every Indigenous student in LRSD will be successful, that they will feel safe and feel like they belong.

I have learned from this team, and it is because of them that I am here today. They continue to inspire me and give me courage to do the work of decolonizing systems in Manitoba, which I now get to do from the Manitoba Legislature.

To the students who are watching in the Golden Boy Room, I want you to know that you belong, you are appreciated and that you can and will accomplish incredible things.

I would like to invite all members to please join me in celebrating these wonderful educators.

### **Recognizing Trails in the Roblin Constituency**

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** With International Trails Day just around the corner, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to recognize two fantastic, volunteer-run organizations in the Roblin constituency: the Friends of the Harte Trail and the Headingley Grand Trunk Trail Association.

From the eastern end of the Roblin constituency in Charleswood, right through to the western boundary at Beaudry park in Headingley, we are incredibly fortunate to have one of Manitoba's best urban

trail systems situated on an abandoned railway bed. The Harte Trail begins in the Assiniboine Forest and runs the length of Charleswood just north of Wilkes Avenue. It's a beautiful wooded trail frequented by deer, birds, foxes and the occasional coyote.

The Friends of the Harte Trail are instrumental in the trail's maintenance and upkeep. Whether installing new dog waste bag stations, planting trees, hosting trail cleanup days or adding new recycling bins along the trail, these volunteers are dedicated to ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience for pedestrians, cyclists and their furry companions.

Further west, along the Headingley Grand Trunk Trail, users will pass through three major prairie ecosystems: tall grass prairie, wetlands and forest. It's impossible to overstate the incredible work that the volunteers of the Headingley Grand Trunk Trail Association have done to make this trail what it is today. The boardwalk is a peaceful oasis of calm, and the nature playground provides trail fun for the littlest hikers. The association is also dedicated to preservation of the many important plants and animals that make their home on the trail.

Where these two trails would meet, they are intersected by the Perimeter Highway, and that's where both of these groups have joined together on a project to get a safe passage across the Perimeter that would connect the two trails. These volunteers have worked so hard over the last couple of years to secure grant funding to conduct feasibility studies outlining the different options, and they've got all the right folks around the table to get this project under way. We are all very excited about this project and the many benefits it will bring to both our communities.

I would like to ask all members to join me in recognizing Diana Juchnowski, Liz Loewen and Karl Gompf of the Headingley Grand Trunk Trail Association, and Philip Jenkinson, Tyler Crichton and Murray Marien, who join us in the gallery today.

On behalf of all the residents of Charleswood and Headingley who benefit from your hard work, thank you for all you do for our beautiful trails.

### **Beverly Ndukwu**

**Mrs. Rachelle Schott (Kildonan-River East):** Honourable Speaker, today I'm joined in the gallery by Beverly Ndukwu, a strong advocate for sickle cell disease and the founder of the Sickle Circle of Manitoba. Bev flew home back to Winnipeg to join us here today and to spread awareness across our great

province of Manitoba for those who are affected. I've known Bev and her family for well over 20 years. Her cause is close to my heart also.

This year, the annual Andrea's Angel Walk will take place on September 7 at Kildonan Park in Kildonan-River East. The walk honours Bev's sister, the late Andrea Ndukwu. Andrea was only seven years old, a fierce warrior who lost her battle with sickle cell. Ever since, Bev has devoted her life to increase awareness of sickle cell through the walk and the work of her organization.

The sickle cell–Sickle Circle of Manitoba is a small, volunteer-based non-profit that supports patients and families affected by the disease.

Sickle cell is the most common form of an inherited blood disorder. Early detection can often allow for timely treatment to prevent irreversible damage, which is why Bev's work is so crucial. The only cure is a stem cell transplant, and if left untreated, there can be serious risks for the patient.

We must amplify the reality of the disease and create more awareness in our communities as it affects so many worldwide.

Please join me in thanking Bev, the Sickle Circle of Manitoba for their inspiring work and dedication to people affected in Manitoba.

Thank you.

### **The Amazing Race in Russell, Manitoba**

**Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River):** I rise here today to recognize the amazing community of Russell.

On May 1 and 2, hometown hero and 2010 Olympic gold medalist in men's skeleton event in Vancouver, BC, Jon Montgomery, brought The Amazing Race Canada to Russell, Manitoba. This was the best-kept secret in the community, and when it was announced publicly a day before the event, the community was bursting in excitement.

Meanwhile, on Main Street, a huge crowd was gathering under the arch for a community barbecue sponsored by Russell Inn and Braendle-Bruce funeral home. The success of the event was truly a community effort. David Klassen, the municipality and Daymon Guillas all provided immense support. Thank you to Wes Anderson and Adrienne Falloon for their tireless work with the production company, as well as the countless volunteers and local staff force.

\* (13:40)

Since 2013, when Jon began to host The Amazing Race Canada, he advocated to bring an episode to his hometown of Russell, and in 2024 his determination became a reality.

Honourable Speaker, I'm not going to share details of the tasks as it would spoil the anticipation and fun, but stay tuned at the end of July or early August when this episode is aired for the world to see.

As Jon Montgomery says, and I quote: It's another beautifully, brilliantly casted season, which captures the essence of our country—that we are diverse.

Thank you.

### **Bannock Babes Collective**

**Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière):** Honourable Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today and recognize the Bannock Babes collective. They are a talented group of Indigenous drag artists who fuse artistry with politics while contributing to their communities. The collective was founded in the summer of 2019 and has since created a space to celebrate the strength of queer Indigenous experiences.

They've been described as the fiercest drag collective in the country. They've brought their artistry to unexpected spaces like The Forks, art galleries, small towns, music festivals, reserve communities and drag story times. Through their intentional presence in spaces that may, on the surface, seem unwelcoming, they're pushing the bounds of people's imaginations on what drag can be, who can be a part of it and what a loving, powerful force it is.

Sunshine House and its mandate are central to the work of the Bannock Babes. From the Mobile Overdose Prevention Site to harm reduction initiatives in First Nations communities, countless projects are meaningfully intertwined with their incredible artistry. Folks in the Chamber may have even had a bannock taco delivered to them by a member of the Bannock Babes in support of these important fundraising initiatives.

The Bannock Babes are a family of aunties, uncles and cousins focused on building each other up through their collective strengths. Their presence ensures future generations of Indigiqueer artists know there's a space for them and that Indigenous drag is foundational to the art in our region.

While some people may say they create magic, the real magic is the everyday work of survival, resistance, love and respect that builds a safe artistically liberating and highly supportive drag community.

While the Bannock Babes collective include over 30 members, we have in the gallery with us today the founding members: Prairie Sky, Feather Talia, Vida Lamour, Local Honey and Anita Stallion. We are also joined by their elders, Gayle Pruden and Willyssa Thunderpuss.

I'd welcome all honourable members to rise and acknowledge the work of the Bannock Babes.

### House Business

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Riel?

**MLA Mike Moyes (Riel):** I rise on House business.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Riel on House business.

**MLA Moyes:** Pursuant to section 44(3) of The Conflict of Interest Act, I'm tabling copies of two complaints I've made to the Ethics Commissioner.

One complaint is in regards to the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson); one complaint is in regards to the former Finance minister, Cliff Cullen.

I'm also tabling supporting documents, specifically a freedom of information response related to both complaints. These documents concern a complaint I've made to the Ethics Commissioner regarding the member for Interlake-Gimli and Cliff Cullen.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** While that is being distributed, I'll take a moment to introduce guests in the gallery. I'd like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us today from The Sickie Circle Manitoba: Beverly Ndukwu, Fort Ndukwu, Jordan Prest, Kevin Ndukwu, Prince Samuel Ndukwu, Dr. Jayson Stoffman and Juliana Ogoms, who are the guests of the honourable member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Schott).

And on behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

We also have with us, seated in the public gallery from Duck Bay School, 15 grade 8 and 9 students under the direction of Valeray Guilbouche, and they're

guests of the honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk).

We have seated in the public gallery from River East Collegiate, 25 grade 9 students under the direction of Anita Stepaniuk, and they are the guests of the honourable member for Rossmere (MLA Schmidt).

Further, I'd like to draw attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us today Glenlyn [*phonetic*] Tan, the vice-president of the Filipino Canadian National Congress and the past president of the Manitoba Association of Filipino Teachers.

Companions of Glenlyn [*phonetic*] Tan are Dr. Lea Aseron Balaga, MD obstetric gynecologist; Dr. Anthony Balaga, MD anesthesiologist and a licensed nurse in the Philippines and the United States; Mikaela Beatrice Balaga, biology student in the Philippines; Mr. Meynardo Maahilan [*phonetic*], previous town councillor in San Juan, Batangas, Philippines, a registered nurse and a chairman of the town's health committee centre; Mrs. Evelyn Maahilan [*phonetic*], an entrepreneur, registered nurse and pharmacist; Mr. Jojo Maahilan [*phonetic*], registered nurse in Manitoba, who are guests of the honourable member for Notre Dame (MLA Marcelino).

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

Further, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have seated with us today Mukhtiar Panesar, Manjit Panesar, Aashna Panesar, who are guests of the honourable member for McPhillips (MLA Devgan).

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

\* \* \*

**The Speaker:** I would also like to point out that today, we have two of our Legislative pages completing their final shift.

Ava Pilote is currently in grade 11 and will be graduating in 2025 from École Héritage Immersion in St. Pierre Jolys, Manitoba. She plans to attend university where she will pursue an education in sciences and medicine as she is passionate about helping others. Ava plans to continue volunteer work in her community and with her army cadets.

She is grateful for the opportunity and experience she received as a page at the Legislature and thankful to those who have shown her support. She acquired a

deeper appreciation and respect for the role of the provincial government has in shaping Manitoba. She plans to share her experience with students at her school and in her community to encourage others to apply for the incredible opportunity. She is honoured to have been able to witness history in the Chamber and participate in its rich traditions.

Ava will pay forward the encouragement and kindness she has received throughout the year.

Congratulations, Ava. We wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

Abigail Bergagnini will be graduating from West Kildonan Collegiate this June. Her hard work and dedication towards her academics have paid off as she is now set to attend the University of Winnipeg in the fall, where she will be majoring in education and minoring in pre-law. She hopes to have a future in politics, maybe even in this Legislature.

As she prepares for this new chapter in her life, she is grateful for the experience she has gained as a page. She has had many amazing memories here and has learned so much about the legislative process. She is confident that in the future, she will use these lessons learned here to be able to make meaningful contributions to society while having a positive impact on others' lives.

She is also very appreciative of everyone at the Legislature who supported her throughout the year. She is particularly thankful to her fellow pages, who she experienced this journey with and who always lend a helping hand.

Everyone in this Legislature has shown her kindness and patience that has made her experience more memorable, so she extends her heartfelt thanks to all.

Congratulations, Abigail. We wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### Holy Trinity Church Preservation Request

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Again, congratulations to Ava and Abigail. Thank you for spending your time here with all of us. And as much as we've taught you, I'm sure you've taught all of us quite a bit.

Honourable Speaker, Winnipeg and Manitoba are home to many architectural marvels. Holy Trinity church at 256 Smith St. is one remarkable building

that is worthy of preservation. Unfortunately, its parishioners say it is facing demolition.

My question is for the Premier: What are you going to do to help preserve this national historical site?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** I want to say to our two pages—the future doctor, future lawyer—all the best on what's next. Please stay in Manitoba.

We'll certainly be willing to work with the parishioners, but what the member opposite needs to answer is why did Heather Stefanson demand information from the highest levels of government on how to issue a licence to Sio Silica during the caretaker convention?

Our colleague from Riel just tabled some very concerning information. Included in it is a briefing note generated for the former premier of Manitoba, Heather Stefanson, about Sio Silica that sought to answer the question I just posed. This was generated on October 6th of 2023, three days after the election, after our team had been elected but before we had been sworn in.

So the question he and every Progressive Conservative needs to answer today: Why did Heather Stefanson request information during the caretaker convention about how to approve a licence for Sio Silica?

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

**Mr. Ewasko:** Once again, we see true evidence of the Premier dodging and deflecting question period. And soon enough, Honourable Speaker, the Premier and the rest of his government colleagues will be in opposition, so they'll be able to ask questions within three years.

There's a role government has to play in preservation of landmarks. But this government has a troubling trend emerging. Faith-based post-secondaries have seen their allocation cut by over 90 per cent. Many faith-based community organizations and summer camps were caught up in the \$4-million Green Team cut, and now Holy Trinity church is facing demolition.

My question, again, for the Premier is simple: Will the government be there to help Holy Trinity church stand for another century to come?

**Mr. Kinew:** If parishioners come forward, we will certainly engage in a conversation with them.



However, the question of the caretaker convention goes to the heart of our democracy. It's about respecting the will of the people.

On October 3rd of 2023, the people of this province elected a new government. However, three days after that election, according to the information that has just been shared by the member for Riel (MLA Moyes), the caretaker convention was violated because Heather Stefanson, the premier at that time, on October 6, requested a briefing note be generated about approving a licence for Sio Silica. That is the same day that their government tried to pressure us into approving a licence to Sio Silica. They tried to rush it through, even without letting us know. We objected and told them to hold off on any licensing decision at least until we were sworn in.

But what's very crucial for Manitobans to pay attention to and to these documents, is that they were contained within an email in which the clerk of the Executive Council—

**The Speaker:** Member's time is expired.

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

**Mr. Ewasko:** So obviously, there's more to come. So more dodging, more deflecting from this Premier. He's always trying to do that in regards to any kind of accountability that this Premier has to show to Manitobans.

There is a process, Honourable Speaker, and I know that the—that everyone on this side of the House is going to follow that process by the Ethics Commissioner.

Again, Honourable Speaker, government has a role to play in the preservation of landmarks and supporting faith-based institutions. When people come to downtown Winnipeg to find architectural and historic treasures, Holy Trinity stands amongst them. They also—they're not only a church: they serve lunch programs, Honourable Speaker, over 10,000 meals a year. This is more than a building and it's worth saving.

One last time, will the Premier and the NDP government be stepping up to work with the City and the federal government to help save Holy Trinity church?

**Mr. Kinew:** If the parishioners come forward with the request, we will certainly entertain it.

But Manitobans come here to see democracy. The caretaker convention is at the heart of a democracy. It

says that no significant public policy decision should be made after an old government is shown the door and before a new government is sworn in.

Yet these documents say that Heather Stefanson requested a breach of the caretaker convention on the Friday following the election. She asked for a briefing note to be generated on approving a new silica mine in the province. Her clerk, the senior civil servant in Manitoba of the day, said in an email related to this note, and I quote: I will continue to state as provided to these ministers that we are in caretaker convention until the new government is sworn in. End quote.

The clerk was aware. What was going on on the other side of the aisle that the clerk had to remind them of the caretaker convention? And perhaps most poignantly today, who are the other ministers to whom she refers?

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

#### **Increase in Violent Crime at Retail Stores Request for Government Plan to Address**

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Once again we see deflecting and dodging by this Premier and there's nothing new with you-know-who, the MLA for Fort Rouge, Honourable Speaker.

We know that despite the promises of this Premier that he would be tough on crime and other violent incidents in our community highlights his government's utter failure. A Food Fare co-owner as well as a family member were recently victims of arson when their vehicles were dowsed with a flammable liquid and set ablaze. This was at 3 p.m. on a Friday afternoon, Honourable Speaker.

Simple question for the Premier: Will he stand in his place and unequivocally condemn this wave of targeted shoplifting that has evolved to arson?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** What took place at Food Fare is unacceptable. I condemn it in no uncertain terms. Our team has worked out—we will—has reached out to the organization. We will have more information to share later this week on actions we are taking in response.

This is new information about the fundamental principle of our democracy being violated by the outgoing PC administration. The allegation that has been made is that they ignored the will of the people and sought to, through back channels, approve a major

mining development in the province after they had lost power.

The clerk of the Executive Council, the senior civil servant in Manitoba, on October 6 raised the alarm: I will continue to state as provided to these ministers, we are in the caretaker convention. Who was she providing that reminder to? Well, elsewhere in the email, it says and I quote: I understand that there has been a request from Finance, from EDIT and Ag ministers for this information. End quote.

So we previously knew that the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) was caught up in this disrespect for our democratic principles, but today we learn also—

**The Speaker:** Member's time is expired.

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

**Mr. Ewasko:** Once again, deflection, deflection, deflection. Doesn't want to answer the questions on his own failing government's record on not only crime, but also on many other things that his government is failing to do for Manitobans.

Businesses have been speaking out on the rising retail and violent crime taking place under this Premier's watch. The owner of one small business on Portage Avenue noted that the criminal harassment has become, I quote, more and more brazen.

Masked assailants armed with bats, a baton, brass knuckles, stormed a business, assaulting staff. This was not New York or Toronto, but just a few kilometres from this very building. In lieu of support from this NDP government, the business owners suggested they may have to place bats throughout the store for the protection of their staff.

My question for the Premier is easy: What is his government doing about it?

\* (14:00)

**Mr. Kinew:** We're bringing together civil society, community, law enforcement. We've already held our first public safety summit. We're taking action to combat retail theft.

Importantly, we also respect the will of the people. That's why we're taking action on public safety. Can the members opposite say the same?

On October 6, they inappropriately pressured our government to try and approve their rushing through an approval of the Sio Silica project. We now see

that not only did the premier of the day, Heather Stefanson, request a briefing note on the same day, but her clerk, the senior civil servant in Manitoba, raised the alarm of the caretaker convention. *[interjection]*

What's significant is not only the heckling of one of the members caught up in this scandal, but also the new information about the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson) also being involved. Furthermore, the Finance minister of the day, Cliff Cullen, is also now shown to be involved.

My question for the members opposite is, how many PC ministers have to be caught up in this thing before it is called a conspiracy?

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

**Mr. Ewasko:** It's unfortunate that the Premier stands in his place and, during question period, which is supposed to be question period, but it seems to be question-and-question period, Honourable Speaker. *[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Ewasko:** It's unfortunate that, again, the Premier's showing he's more showman than statesman.

Whilst our business owners, staff and customers are tired of, and I quote, in quote, theft and vandalism that is only getting worse and worse, the Premier's hollow promises are putting more Manitobans at risk, not only physically, but economically, but he doesn't want to answer to that, Honourable Speaker.

One grocer shared, I quote: If I have to stand in my store and watch people steal, I won't have a store to stand in. I can't afford that. I have to take a stand.

Will this Premier take a stand and advise what he will be doing to protect Manitobans, because his actions to date have been an utter failure, Honourable Speaker. Will he stand in his place, answer these questions about Manitobans' safety, and what are they doing in regards to the rising, rising crime in not only the city—

**The Speaker:** Member's time is expired.

**Mr. Kinew:** We've already invested millions of dollars in law enforcement and bail monitoring measures. And tomorrow, later this week, we will have more information to share about responses to this specific issue.

However, one thing that I will never stop doing is standing up for our democracy. The members opposite engaged in a conspiracy to subvert the will of the people. I've already showed that the premier of the day, Heather Stefanson, asked for a briefing note on the same day that members of their administration tried to ram through an approval of a major mining development.

We know that Kevin Klein, Heather Stefanson, Rochelle Squires, today we learned the member for Interlake-Gimli, the member for Red River North and Cliff Cullen were all involved in this thing.

I will point out that in the email 'concerning' the clerk of the Executive Council, that's not only dated October 6 with the briefing note, the email is from October 12, the same date that Kevin Klein and Rochelle Squires have publicly stated they were inappropriately pressured by other members of the government.

Why did they ram this through—

**The Speaker:** Member's time is expired.

#### **Budget Implementation Act Request to Call BITSA to Committee**

**Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte):** Yesterday I asked the Finance Minister a question about the labour amendment act. He said, I can't speak to that specific question.

When I asked him to—if Manitobans can come speak to the BITSA bill, he said no.

When I asked about the environmental amendment act, the labour amendment act, the seniors advocate act, The Election Financing Act, hydro rates and gas taxes, he said no, no, no and no.

Out of 15 questions I asked him, he didn't answer one question, bringing his total to 82 non-answers in this House.

The Premier (Mr. Kinew) is—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Khan:** —violating democracy in this House. The minister is violating democracy in this House.

The hypocrisy is rich on that side. *[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

The government bench needs to calm themselves down. I'm having trouble hearing the questions and I'm sure you are as well. *[interjection]*

Order, please. I don't need the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Ewasko) chirping in, so please refrain from doing that.

The honourable leader for Fort Whyte—oh, the honourable member for Fort Whyte.

**Mr. Khan:** Sorry, Honourable Speaker. I—am I able to start the question over again, as I don't know—

**The Speaker:** No. *[interjection]* No.

**Mr. Khan:** The hypocrisy is rich on that side of the benches. The Premier is violating Manitobans' democracy, the Minister of Finance is violating Manitobans' democracy.

Will they allow Manitobans to come to this House and speak on this—

**The Speaker:** Member's time is expired.

**Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance):** We're proud of our BITSA bill and the work it does in improving affordability and fixing health care in this province.

But there's a very important question that we need to discuss in this House today, which the Premier has raised, which is the fact that we've learned that even more PC Cabinet ministers tried to break the caretaker convention, including—and this starts at the top—Heather Stefanson, Kevin Klein, Rochelle Squires, the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), and as the Premier mentioned, we've now learned Cliff Cullen and the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson) are all involved in attacking our democracy.

They didn't like the outcome of October 3, and they continued to still try to make major decisions that would affect Manitobans. We reject that decision; we want them to be held to account. We ask, will they stand today and be held accountable for their decision to attack democracy in Manitoba?

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

**Mr. Khan:** I'm going to start by reading a quote: Now, do they answer these questions? Do they face Manitobans? Do they explain to the people? Do they try and make their case as to why they believe that people's bills should go up? No, they don't. That's why they buried this in the back of a piece of legislation in—omnibus bill. That's very terrible, undemocratic piece of legislation; that's very undemocratic.

Who said that, Honourable Speaker? This Premier said that. When you want to talk about violating democracy, that is exactly what this Premier is doing with this budget bill.

Will the Premier allow Manitobans to come to this House and have their democratic right to speak to important bills and legislation?

**MLA Sala:** Honourable Speaker, that BITSA bill delivers on our budget, and it delivers on the important things Manitobans sent us to this Legislature to deliver on, which is fixing health care and making life more affordable.

But again, I know the members opposite don't want to talk about this, because this has major implications for a lot of careers across the way. But let's give this just another shot, here, at hopefully seeing some accountability.

There were many folks across the way today that we've named that—been identified as trying to push to move forward the silica sand project after they lost government. Will they be held accountable? We can see emails that show that the PC ministers didn't care. The clerk, in an email, said, I will continue to state, as provided to these ministers, that we are in caretaker convention until the new government—

**The Speaker:** Member's time is expired.

The member—honourable member for Fort Whyte, on a final supplementary question.

**Mr. Khan:** I have quoted this Premier (Mr. Kinew) at least six times in regards to the 2020 BITSA bill. This Premier says he has made mistakes in the past and he's changed.

Well, proof is in the pudding; nothing has changed. This Premier is violating Manitobans' democracy right in front of our very eyes. This Premier is quoted as saying, is undemocratic, terrible and wrong in 2020, and yet he is doing that exact thing right now to Manitobans.

At the start of question period, he has the audacity and the hypocrisy to stand up and talk about democracy, and he's violating Manitobans.

Will this Premier allow Manitobans to come to this House and have their democratic right to speak to an important legislation they put forward?

**MLA Sala:** There are members in this House who are responsible for violating democracy, and they all sit on that side of the Chamber, right? We know what

happened is a clear violation of The Conflict of Interest Act.

I'll read it out for the members who are chirping in the other side. Quote: A member must not use or communicate information to further the member's private interests or to seek to further another person's private interest.

It is clear, Honourable Speaker, that what they did was to try to further the interests of another party. They're responsible for attacking democracy. Will they answer for their actions?

#### **ISOs at the Crisis Response Centre Request for Equipment and Additional Staff**

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** Health-care workers continue to go to the media to try to get this NDP government to improve safety at the Crisis Response Centre at HSC. A health-care worker told the media that, quote, the entire staff team at the CRC remains very devastated and shaken. They are probably going to be traumatized forever. End quote.

Yet security at the facility is often far away, sharing resources with HSC as a whole. This means that frequently they are unable to intervene in a crisis. The crisis centre is often left without any security available onsite at all.

\* (14:10)

This is the second time I've asked this question. Will the Minister of Health commit to immediately posting full-time institutional safety officers at the Crisis Response Centre?

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** We take the safety and security of front-line health-care providers with the utmost seriousness, and we are expanding ISOs across the province, something the previous government never did. If it were up to the previous PC government, CRC would have no security onsite, and that is shameful. We're going to continue to do better.

But I have a question for my critic. I've been watching her reaction through question period. I'm wondering if she plans to ask her colleagues about their violation of the caretaker convention. I'm wondering if she has questions for the member to her right. Does she have questions for the member to her left, member to her right again, just at the end here, the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson)? Does she believe it was appropriate for them to violate caretaker convention?

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

**Mrs. Cook:** In the most recent critical incident, a safety officer was assigned but was unable to safely intervene.

Since the Health Minister has only provided these officers with pepper gel, in indoor situations, they have no means of intervention that does not endanger themselves. An HSC security officer told the media, quote: Giving us a pepper spray gel is not going to solve anything inside the hospital.

Across the HSC campus, U of M Bannatyne campus safety officers carry batons. Safer indoor interventions like Tasers are available as well.

Will the Minister of Health immediately better equip ISOs in the Health Sciences Centre so they can do their jobs protecting staff and patients?

**The Speaker:** [*inaudible*] Sorry.

**MLA Asagwara:** I've already previously given direction that all ISOs are to be trained on the use of all tools and equipment that will help keep staff and patients safe and secure across our province.

I want to be clear, however: Our government is doing the work that Manitobans elected us to do. Manitobans sent a message to members opposite that they were no longer in charge. So why is it, and I'm asking my critic again, why is it that she supports members in her own caucus violating a democratic principle that upholds governance in this province?

Does she support the member to her right, the member to her further right and the member to her left in their violation of what Manitobans elected governments to do?

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Roblin, on a final supplementary question.

**Mrs. Cook:** In a media article posted just yesterday, security staff at HSC say they don't have the tools that they need and safety remains a key concern for nurses working at HSC; they do not feel safe at work right now. A key reason HSC nurses have not ratified their tentative agreement is because they feel unsafe at work. Darlene Jackson, MNU president, told the media that what nurses lack is immediate support in a crisis.

The NDP could provide this immediate support. They could post more safety officers at HSC in the Crisis Response Centre. They could provide those

officers with the equipment they need to respond to danger, both indoors and out.

Why is this minister choosing not to respond to these desperate pleas for safety interventions?

**MLA Asagwara:** Every single day we are choosing to clean up the mess of the previous government, and that includes making sure that institutional safety officers are on site at HSC, more coming there and across the province, something that never would've happened if Manitobans had not voted out members opposite who took no action for seven and a half years despite having the resources to do so.

That decision making is also reflected in their inability to respect democracy after October the 3rd. Members opposite violated caretaker convention. They said to Manitobans that your voice doesn't matter.

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

**The Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Asagwara:** They're heckling me right now because they don't want to be accountable to Manitobans, a pattern that hasn't changed in eight years for members opposite. That critic could be different; it's clear that she—

**The Speaker:** Member's time is expired.

#### **Wait Times for Child Care Request for Plan to Address**

**Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler):** Honourable Speaker, starting a family should be very exciting time for individuals, but for many Manitobans there is increased stress in trying to line up child care for when they return to work. With a long wait-list all daycares are experiencing across the province, families are desperate to find spots and often need to join wait-lists for 12 to 24 months in advance.

What is the prime—what is the minister doing to address the long wait times that parents are experiencing so that they can go back to work?

**Hon. Nello Altomare (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** I will say that I've answered this question many times in the House. We have outlined in BITSA 5 per cent increase in daily operating expenses; two extra professional development days for people working in the sector; an increase in wages. That member knows that; they understand that.

I want that member to understand this, though, because she's new to the Chamber: The responsibility that a person takes for their words and actions, it's very important here. Do they take responsibility for what happened during that transition period? No, they are not. And what that member needs to ask is, look at the front row, look at the second row and ask her members whether or not they will take responsibility for those reprehensible actions.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Morden-Winkler, on a supplementary question.

### **Child Care at Health Facilities Request for Spaces**

**Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler):** I've heard from my constituents first-hand that health-care workers are turning down extra shifts at hospitals simply because they cannot find access to child care, leaving medical wards and ERs short staffed. We have designated child care at universities; why can't we do the same thing for health-care facilities?

Will this minister commit today to adding child-care spaces to hospitals and support our health-care workers?

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** I appreciate that question from the member opposite. The Minister of Education and myself and our departments are working together to make sure that we take an approach that puts Manitoba families first, and health-care workers across the province first, make sure that their families have the supports they need.

That's why Manitobans elected us on October the 3rd, and that's why we continue to ask, and I'll ask that member now: Does she believe that it's appropriate that Heather Stefanson, Kevin Klein, Rochelle Squires, the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson), which we've now learned all violated that sacred democratic responsibility and did not respect caretaker convention, does she support that, yes or no?

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Morden-Winkler, on a final supplementary question.

### **\$10-a-Day Child Care Timeline for Expansion**

**Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler):** This minister and his colleagues were quick to make promises, but Manitobans are still in the dark about the minister's pledge to expand \$10-a-day daycare.

The Manitoba Child Care Association says they've still heard nothing.

The minister has had months to announce specifics before this—his Premier (Mr. Kinew) called the by-election. School lets out in one month.

When can the Manitoba parents expect to hear details about this program?

**Hon. Nello Altomare (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** Again, I do want to thank the member for that question. It's an important one because, as I said before, we've outlined this throughout the debate process during this session.

In BITSA, it outlines an increase in operating costs for the particular daycare centres. In BITSA, it outlines an increase in wages. In BITSA, it outlines an increase in professional development time. As you can see, this member will be able to support our BITSA bill by voting for it and supporting the early child-care sector in this province.

### **Cancellation of ELA Exam for 2024 Impact on Graduating Students**

**Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods):** Honourable Speaker, today should've been day two of the grade 12 English exam. Students should be writing their tests, but instead they're left wondering what new exam they'll be writing and when they'll be writing it.

They're also wondering how these exams will be weighed and if they'll have their marks returned to them by the end of the school year.

So it's a simple question; I'm not sure why the NDP are so upset about it. Can the minister assure grade 12 students that their graduation will not be unnecessarily delayed because of his decision to abruptly postpone their exam?

**Hon. Nello Altomare (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** I do want to thank the member for that question, as he knows the exams are occurring. We've already answered this question; he can look in Hansard from yesterday.

I do want to reiterate what's really important in this House: that we take responsibility for our actions. I haven't heard or seen any of that from Heather Stefanson, Kevin Klein, Rochelle Squires, the member for Red River North, the member for Interlake-Gimli—nothing. Haven't taken responsibility for those reprehensible actions around breaking of the caretaker convention.

Will anybody on that side of the House stand up and finally take responsibility?

\* (14:20)

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Spruce Woods, on a supplementary question.

#### Directive to Divisions—Minister's Comments

**Mr. Jackson:** Well, I'm glad the minister mentioned Hansard yesterday, because school divisions have shared that they have been asked to revert to the previous pandemic-related testing system and develop their own exams on a school-by-school basis.

That is the exact opposite of what that minister said yesterday in this House when he had said the exam was simply paused, the personal privacy issue would be addressed and the exam would take place before the end of the school year.

So which is it, and why can't this minister keep his story straight when it comes to our public schools?

**MLA Altomare:** Again, Honourable Speaker, as I said yesterday and I'll repeat it for the member: The exams will occur. He knows that this is going to happen. We have mentioned this yesterday; we were very, very clear.

We're also very, very clear about the important lesson we teach in schools, and that is to take responsibility. I know that member's new. Has he asked anybody in the second row if they take responsibility? Has he asked anybody in the front row if they take responsibility? I don't think he has, because you know what, if he did, he might not get the answer he wants.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Spruce Woods, on a final supplementary question.

#### Issues with Exam—Timeframe to Address

**Mr. Jackson:** Honourable Speaker, it's inappropriate for the minister and his deputy minister to imply that this was the default of the department.

Exams aren't written overnight, and in fact, the deputy minister himself admitted in a CBC article, which I will table, that the exam in question was actually developed in 2019. No issue was raised with it, and this member has now had 223 days as Minister of Education to address any concerns he had in the lead-up to June final exams.

If the exam has been written and developed for five years, why did it take until May 24 for this minister to pull it?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** The mistaken question on the English language arts exam was created in 2019 when they were in office. They were in office for more than four years and never noticed the problem with the issue. Our minister and our deputy took immediate action to do what? Once again, clean up a mess that they made.

But while we're talking about deputies, let's talk about the deputy minister to Kevin Klein during the transition period. Let's talk to the deputy minister to the premier, the clerk of the Executive Council. At the behest of the member for Interlake-Gimli, the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), from others in the former PC Cabinet, they asked the clerk to provide information on how to rush this through before our government was sworn in.

The clerk of the Executive Council, who he worked with when he was Heather Stefanson's staff, warned them about the caretaker convention. Was he aware of the violation? Was he involved?

#### \$10-a-Day Child Care Summer Availability Inquiry

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Thank you, Honourable Speaker. *[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Lamoureux:** Last week, I asked the Minister of Education about whether \$10-a-day child care would be available to school-age children this summer.

The Minister of Education cited election blackout rules for not commenting, but it turns out that these rules do not apply to any communication related to a budgetary policy. I table this information for the minister's knowledge.

Manitoba families need to prepare financially as to how much they will be paying for school-age children this summer.

Since the election blackout rules do not apply in this case, can the minister explain if child care will be \$10 a day this summer?

**Hon. Nello Altomare (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** Again, I do want to thank the member for that question. It's a very good question because affordability is at the top of mind of all Manitobans, at the top of mind to the point where throughout our BITSA bill, we have affordability measures, Honourable Speaker, that will address the very pressing monetary concerns of Manitoba families.

It includes a very hefty increase in the operating grants of daycares and also includes an increase in wages, and as well includes an increase in professional development time.

It's an important question. Our BITSA bill contains some of these measures. I hope that member will support it.

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

#### **Program Extension—Funding Concerns**

**MLA Lamoureux:** Honourable Speaker, very basic math, here: 14,000 child-care spaces times 45 days of summer at \$10.80 a day per child would cost the Province nearly \$7 million. The government, however, only budgeted \$2.5 million for extending child care to non-school days.

If the minister won't confirm that \$10-a-day child care will be extended to this summer, will he admit that he severely underfunded the amount needed?

**MLA Altomare:** Again, I do want to thank the member for that question, Honourable Speaker.

I—talking about underfunding the child-care budget, all that member has to do is look at the other side of the House here, consistently underfunded, underperformed in the child-care sector.

Where we're creating up to 8,500 spaces right now, before they were creating 700. And what would happen? It would've taken them 30 years, Honourable Speaker, to get to the point of 23,000. We're going to get that done in the first term.

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

**MLA Lamoureux:** Honourable Speaker, this government committed \$2.5 million, and that's not even half of what is needed to cover affordable child care for Manitoba families this summer.

The Premier (Mr. Kinew) promised, during the election, \$10 million annually to extend \$10-a-day child care for spring break, summer break and holidays, and I table this. That's why it's surprising that, months later, this still hasn't taken effect.

Why did the minister fund only a quarter of what the Premier himself had promised for extending \$10-a-day child care?

**MLA Altomare:** Again, Honourable Speaker, I do want to thank the member for that question, because it's an important one.

Last Friday I met with the sector, and they're very pleased with the investments that this government is putting into early learning and child care. They finally have a real partner.

As far as affordability goes, there is a subsidy program, Honourable Speaker, that is available to families that they can apply to, have their fees reduced to \$2 a day, starting as of right now, to get that done. That member knows that; I hope that she's providing that information to anyone that's asking that question.

Thank you.

#### **Licence Approval for Silica Sand Mine Complaint Filed with Ethics Commissioner**

**MLA Mike Moyes (Riel):** Honourable Speaker, the attempt by Heather Stefanson and members opposite to improperly approve a silica sand mine licence after they lost an election was a dark moment in our province's history.

It has been described by their own former Cabinet colleague as inappropriate, extremely disappointing, unconscionable and corruption.

Now we've learned that two more former PC Cabinet ministers were involved in attempting to breach the caretaker convention and The Conflict of Interest Act.

Can the Finance Minister elaborate on the complaints filed with the Ethics Commissioner earlier today?

**Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance):** I want to thank my colleague for his important work in bringing these concerns forward to the commissioner.

I know all Manitobans are deeply concerned to learn that Heather Stefanson, Kevin Klein, Rochelle Squires, the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson) and Cliff Cullen were all involved in seeking to break the caretaker convention with the goal of ramming through a mining project after the election.

It's clear that they were all involved in trying to give the licence. We've seen an email from the former clerk of the executive that reads, quote: I understand there's been a request from Finance, EDIT and Ag ministers for this information. We're seeing how deep these concerns go.

On this side of the House, we believe in respecting the will of the people. While the PCs seek



to hide their wrongdoing, we're bringing truth to Manitobans. These are serious—

**The Speaker:** Member's time is expired.

### **Increase in Retail Theft Request for Plan to Address**

**Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West):** I see that the NDP are asking more questions than they're giving answers for. It's quite obvious that they're much better as opposition than they are a government.

\* (14:30)

It's only the high-profile incidents that make the media, but we as legislators are hearing about the struggles to keep a business open while retail theft is rampant. Just last night, media responded to an organized theft of almost \$40,000 of high-end instruments from Long & McQuade. Again, ample security precautions in cameras don't deter crime.

What is the minister's real plan for reform, or will he continue to toot his own horn?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** This is a serious issue. Our government is taking action. We will have more to say in terms of a substantive response to this issue of retail theft which is connected to organized crime and which must be stopped. We are tough on crime; we are tough on the causes of crime.

The member opposite, however, should be very concerned about the information shared here today. The caretaker convention is to in—protect the will of the people.

It's to ensure that when we cast our ballots, the ballots that veterans fought to defend, that people in civil society fought to fight for, that those things are respected.

That was violated by the outgoing PC administration, who tried to approve a mine even though they had already lost power.

Again, whose interests were they acting on behalf of? Which private interests were they trying to further? And, most importantly of all, why, beginning with the premier on down, did they refuse to respect the democratic will of the people of Manitoba?

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

### **Introduction of Guests**

**The Speaker:** And I have some more guests in the gallery to introduce.

Joining us in the public gallery, we have Kevin Blashko, Nadine Blashko and Michael Blashko, and they are guests of the honourable member for Lagimodière (Mr. Blashko).

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

### **PETITIONS**

#### **Removal of Federal Carbon Tax**

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The federal government has mandated consumption-based carbon tax, with the stated goal of financially pressuring Canadians to make decisions to reduce their carbon emissions.

(2) Manitoba Hydro estimates that, even with a high-efficiency furnace, the carbon tax is costing the average family over \$200 annually, even more for those with older furnaces.

(3) Home heating in Manitoba is not a choice or a decision for Manitobans to make; it is a necessity of life, with an average of almost 200 days below 0°C annually.

(4) The federal government has selectively removed the carbon tax off of home heating oil in the Atlantic provinces of Canada, but has indicated they have no intention to provide the same relief to Manitobans heating their homes.

(5) Manitoba Hydro indicates that natural gas heating is one of the most affordable options available to Manitobans, and it can be cost prohibitive for households to replace their heating source.

(6) Premiers across Canada, including the Atlantic provinces that benefit from this decision, have collectively sent a letter to the federal government, calling on it to extend the carbon tax exemption to all forms of home heating, with the exception of Manitoba.

(7) Manitoba is one of the only provincial jurisdictions to have not agreed with the stance that all Canadians' home heating bills should be exempt from the carbon tax.

(8) Provincial leadership in other jurisdictions have already committed to removing the federal carbon tax from home heating bills.

We petition this Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to remove the federal carbon tax on home heating bills for all Manitobans to provide them much-needed relief.

This petition is signed by Chantelle Bachman, Brett Mcgrath, Derrick Peitsch and many, many more fine Manitobans, Honourable Speaker.

### **Provincial Trunk Highway 2**

**Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Provincial Trunk Highway 2, PTH 2, is a 315-kilometre, 196-mile highway that runs from the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border to Winnipeg's Perimeter Highway.

(2) A significant portion of PTH 2 runs through the constituency of Spruce Woods, from the border of the rural municipality of Pipestone and the rural municipality of Sifton to the border of the rural municipality of Victoria and the rural municipality of Norfolk-Treherne.

(3) This route is historically significant, as it follows the original path taken in 1874 by the North West Mounted Police in their march west from Fort Dufferin to Fort Whoop-Up.

(4) PTH 2 is a significant 'communiting'-commuting route for Westman families and is also utilized by those in the trade, commerce, tourism, agriculture and agri-food industries.

(5) The condition of PTH 2, from the east side of the town of Souris straight through to the hamlet of Deleau, is in an unacceptable state of disrepair.

(6) The newly appointed Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure has confirmed the department has no plan to refurbish this stretch of road until the 2028-2029 construction season.

(7) The minister outlined that the current 2028-2029 construction plan does not include the stretch of PTH 2 that runs through the town of Souris, but instead starts on the west side of town.

(8) The communities in the area have been clear that any reconstruction of PTH 2 must include the stretch that runs through the town of Souris.

(9) The minister and the Premier have a duty to respond to infrastructure needs identified by rural communities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier and the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to immediately prioritize the reconstruction of Provincial Trunk Highway 2 in the upcoming construction season.

(2) To urge the provincial government to include the stretch of Provincial Trunk Highway 2 that runs through the town of Souris in its reconstruction plans.

This petition has been signed by Gail Williamson, Lyle Adair, Kim Eissner and many, many, many more fine Manitobans.

**The Speaker:** No more petitions?

Grievances?

**Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader):** On House business.

**The Speaker:** The honourable Opposition House Leader, on House business.

**Mr. Johnson:** I am seeking leave for the second reading motion to Bill 37, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, 2024, to be withdrawn and for the subject matter to instead be referred to a standing committee of this House this evening at 6 p.m. to provide Manitobans the opportunity to have their say on this very important bill.

\* (14:40)

**The Speaker:** Is there leave for second reading motion of Bill 37, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, to be withdrawn, and for the subject matter to instead be referred to a standing committee of this House this evening at 6 p.m. to provide Manitobans the opportunity to have their say on this very important bill?

Is there leave?

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**The Speaker:** Leave has been denied.

**ORDERS OF THE DAY***(Continued)***GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

**The Speaker:** So as previously agreed to, this House will now resolve into the Committee of Supply to consider Estimates from the following departments: the Chamber, Executive Council; room 255, Families; room 254, Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care.

The Deputy Speaker will now take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY****(Concurrent Sections)****ROOM 254****HEALTH, SENIORS AND LONG-TERM CARE**

\* (14:50)

**The Chairperson (Rachelle Schott):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** I just wanted to pick up where we left off at the end of our last time in this room. I believe I had asked about the intent behind the clause in the new collective agreement around not allowing nurses to work for an agency and hold positions in that same employment organization and the public system.

I'm just wondering if you could expand on what the intent is, the intended effect of that provision.

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** And while my deputy minister gets a bit of information together on that question, if that's okay, I want to apologize for being a few minutes later getting to the room than I planned and thank everybody, thank the member, my critic, for her patience.

So what I can say, as we get a bit more detail for the member based on that question, is that the collective agreement that has been ratified in most regional health authorities as it pertains to agency, the question that the member's asking, nurses—we want nurses to have flexibility. We want nurses to have the opportunity to work wherever they are excited to work in health care.

\* (15:00)

And so, you know, for seven and a half years, there were no steps taken whatsoever by the previous government to ensure that there was a consistency of the quality and the approach of how agencies were being used to ensure that the fiscal approach being taken was in the best interests of Manitobans, which is why we saw this marked trend in the increasing direction which, I think, Manitobans have made very clear they'd like to see a more responsible fiscal approach when it comes to this particular area.

Again, to be clear, I certainly want for nurses to be able to work in whatever capacities they're most excited to work. Being able to support that reality and making sure that that reality reflects nurses working in the public aspect of the health-care system means that there's a lot of work we have to do to repair damage that was done over seven and a half years: addressing culture in health care, taking steps to make sure that nurses have increased wages.

You know, government being at the table with the representatives, with unions is something that our province hasn't seen. Previously, under the previous administration, nurses were denied a contract for four years. Health-care workers had their wages frozen for, in some cases, almost six years. The impacts of that are devastating. We're seeing the impacts of that mistreatment in our health-care system right now, to this day. It is going to take a tremendous amount of work and heavy lifting to repair that kind of damage.

What does it say to a health-care worker when a government disrespects them for seven and a half years? What does it say to a nurse when a government turn their—turns their back on the collective bargaining process for four years and says we don't believe that you're deserving of the opportunity to have an agreement negotiated in your interests and the interests of people who rely on our health-care system? That does a lot of damage. And so our government has been committed to getting to the table with health-care providers and experts across the province to make sure that they can trust that agreements will be negotiated in good faith.

And so, you know, to your question about agencies, we want for nurses to be able to have agency in where they choose to work and how they choose to work. We also want to support them in having what they need to have the desire to work in the public health-care system.

We're seeing nurses consistently going into the float pool stream, which is something we've invested and enhancing. The float pool is a great—it's a very, very competitive actor in regards to challenging the narrative that agencies are the way to get more work-life balance. The float pool affords that. It affords increased remuneration—compensation, rather. It allows for nurses to have a network of support, collegial support. It allows for them to contribute to benefits and pension, which we know agencies don't provide.

And so, the agreement allows for nurses to have choice. It also supports a consistent delivery of care and quality of who provides that care in a way we have not had previously. And so, prioritizing nurses—what they told us, that, you know, in some cases, they're not even being made aware of shifts that are available. Nurses in the public system at certain sites aren't even being made aware of shifts that are available or the process that shifts get filled. And that's not okay. Having a process in place that provides that clarity is very important.

**Mrs. Cook:** So we talked about this issue a couple of times in question period last week and again in Estimates around the use of agency nurses. And I raised some concerns, and actually, the Free Press echoed those concerns in an editorial this morning. I'm happy to table it. I've got it if the minister wants to see it.

The editorial board called this approach heavy-handed and coercive and raised the very valid question, I think, of whether such a rigid policy that forces nurses to choose between working for an agency or working in the public system could backfire.

So I'm just wondering if the minister could explain how forcing nurses to choose between working for an agency or working in the public system is going to improve the public system, and are they concerned that this is a gamble and that nurses may not make the choice that they are hoping they will make?

\* (15:10)

**MLA Asagwara:** Thank the—my critic for that question.

So to be clear, the line in the agreement that pertains to that and what the member has referenced previously, what the member's tabled previously, isn't accurate. The language that the member is using in terms of forcing people to choose is inaccurate.

And so what we're allowing are for nurses to have more choice, actually. And so, more choice being that if they want to work up to full-time hours, if they want to work part-time and access a vehicle to do that, they can do that through the float pool that will give them increased flexibility, increased compensation, increased benefit to their benefits.

And, you know, what this structure allows for nurses to do and what it allows employers to have is what nurses—we've been hearing nurses say that they want. They want the opportunity to be able to pick up and have in the public system and to have an approach that doesn't deprioritize them being able to provide that care and that structure and that framework.

And so, you know, it's important, again, that for many years, there was no consideration of how should agencies be operating in Manitoba. And now we're in a place where other jurisdictions look at our province and say, my goodness, you know, Manitoba, despite having a per capita demographic far less than, let's say, British Columbia, has a massive amount of agencies operating and really no consistency in terms of how that is rolled out, how those decisions are made, the quality that's being expected from these agencies.

And we've heard very loudly and clearly that nurses and health-care workers and providers and Manitobans want an approach that prioritizes patient care and safety, quality of care, fiscal responsibility, which will allow—and I think everybody has said that they agree: the expenditures on agency nursing in this province is well beyond what it should be, and actions do need to be taken. I've heard that from health-care workers and nurses alike.

And so this structure will allow, and it recognizes, that it's time to modernize the way that we approach scheduling and health care. It gives nurses the opportunity, again, to be able to pick up shifts where they would like to pick up shifts. It gives them a time frame for that work to be done, right? So we're not talking about tomorrow, we're talking about a year from now, and this being in place.

And it gives nurses time to decide what works best for them, not being forced to choose. Nurses, if they want to work in the public system and they want to work in the float pool, great. If they want to work in the public system and continue to work in agency, they can.

This isn't forcing nurses to do anything any which way, but it is allowing nurses to have greater options,

greater flexibility, potentially choose working in the float pool, which will offer them a great package in terms of their practice and work-life balance. And it allows the employer a process to make sure that nurses who do work in the public system are able to actually access opportunities to pick up shifts.

What we've heard, what I've heard from folks is that there is a—there's a pattern of, in some cases, going to agency first and foremost, and nurses in the public system not having the opportunity to pick up shifts that they would like to pick up.

And so this approach will allow for nurses in the float pool to pick up, it'll allow for nurses in the public system to pick up, it will allow for agency nurses to pick up. But what it does is it emphasizes having measures in place that support the strength of a public health-care system; the system that the vast majority of Manitobans want us to move in a direction where it's strengthened again, not cut, like it was for seven and a half years and deprioritized.

I think that's a really important thing to think about and to factor in here is that, you know, it's important that we have actual process in place that prioritizes strengthening basic things like scheduling, which basic, but it can be pretty complex, in the public health-care system.

And so this allows for an approach to be developed with health-care leaders, with front-line staff, with human resources to ensure that there's consistency in the approach and that we're prioritizing our investments, strengthening the public health-care system and, at the same time, giving nurses the opportunity to have improved work-life balance and flexibility in choice.

**Mrs. Cook:** I don't believe I've misrepresented the— the words are pretty clear in the MNU document. A nurse cannot work for an agency and pick up shifts with the agency in the same EO where they hold a position.

So that is forcing nurses to choose. Either you're going to work for the public system in this employment organization or you can work for the agency, but you can't do both. And I understand that that might be something the union wants, but I don't know that that approach is going to serve the best interests of the health-care system as a whole, because we know that one of the reasons nurses go to agencies is for flexibility.

And the minister has talked about the float pool as a means of providing flexibility to nurses. But the

only incentives in this agreement to draw nurses back from agencies to work in the float pool or elsewhere is if they're willing to work full-time hours. And I know the minister knows this, that there are a lot of nurses who don't want to work full-time and cannot work full-time.

I talked to a nurse just last week who called that incentive hurtful and demoralizing. She's unable to work full-time hours, but she's been working all through the pandemic and feels that she's worked incredibly hard. And this incentive is not—she can't get the hours that she would need to achieve this incentive. So if she were working for an agency, that would be no motivation at all to leave the agency and come work for the public system.

So I'm just wondering if the minister has anything up their sleeve to incentivize nurses who don't want to work full-time.

**MLA Asagwara:** I appreciate the question from the member, and I appreciate her implication that maybe I'm a magician part-time, something up my sleeve.

But what I will say is that nurses working part-time do have incentives, and so, you know, as the member can imagine, being a nurse in the health-care system previously, under the previous government, for four years where their wages were frozen, part-time and full-time and casual nurses all had their wages frozen by the previous government who refused to get to the table and bargain in good faith. That has an impact.

I would argue that that certainly affected the ability of nurses to have balance, probably forced nurses, to use language the member has used, forced nurses to pick up more shifts because they—their wages were frozen because they didn't have the ability to negotiate for improved benefits, wages, et cetera.

What this agreement does is it improve is—improves, rather, the wages of part-time nurses. It improves the benefits of part-time nurses and it allows them the flexibility to pick up, if they choose, maybe not up to full-time. But if they do choose to pick up any additional shifts whatsoever, they will have increased compensation as a result of that. There are premiums involved for nurses who work, yes, part-time.

\* (15:20)

And so it is—there are details that, you know, I'm happy to share here at committee that outline how this agreement does provide additional benefits for nurses

working part-time, be it in the remuneration at a fundamental wage level, year over year, be it their benefits being enhanced in a significant way, even for part-time folks, be it increased flexibility to pick up—if they so choose—and to be additionally compensated and contribute to their benefits and pension, if they choose that.

And so I do think it's important to acknowledge that I get the frustration of where many of these nurses who've reached out to the member, as she says, are coming from. I can't imagine how frustrating it must have been for years to have their wages frozen, to have their resources cut, to be forced out of—in some cases—careers they loved because they had a government who didn't respect them.

What this agreement does is provide increased remuneration, improved benefits, increased flexibility and options for nurses to pick up, within their capacity, if they so choose. It also outlines an understanding, an agreement to work collectively to develop nurse-to-patient ratios that will improve the conditions of the work environment and improve the delivery of the quality of care for patients, which is something that we've heard nurses say that they want for a long time, another step.

Even in terms of having that conversation that was never taken under the previous government, these are all steps in a direction that we've been hearing from nurses has been needed—has been desired, rather, for some time. And so, you know, I would hope that when that member is having conversations with folks, with nurses and others, that she has the breadth of the information available to her so that she can offer that, so that she can share that to folks who are reaching out.

Certainly, I do think it's important that nurses have as much and all information, actually, as possible, available to them. And, you know, I use this opportunity to provide that information and reassurance that there are incentives, be it premiums, wage increases, percentage increases, benefit increases, improvements to how they can have pensionable benefits, more work-life balance and flexibility available to them.

And I think that all, in terms of a package, speaks to our commitment to working with nurses, not against them, like they experienced for seven and a half years under the previous administration.

**Mrs. Cook:** This is a very simple question about the float pool. Last time we were in here, the minister

provided the names of lots of facilities where float-pool shifts are available to nurses. I believe most of them were in the North; there were some in Interlake as well.

I'm just wondering, are shifts available for float-pool nurses in the WRHA and at HSC as well?

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the member for that question.

I just want to re-emphasize that the agreement that has been ratified in most RHAs as of now provides more flexibility for nurses. It creates more opportunity for nurses to work where they would like to work. I think it's a really important thing to note that currently, if you are an agency nurse, you can't actually—I guess I shouldn't say that—I'll reword that. Currently, a nurse in Manitoba, let's say working in the public system, can't just pick up anywhere, right.

This agreement will allow nurses that flexibility. It will allow nurses working in the public system to pick up where they would like to offer support. Could be you want to pick up and you want to work at your own site. Could be you have an interest at working at a different site. Could be you have an interest in working in a different region.

It will allow nurses the flexibility to do just that and, in terms of incentives, because the member did ask about that, if you want to do that through the float pool, you have an additional incentive to do that. You'll have increased compensation premium, you'll have the ability to pick up whatever amount—a lot, a little—and have that contribute to your pension.

This agreement actually gives nurses and creates more flexibility for them. It creates more options for nurses to be able to choose from, which is important because, at this current time, nurses don't have that level of flexibility.

It's important to also note, in just speaking toward—maybe I'll add another finer point on that, as well. I do think it's really important for folks to recognize that being able to contribute to your pension, being able to contribute to your benefits, does mean a lot to a lot of nurses. Not to everybody, right. To some folks it's less of a priority than it is to others. But it is significant for a lot of nurses. And this agreement allows for nurses to pick up in ways—again, at a premium—and also contribute to their benefits. And that is significant.

You know, this agreement allows for nurses—because we take, you know, health and wellness

seriously, it's enhancing their benefits package for nurses. You know, they deserve to have enhanced benefits. They work really hard.

So there are benefits here and there are incentives here that do matter, that do make a difference. And again, being able to come to the table and show nurses that they have a government that is willing and wanting to do that, and to hear them is important.

I do think that, you know, Manitoba's also due for a modernization of the way that we approach staffing and scheduling in the province. And so that work, modernizing a system for nurses, is also really critical, and taking into account that we're going to keep doing this work. We're going to keep evolving what this looks like to benefit nurses and to, first and foremost, benefit patients.

To the member's question about geographical needs, you know, certainly yes, there's—the float pool is really noted in the North; it's noted in the North, Interlake. It's expanded to Southern and Prairie Mountain Health. We know that those are areas that have unique staffing challenges, unique staffing needs, and it's crucial that we support these regions and give them levers they can pull to address their staffing needs.

The float pool has been an incredible, incredible tool for these regional health authorities to be able to staff and to staff in safe ways that ensure a quality of care and consistency of care. That's something, I've heard stories—I have heard stories—from folks in rural and northern Manitoba who have had nurses assigned through an agency and, you know, nurses showing up who have never practised in that particular area of health care.

I'm a psychiatric nurse. If somebody told me tomorrow to go and work in re-sus in an ER, I might listen. I—it's—nobody wants that. It takes a particular, specific skill set, and we need to make sure that we have a confident sense of how nurses are being assigned to sites. And I've heard a number of incidents where those decisions and how they're being made aren't aligned with making sure that the quality of patient care is where it needs to be.

So this agreement provides more flexibility. We're going to work with regional health authorities and nurses to make sure that the situations that I've heard of are mitigated and that patients can count on getting the quality of care that they deserve in the system.

\* (15:30)

**Mrs. Cook:** So we've talked about this issue in QP as well, but I wanted to bring it to the table here so that we could discuss it a little more thoroughly without the time constraints and the heckling and the political atmosphere that we get in there sometimes. It's around the safety issue because we know that that's one of the things that prevented the tentative agreement from being ratified with the Shared Health nurses in particular at HSC.

So, just in terms of getting the lay of the land, can the minister tell me how many institutional safety officers are currently in place, specifically at HSC? But I'd be interested in the numbers for other sites as well, and how many are still being trained and expected to be brought online?

**MLA Asagwara:** We're going to work on getting that information for the member. That's a good question.

I do want to make sure that I clarify my previous comments. And so we are going to continue to invest in enhancing the float pool. WRHA has significantly less of a need than rural and northern communities. We see that just based on the numbers, and so the priority, obviously, in making sure that areas of highest need have the supports that they need through the float pool.

But we're going to continue to invest in enhancing the float pool, be it WRHA and at more sites across the province, most definitely. And as we see nurses continue to reach out to the float pool and join the team there, which is happening on a daily basis, we'll continue to do that.

As I stated previously, we more than doubled the number of nurses in the float pool. We're onboarding a number of folks; a significant number of those folks are coming back to the public system from private, which is really good. I think that's a really, really good sign that folks feel confident and hopeful about working in the public system, and that's what we want. We want for people to have choice, but we also want for people to choose to support public health care because it's a fundamental Canadian value that we uphold. It's something that Manitobans depend on. Again, the vast majority of Manitobans count on that as being a place that they can access quality health care.

You know, the member asks about safety and security at our sites and specifically around institutional safety officers. And I appreciate that she's raised that. I've said it previously, and I want to reassure the member that I wasn't trying to be cheeky

or funny about the fact that when we came into government and I was being briefed on different issues, and I asked specifically about safety because it is something that I was hearing—we continue to hear, that members continue to hear—I was literally shocked.

I was jaw-dropped when I was told that there was no plan whatsoever outlined by the previous administration to have institutional safety officers at sites across the province. And, you know, if it were that there had been a little bit of a plan or some work being done, I would state that. But there was no strategy in terms of how these officers were going to be trained, you know, when they would be coming online in the system. None of that had been detailed, which shocked me given the concerns we'd been hearing for years around safety and security.

Part of how we were able to get institutional safety officers on site by the spring was by giving very clear direction that this needed to be done, that we have the tool of legislation in place, we have—which had been in place for, at that point, well over two years, maybe two and a half years. It had already been passed and it was just a matter of receiving direction from the ministerial office to say this is a priority. Institutional safety officers need to be trained in Manitoba. They need to be hired and they need to be on site at HSC and other places across the province.

Now, you know, when I have conversations during the listening tour, and I'll name—Selkirk Mental Health Centre is a good example. So we had a listening tour stop there. We had a huge turnout there. And I have a tremendous amount of respect for the security folks who work anywhere in the province. I, you know, I have a personal, historic relationship professionally with Selkirk Mental Health Centre. You get to know these folks who show up every day to provide safety and security to patients and staff; they take their jobs very seriously. And it says a lot to folks when they know that legislation's been passed to enhance safety and security, but they saw no action taken for years.

And the conversations I've had with folks at HSC and SMHC and other places was relief. When they were told that this work is finally being done, folks were going to be on site by the spring, that work is going to be ongoing—there's no, we're going to check the box and say our work here is done—that work is ongoing, they were relieved.

And so being able to finally have institutional safety officers on site at HSC as one step of many parts of how we're going to continue to enhance safety

and security was long overdue. But, you know, it's an important step that our government has taken alongside health leaders and folks in the front lines who have made very clear this is a priority.

And we're going to continue to train ISOs, we're going to continue to educate ISOs as more information is brought forward in terms of how we can enhance their skill sets and we're going to continue to make sure that, across the province, safety and security is prioritized in our hospitals.

**Mrs. Cook:** Just to reiterate my question: How many ISOs are currently working at the various sites, and how many are in training and expected to be online at some point soon?

**MLA Asagwara:** I'm a little premature, I'm still getting a bit more information, but I will—I'll provide the member information that I do have available, and I may have some more information in this session to offer.

And I appreciate the member's patience as I offer a lot of commentary, because I do think it's important. It's an opportunity for me to put this information on the record, and I do think it's valuable. These are issues that I take very seriously, and these are issues that Manitobans take very seriously.

\* (15:40)

One of the things that I really appreciate about the way that we are approaching the institutional safety officer training program is that it's also creating a number of jobs. And so the economic benefit of a program like this is that wherever these folks are going to be working and where they're being trained is also an opportunity for folks in the local area to access this training and opportunity.

To me, that's pretty great, especially when we think about the importance of health care as a community of health-care providers. Whatever role, whatever hat you're wearing in the health-care system, you're part of that broader health-care team. It's important for that broader health-care team to look like the communities that are being served.

And so when you have training opportunities like this, institutional safety officers, the approach that is being taken is to also support people having a chance at getting trained in this regard. Institutional safety officers are receiving the kind of training that, you know, includes de-escalation, it includes technical training around tools and equipment, it includes, you



know, culturally informed aspects of training as well. It's pretty comprehensive.

And that is really advantageous for a lot of folks who, you know, maybe want to broaden their skill sets beyond this as well. And making sure that we are taking an approach that creates good-paying, stable jobs is key. It's a good economic approach and strategy as well.

The training—the number around how many folks are in training right now might be a little tricky for me to provide. I'm going to try to get clarity on that, but we've got cohorts that are being trained regularly, and so those numbers may vary at any given time.

But I can share with the member right now: we've got 37 institutional safety officers at Health Sciences Centre, and that is of the forty-two—forty? Forty-two, who will be there entirely when it's totally at complement. We have four at St. Boniface; they've been there now for several weeks. We've got 16 that graduated not long ago and will be at St. Boniface and Victoria general hospital. We have a number of institutional safety officers that will be joining those folks right away. So I believe about 16 additional institutional safety officers will be joining that location in the coming weeks.

And so, again, we are—we're training cohorts of institutional safety officers consistently, and we're rolling them out across the province. The member asked a question earlier in question period today that I think is an important one and speaks to, at the heart of it, I think, whether or not there's an openness or an opportunity to, if we see that there are needs that are arising in different areas, are we able to meet those needs.

And I want to, you know, reassure the member that the answer to that question is yes, that, you know, there are sites across the province, as we continue to work with our partners to make sure that safety and security is a priority, that we are also going to make sure that we can take steps that are appropriate to have enhanced safety and security measures.

And so, like I said, this—the work in terms of safety and security across our hospitals and across the province in health care, there's no end point for us. It's a matter of being open to listening, working with leaders in this area, hearing what the needs are on a site-to-site basis in some cases and developing an approach that makes good sense.

And so there are—number of steps being taken in terms of addressing safety and security. HSC's a good

example because in the last number of months we've seen particular incidents of concern around safety and security really decrease because of measures that have been taken. Every report of compromised safety and security is taken very seriously, and we'll continue to adapt and take steps that continue to move us in a better direction.

**Mrs. Cook:** Continuing in the same vein, I just wanted to ask about the equipment that the ISOs have. I know initially, when they first got on the job, there was a little bit of confusion about what equipment would or wouldn't be available to them, and I believe the minister ended up issuing a directive to get them specific tools.

So what tools do ISOs have? We know they have pepper gel. What else do they have when they're on site?

**MLA Asagwara:** I appreciate this question from the member. I would like to talk about tools in the fulsome sense of that language.

Institutional safety officers are trained in a myriad of ways to deal with situations best addressed by institutional safety officers. So they are trained in de-escalation; they are trained in use of force—appropriate use of force; they are trained in how to appropriately subdue a person; they are trained in terms of cultural awareness.

And I understand the questions around what tools they have in terms of is it pepper gel or is it a baton, like in other sites. But I do think it's really important to understand that the conversation around safety and security does not begin and end with pepper gel and batons, that it is about increasing staffing resources on sites, at locations, to make sure that the reasons why we see increased pressures and tensions at certain locations is due to lack of resources. It is creating an environment and culture in health care where people, no matter who you are, can access a service and be met with dignity and respect, which I know health-care workers show up every single day delivering care rooted in that.

However, it's important that we equip people with the education and awareness in training to understand that people are very diverse and how to meet diverse needs when they arrive on site. And so the tools that institutional safety officers are equipped with to deal with escalated situations are folks who are presenting in a state of distress, which, if you don't have the training, perhaps you won't be able to interpret distress for what it is. They're equipped with those tools.

My direction was provided and given because of the outcome of the—what's the language? *[interjection]* Thank you—the arbitrator's report, and health-care leaders, front-line folks were waiting for that report. I was—issuing a directive for institutional safety officers to carry pepper gel was a decision that I made because it was appropriate and necessary, and a tool that institutional safety officers having on their person allows them to access what they think and are trained, rather, to think is best in those circumstances.

Another directive that I have given is for institutional safety officers to be fully trained on the scope of tools and equipment that could be available to them. Currently they do have pepper gel, they do have handcuffs, they are trained and able to administer naloxone, if needed.

And so, again, the scope of what institutional safety officers are trained with and trained for is to match the needs that we're seeing in terms of presentation to these settings. I also want to be clear, as I've stated previously, that this is a living process, meaning that should issues arise, we are going to continue to do the work of developing approaches that help keep people safe and secure.

One initiative that I think is really important to acknowledge is Community Safety Host program. I don't know if the member's aware of this program or not, but it's an initiative that has been very successful in sites like Mount Carmel Clinic; millennial library's a good example. These are—this is a program that engages local community in roles of connecting with folks who are accessing these services in a good way, meets people where they're at, understands demographically the needs of folks who might be presenting, and it's a really, really effective program.

And that's something that our government is actively working with partners, taking a good look at it, alongside many, many other measures to see how we can strengthen safety and security in our health-care system in a way that is dignified, in a way that puts people first, and in a way, when I've talked to health-care workers and community and patients alike, they agree fundamentally is an approach that they want to see taken by government and by health leadership. It humanizes the conversation when we're talking about safety and security, which is really important.

\* (15:50)

**Mrs. Cook:** I appreciate where the minister's coming from with this. I think, you know, we always hope that

situations can be de-escalated safely, and, you know, non-violent crisis intervention is always the goal. But I don't know that it's always realistic.

And I just want to quote from—this is from a CBC article. It's public. I didn't quote—use this quote in QP today. But this is the scope of what's going on in the Crisis Response Centre at HSC. This is the words of the health-care worker, not my words. Quote: We are a 24-7 facility, and we never close our doors. We have folks who are high on meth; we have folks who are psychotic, suicidal, homicidal. End quote.

And I don't think in those situations that relying on ISOs to be able to safely de-escalate the situation without the use of a different kind of tool is always going to be realistic. Darlene Jackson called it verbal judo in the media and was very clear that it was insufficient to keep patients and staff safe.

So we've got pepper gel; we've got handcuffs; we've got the ability to administer naloxone, which is critical, of course. But will the minister consider giving ISOs batons or Tasers or other tools that they may need in situations which are hopefully very few and far between in order to keep patients and staff safe?

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the member for that question.

Certainly, I do not purport to be an expert in security. That's not my background or my training, as much as I do a lot of reading—

**An Honourable Member:** A magician.

**MLA Asagwara:** Pardon?

**An Honourable Member:** And you're a magician.

**MLA Asagwara:** And I'm a magician.

However, you know, I take this area and this issue very seriously. And so we do consult with and work with experts in this area in terms of the best approaches. And we will continue to work with experts in this area in terms of the best approaches.

I do want to be very clear that—and I say this having been in situations on the front lines of health care as a nurse, and I've dealt with every single one of those situations: folks who are actively under the influence of methamphetamines, folks who are acutely psychotic, folks who are actively suicidal, folks who are acutely and actively homicidal. Been in every single one of those situations.

Each of those situations are very nuanced, challenging, and in some of those situations, the most appropriate response—and in the case of the CRC—is police responding. And it's important to note that institutional safety officers and many other folks are being trained to have a scope that allows them to access many tools and utilize their skills in many situations and to appropriately respond in those situations.

And we'll continue to learn as situations arise how to better support institutional safety officers, how we can evolve, you know, the existing training, et cetera. This is—you know, it's a brand-new approach in Manitoba. Again, it's an approach that had it been implemented three years ago, we would be three years further along in terms of what this needs to look like in Manitoba.

Unfortunately, no action was taken under the previous government. We were able to get institutional safety officers on site in a very aggressive timeline. We're talking about six months. And that is a testament to what can happen when there's clear understanding of what our objectives are and folks are willing to work in collaboration to execute an objective.

But it's also important to note that there are circumstances that are—can be really challenging and beyond the scope of institutional safety officers, despite their best efforts, beyond the scope of health-care providers, despite their best efforts, and where you do need to call first responders who can provide the most appropriate response.

And I recognize and I empathize and I think about and I care for deeply front-line health-care workers, including those at CRC who are navigating the impacts of a situation that obviously has affected first and foremost a family—and, you know, my heart is with that family that is navigating this loss. And what we do as a government and what we do as a health-care system, what we need to do, what we are doing, is listening to these front-line health-care workers, working with folks to ensure that the approaches we take moving forward equip people with the tools and resources that they need.

And so I do want to address the comment of verbal judo. I—that's a comment that—it's not a comment that I would make or use. I mean, I certainly respect the perspective of Ms. Jackson who made that remark, and I certainly appreciate her advocacy for increased safety and security on sites.

I highly respect and value the skill set required to be a person who can effectively de-escalate escalated situations, and it is a unique skill set. It's something that our first responders—it's something that police officers are trained to do. It's something that we see police officers, RCMP, security officers, institutional safety officers, front-line health-care professionals of all stripes utilize the skills of de-escalation.

And it is a unique skill set, and I want to recognize that. I want to recognize that because it takes training; it takes commitment to utilizing that approach and the prioritization of the safety of others that makes it effective. And I just want to acknowledge we've got a number of first responders and health-care providers who effectively use that skill on the front lines of health care and across the province every day, and I really do respect and admire that.

**Mrs. Cook:** I want to switch gears and ask about the status of request for supply arrangements or request for service agreements. I've seen always the acronym RFSAs, but I've seen it in—you know, to mean two different things, but I think the minister and the staff probably know what I'm referring to. The RFSAs that were signed under the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force, I'd like to ask the minister how many of those have been renewed or re-signed for the 2024 fiscal year.

\* (16:00)

**MLA Asagwara:** I just want to clarify some information I gave the member and put on the record that was incorrect. So St. Boniface actually has 10 institutional safety officers on site; think I had reported four? Yes, okay, so glad to correct that.

We anticipate—not anticipate; we're working toward having well over 100 institutional safety officers across the province, and, as I stated, this is ongoing work for—we're constantly evaluating and assessing where the needs are and what the opportunities to enhance that safety and security provision need to look like in the province.

To that point, and I do want to share—you know, I talked a bit about this not only being an important step that we're taking in terms of safety and security at particular sites but also an important economic opportunity; it's creating a number of jobs across the province. And there's an effort being made specifically in Portage la Prairie, which I think the member would be interested in, around having a partnership with the Portage la Prairie CSOs that exist currently who've

been brought on board, but partnering with surrounding First Nations communities who have First Nations safety officers, and so working together to ensure access to this opportunity in terms of training and job opportunities, as well.

And, you know, I touched on previously the importance of representation in these roles anywhere in health care, the importance of representation everywhere in health care. And representation at the heart of it also speaks to safety and security in our health-care system. We know that systemic discrimination, systemic racism, in health care is real. We know it exists in systems and that it hurts people. We also know that for some folks in some communities, being able to access health care and see somebody right out of the gate that looks like you, and maybe has a shared life experience or understands your experience, can bring down that anxiety and create a sense of safety and security for people. And so having folks who are in the role of institutional safety officers responsible for enhanced safety and security of patients and staff alike reflect back to Manitobans what they look like is one step. Being intentional about that is one way that we can improve safety and security fundamentally, and that goes for, you know, all roles across the health-care system.

And so we've had a number of really meaningful conversations and really meaningful dialogue with First Nations communities and governments about how do we work together to support health care being a place where no matter who you are, you feel safe, secure and you can access care that inherently meets your needs as a person. And so this work, this effort to have a partnership that would see surrounding communities also have access to this opportunity is really important. It's important to the safety and security of health care. It's important economically. It's important in terms of representation in health care, and, again, when we talk about safety and security, it's a broader conversation that I really—I welcome folks into so that we're applying not such a narrow lens to what that means for Manitobans.

So I just wanted to share that bit of information with the member and make sure that she had those details, as well. And, you know, I also, as she's well aware, if she's got questions beyond Estimates, she can reach out any time and I'm happy to have that conversation with her.

In terms of her previous question, I'm just getting a bit more detail, and I should be able to answer that shortly.

**Mrs. Cook:** Okay, so while we're waiting for information about the RFSAs that was in my previous question, I would also like to know how many procedures have been performed as a result of those RFSAs so far in fiscal year 2024-25. I realize that's only just under two months, so I don't know how much information is available, but I would be very interested to know.

\* (16:10)

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the member for that question.

I want to start by providing a bit of clarity as to the workings of the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force that I have to say, coming into this role, it was incredibly difficult to make sense of what was going on with that task force.

Again, another big, old surprise for me after being sworn in was just how little clarity, line of sight existed into what was going on and how decisions were being made with that task force. Consistently, I would ask people all kinds of questions about how decisions were being made, and consistently nobody seemed to have a line of sight, which is really concerning. That's been publicly reported.

You know, you think that a structure that had a budget that significant would have increased measures of accountability. They did not. I heard from chief medical officers, I heard from health leaders across the province that nobody had a line of sight as to how decisions were being made, but everybody had concerns about dollar amounts like \$7.6 million being spent on annual salaries in less than two years.

Everybody had concerns with, in some cases, many cases, spending up to seven times per surgery what would be spent here in Manitoba and to the point where chief medical officers of health signed an open letter finally calling for what was meant to be, my understanding, our understanding, to be a temporary task force to be concluded because of how disruptive it was and the lack of transparency and insight into how decisions were being made.

I mean, even folks who accessed care beyond our borders via the task force made comments calling the approach to the task force and the spending lunacy, outrageous and said they were embarrassed that that amount of money was being sent—almost \$40 million—out of province, that salaries, people were being compensated exorbitant amounts of money on that task force with no accountability whatsoever. None.

\* (16:20)

And so the decision to invest in the public system, improve our capacity here in Manitoba, that is not a novel idea. Investing in improving capacity in your own health-care system, in your own province, you would think would be a fundamental value and approach that is well understood. But we saw the opposite of that for seven and a half years.

We saw cuts to the public health-care system, we saw lack of capacity in the health-care system intentionally, we saw disorganization and chaos caused intentionally by the previous government. And what we've been able to do in our short months as a new administration is invest in improving capacity right here in Manitoba. Take those millions of dollars that would've been sent to San Diego, you know, North Dakota, Cleveland, wherever, and invest them in establishing the province's first-ever spine program right here in Manitoba. That's a massive step in the right direction that I know Manitobans are thrilled about. They'll finally be able to receive care in Manitoba for spine-health issues. It'll also take pressure off our emergency departments.

The other thing that we are doing is eliminating what some folks, some experts have called a shoebox approach to who is—who it is that maintains lists in terms of patient care, and centralizing the way in which folks are organized for surgeries. I see the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson) maybe is confused as to why I said shoebox approach. I'll explain that, quite literally, there are folks who, they keep a hold of their own lists, as surgeons, versus the lists being more centralized and allowing for Manitobans to be slated for surgeries in a way that prioritizes them being slated for surgeries and getting that care in a timely manner.

And so all of this work is being done and invested in in the public system to allow for better transparency, to allow for Manitobans to get the care that they need. And we're seeing the benefits of that. We're seeing folks who have been waiting for, in some cases three years, two and a half years, for surgeries, finally get those surgeries. None of that was addressed by the previous approach, which is unfortunate. If a different approach had been taken, those folks would've gotten timely care in Manitoba.

**Mrs. Cook:** That is a lot of context. I will reiterate my question. I'll—just going to put out there the information that I'm looking for, make it easy for your staff. I'd like to know what RFSAs are in place, with whom, for what services and how many services they'll be providing.

**MLA Asagwara:** Thank you to the member for that question.

I'll provide some information now in terms of the RFSAs. And I do want to note that, again, the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force was always articulated to be temporary, never meant to be permanent. And I don't think the members ever disputed that, meant to be a short-term structure.

\* (16:30)

And I do reflect on the fact that, you know, I wonder about if seven—over—almost \$8 million hadn't been spent on exorbitant, outlandish salaries, how much more of a dent could have been made during that time in addressing wait-lists? It's incredible that you can spend almost \$40 million outside of the country for care and still not have addressed a wait-list, many wait-lists.

You know, the fact that we have folks who were waiting, had been waiting up until—I talked to folks recently—for the duration of the existence of the task force, where wait-lists were never addressed. They had no approach to having a streamlined approach to how their information was being dealt with. You know, folks could have had a spinal program in place years prior. You know, that is something to reflect on, definitely.

And investing in capacity in the public system is a priority that Manitobans have made very clear to us they want to see executed beyond the spine program in many other ways as well. And we're seeing that. We're seeing volumes in the system increase.

In terms of the RFSAs, I can tell that member, you know, that the contracts with the RFSAs, majority of them were ongoing. And so the ones that were not were due to capacity being enhanced in the public system, for the most part. So Assiniboine clinic, Winnipeg Clinic, Manitoba Clinic had contracts for cystoscopies, endoscopies. And Selkirk, Victoria and St. Boniface Hospital all have improved and increased capacity in the system to deliver that care to manage those necessary volumes, which is great.

Men's Health Clinic is one provider where cystoscopies were shifted because they do such a significant amount of urology-focused care. Good—and I'll just kind of run the list for the member so that she has a better sense of what I'm talking about.

I apologize in advance for the mispronunciation of some of these words. But we've got cystoscopies,

vasectomies, radical inguinal–nope–orchiectomy. I can spell that for you, if you'd like.

**An Honourable Member:** I'll wait for Hansard.

**MLA Asagwara:** All right.

We've got orchiopexy, microscope–microscopic, rather, varicocelelectomy, hydrocelelectomy, spermatocelelectomy, Nesbit–he's not–House? Is Greg in the room? Sorry. Nesbit plication, circumcision, GreenLight TURP–how do I–*[interjection]*–oh, thank you.

Epididymectomy; cystoscopy, biopsy and fulguration; cystoscopy and urethral dilation; excision, genital lesion; dorsal slit frenulectomy; t-u-r-b-t; I'm just–TURBT; Foley catheter insertion. So that's the extent for Men's Health Clinic. So you can see it's–heavy urology focus, right?

Moving on to the other RFSAs. So the rest were continued at Visions *[phonetic]*, at Western, at Maples, at Cardio 1. And Visions *[phonetic]* is responsible for cataracts; Western for cataracts and peds dental and gyn–gynecological procedures. Maples is doing spine–that's right–shoulders and knees: so, ortho; joints. And Cardio 1 is echo–

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

**Mrs. Cook:** I would invite the minister to finish their response.

\* (16:40)

**MLA Asagwara:** And I thank the member for that question.

Just want to provide a bit more clarity, and I appreciate her patience. I was getting a bit more information for her.

So one other RFSAs was with CancerCare, and that was specific to prostate cytosopes. That's technically not ongoing because it was made base, so you wouldn't see it as an existing RFSAs because it's now part of the fundamental program. So we just enhanced their capacity permanently there.

And as I said previously, you know, where we're able to invest in enhancing capacity and volume in the public system–because that's attached to resources as well, right, staffing opportunities, et cetera, and having consistencies there–we're doing them.

I'd like to give a bit of an example of the value in terms of investing locally in our own province. So for every surgery, for every, let's say, hip or knee surgery done in Sanford, we could have done seven of those here in Manitoba. Same Sanford; same with the spine

surgeries. We could have done, for every one done out of the country, we could have done 10 in Manitoba.

When I think about the exorbitant salaries paid, you know, we have a salary for an IT lead that was paid, let's just call it \$567,000, and you know, for that, we could have had over 100 Manitobans get a hip or knee surgery here in Manitoba.

We have folks who are making, you know, \$200,000 in executive assistant roles. Thirty-eight Manitobans–36 Manitobans could have had their surgeries done in Manitoba with that investment. Even more Manitobans, if you had it done in Southern Health, because they have really, if you've been out that way, have figured out a really great way to do ortho surgeries as day surgeries. They've got a really great set-up in the Southern Health region in this regard.

And the fascinating thing in conversation with the leaders of that region was that they have been eager to work with government to enhance ortho capacity, but under the previous government nobody had bothered to ask. Nobody had bothered to reach out and work with them and say, hey, you figured something out here where you're delivering this care in a way that really does meet people's needs. And instead of observing that and working with them to enhance capacity in Manitoba, very close to an urban setting, nobody would work with them from government.

And so, you know, what we're doing is recognizing that Manitobans want a government that is fiscally responsible. We came into office, met with a \$1.6-billion deficit, and Manitobans had given us a mandate to be responsible with their public dollars and to invest their resources wisely. And we're doing that by enhancing capacity in our public health-care system and working with our partners, working with partners at Western, Maples, CardioOne, Visions, you know, CancerCare, et cetera, to make sure Manitobans can get access to the services that they need. And we'll continue to do that work to the benefit of Manitobans.

So, again, I can't emphasize it enough. I think everybody agrees. Manitobans have certainly made clear that it is absolutely outrageous that we were spending seven and 10 times the amount of money to send people away from home for care that we could have built capacity around for years here in our own province.

And it's been really wonderful working with partners across the province to enhance access to care and to make sure that we're moving in a direction where

we're meaningfully not only addressing the waits that the task force did not eliminate or the backlogs they didn't eliminate, but also enhancing the opportunity Manitobans have to get the care that they need in their own communities. And we'll keep doing that work with folks across the system.

**Mrs. Cook:** I'd like to cede the floor to our colleague from Tyndall Park, who's been waiting patiently.

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** And I'd like to thank my colleague from Roblin for allowing me a little bit of time here this afternoon.

Can the minister provide a specific update as to how many of the Auditor General's recommendations related to the Protection for Persons in Care Office have been implemented to date?

\* (16:50)

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux) for the question. I know that the member has a particular interest in this area; she's asked about it in QP previously, and I'm happy to provide a bit more clarity.

So the member asked about the 12 recommendations. I can advise the member that 11 of the 12 have been completed. The one outstanding recommendation is No. 8, which the target date of completion is this coming month—so, June. And that's the recommendation that the PPCO implement a risk-prioritization process for investigations and document it in their policy manual. So that is almost completed.

What I do want to also touch on is the incredible amount of work that has gone into clearing that backlog. Folks have, you know, understandably, importantly, they took the concerns brought forward very seriously. And, you know, it's—the report was horrifying, quite frankly. Some of the—some of what was in that report—really, really horrifying. And the impact on families, obviously, traumatic for some families.

And so the work that the department has undertaken to rectify the outstanding investigations and alleviate concerns around that work being done, I really want to commend them for that. Folks have put in a tremendous amount of necessary effort to address that backlog and also to ensure that moving forward there's an approach that doesn't see that be repeated in Manitoba.

The member, the—for Tyndall Park is well aware that there is additional work being done beyond that to provide recommendations on what the path forward looks like, and I think that that's a really important

conversation because we know that many families and seniors are counting on hearing that feedback. They want clarity around what next steps are going to look like in Manitoba. I know the member has advocated for years about an independent seniors advocate. That will be established in Manitoba; our government is going to make that happen.

But there's a—even a more broad, bigger conversation around not only the advocate but also safety, security, protection of seniors.

What are the options that are available to us, based on what we've learned from the challenges and the failings under the previous government to address concerns that were brought forward in terms of investigations not being completed, not being completed in a timely way, lack of transparency and communication with families, a lack of accountability to the process. All of that. There's a lot of—there are a lot of pieces in this that we are doing the work with experts to address long term.

So short term, you know, being able to reassure the member and other folks across the province that these recommendations were taken very seriously. They're nearly completed. There's one last piece that needs to be done and will be next month.

I'm always happy to have a conversation with the member about this work and to provide clarity. I know that she's got good relationships in community and she's talking to folks all the time about this particular issue and others, and I do want for her to be able—I do want for the member to be able to go out in community and provide up-to-date information as folks need it. So where I can, beyond this committee, I'm always happy to provide that insight for the member.

And I also want to put on the record that the approach that will be taken under our government in terms of next steps will be informed by community. It will be informed by experts.

And again, as I've said about previous issues in this committee, there's no endpoint in terms of, if we do these things, the work is done. The work will be ongoing. It's really fundamentally important to me and to our team and to our government that we keep an open mind and that we're a listening government so that as new ideas—maybe even novel concepts—are brought forward, that we have the ability and the flexibility to incorporate that into our approach.

So I would ask that member and encourage that member, if she ever has other ideas or she's hearing things in community that she thinks would really be

helpful and useful, we want to work with her and with anybody whose priority is making sure that seniors have—are protected, have access to the services and care that they need and that they are aware of the work that's being done.

Because I think so often, some of the anxiety that people—

**The Chairperson:** The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

## ROOM 255

### FAMILIES

\* (14:50)

**The Chairperson (Robert Loiselle):** 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.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler):** Thank you very much for having me here. I'm standing in for the critic for Families, so I'm just happy to be here today.

I just was wondering if the Minister of Families would be able to introduce her—all of her staff to me, just so I know who is here today.

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families):** Miigwech and welcome to today. I'm pleased to introduce my staff.

So, I have my deputy minister of Department of Families, Michelle Dubik. I have Brenda Feng, assistant deputy minister responsible for the administration and finance division. Jason Lacasse, assistant deputy minister responsible for community service delivery division. Christina Moody, assistant deputy minister responsible for child and youth services division. Elizabeth Debecka [*phonetic*]—Debicki [*phonetic*]—I'm gonna try—Debicka? Okay, Debicka. Okay, assistant deputy minister responsible for Indigenous Jurisdiction Transition Office. Heidi Wurmman, assistant deputy minister responsible for the corporate services division. Ernest Kwan, assistant deputy minister responsible for the technology and transformation division.

And today, we also have Nadine Smith, assistant director for gender-based violence program; and Alex Krosney, my director of ministerial affairs.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Thank you very much for introducing everybody. It's just nice to get to know people's faces, so thank you.

I'd like to start with asking a question about the disabilities, specifically.

Can the minister tell us how many individuals or families involved with Children's disABILITY Services are currently being serviced by the two pilot projects that are providing out-of-home respite services for children with exceptional care needs?

\* (15:00)

**MLA Fontaine:** Miigwech for the question.

Out-of-home respite services provide enhanced services to children ages 10 to 17, open to Children's disABILITY Services. Through these respite homes, a range of supplement services are provided including clinical support services, occupational therapy, psychological services, behavioural supports and counselling that are available to the child, the family or support staff.

Families are eligible for out-of-home respite services when they are experiencing unmanageable and—challenges related to exceptionally high needs of their child that cannot be safely managed by other available supports, putting the child at risk of placement in the care of Child and Family Services.

Both pilots were originally developed to deliver different service models. The first pilot, delivered by St. Amant, now an ongoing service, as part of the Children's disABILITY Services budget, was designed to provide short-stay, out-of-home, overnight respite for children aged 10 to 17, up to 91 nights per year.

The second pilot, delivered by New Directions, was initially intended to provide only longer-stay respite in two streams. The first was for stays up to 180 nights per year and the second was transitional—a transitional model for adolescents who will be supported by Community Living disABILITY when they turn 18.

St. Amant out-of-home respite services include two three-bed short-stay homes, one in Winnipeg and one in Brandon. Both homes opened in 2022.

New Directions' out-of-home respite services include one four-bed short-stay home, two three-bed transitional homes. All three homes are located in Winnipeg and opened in 2023.

These services have prevented—and here's, I think, the key and material point of these respite homes,



which I think are the most important—is that they have prevented those children from coming into the care of Child and Family Services. So I think it's a really good model to be able to support families.

And I've had the opportunity to visit both New Directions and St. Amant, and I have to say, St. Amant, they produced a video on the respite homes that they have in Winnipeg and Brandon, and, as I often do on these things, I cried watching the video. It was so beautiful to watch the work that they're doing and just how appreciative the family and the parents were.

And in the video they highlight the different activities that children that go there overnight participate in. And I was asking, like, what were some of the, you know, circumstances in which children come there, and—a whole range of circumstances. Like, I just need a break, please, you know, whatever, to some families, like, needing a vacation. Right? Like, five-, seven-day vacation. A lot of Manitobans don't necessarily know—and, you know, why would they, in some respects—that, you know, when you're a family with a child with disabilities, you sometimes never get a break. You never get a vacation.

I remember meeting, in my first election back in 2016, I met this couple, this Métis couple, and they had a daughter with disabilities. And I think at that time she was, like, 28, 29, something like that, and she was saying to me that she hadn't had a vacation in 30 years, and she was saying, like, they were exhausted. But it was also because they really appreciated their respite worker, they had a really good relationship with their respite worker, but they just weren't at a place where they felt confident enough to leave their daughter.

And so, for your question, I just want to say that, as of August 2023, a total of 69 children have been referred to the service, which is exceeding the capacity for the six beds.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Thank you for that information. That's really good information to hear about, because it's so important to all of us.

You just had mentioned 69 children. Do you know how many of those children would have been children that would have been in care or that would have had to go—would have been in care that don't now get this extra support? Do you know the amounts of that number?

**MLA Fontaine:** Can I just ask a clarifying question? Do you mean out of these 69 children, is your question, how many potentially would have gone into care, is that what you mean?

**An Honourable Member:** Like, you had said that children in—going into care—or, okay, can you clarify, I guess, what you said about the children in care?

**The Chairperson:** Sorry, the honourable Minister of Families.

**MLA Fontaine:** So, just to clarify, you know, often what we see in child welfare—and my colleague will know this as well, right—is that if parents—all parents—don't necessarily have the supports that they need, often the state, child welfare, will come in and apprehend children, because they don't have the supports.

And I think the beauty of this is that for families that are incredibly overwhelmed and tired and all of these things and trying to navigate a system for their child, the potential for their children to get apprehended is a real potential, and this offers that opportunity that their children, instead of getting apprehended, they can get a break, and they can get the support. And so these are children that have not come into care because of the respite and because of this program.

\* (15:10)

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Just for—so, 69 children or youth have been able to use that, those two programs, this last—well that's great. Okay. In total.

**MLA Fontaine:** Yes, so, 69 children, and I'm assuming it's, you know, maybe 69 families. It could be a little bit less, but 69 children-slash-maybe a little bit less, 69 families, have been able to use these programs and—to get the supports that they need, and have been a mitigating factor in not having—not being apprehended in child and—child welfare.

I wanted to say something else, if that's okay. I wanted to just share that, again, these were pilot—well, St. Amant was a pilot project. Was New Directions a part—so, both of them were pilot projects.

But now, effective the '24-25 fiscal year, St. Amant out-of-home respite services are now a permanent part of Children's disABILITY Services program, with a \$2.1-million investment annually. And outcomes for New Directions' project is currently being evaluated to determine that the services meet the program objectives, which will inform our future program enhancements or support.

So I think that it's important—again, everything that we've said, it helps keep children out of child welfare. We don't want children in child welfare, right? So it helps support families and all of that, but it—the St. Amant program, like I said, is so great and so appreciative by the families. It's now—and we've seen the results of it. So now it is a permanent part of the CDS program.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** My question—I guess that's great to hear. So, because this is such a great program and we're doing—there's so much being done, is there a plan to expand that capacity, for more respite?

**MLA Fontaine:** So, I appreciate that question, and as I stated in my previous answer, we evaluated the St. Amant program, and, as I said, we'd made it a permanent program in the department.

We're currently evaluating New Directions to see if it's met the outcomes and all of that, and we'll make a decision after that.

And then we are continuing to monitor the demand and then the outcomes, which would then inform the way the department is—the road the department is going to engage on. This is a part of the continuation of respite services.

So—as I'm sure you know, there's a variety of different respite services—so again, I think that it is a good program and good services to be able to prevent children from coming into child welfare. And I just want to—I want to say this, that I think it's important to put this out there, as well, was that, as I said, you know, preventing children from coming into care, but there were actually some families that—who were actively planning for a placement and then didn't have to again, right, from this type of respite or this type of programming.

And then, of course, in general, we're doing a variety of different things to prevent children coming into care, right? And I know that the member would know that. I've brought it up in the House several times, that we're really leaning into and moving towards customary and kinship care, right? And so that, again, children, you know, are able to stay with their family or their extended families in their communities and within their nations. But that's one of the things that we're looking at in respect of having children not come in care.

And as I've said before and I've said in the House, like, all indicators is that children do better when they're with their families, and that is children with disabilities and that is children that are, you know,

with nondisabilities. They do better when they're with their families and in their communities and supported by, you know, their supports and the people that they trust.

And so, you know, my priority since becoming minister is to ensure that we are doing the best for children, for all children and for the next generation of leadership, leaders and community here in Manitoba. And one of them is to prevent as many children as possible coming into care.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** I appreciate that, and I agree. We're all on the same page with the children; we want the best for them and do the best we can for them. So that just leads me to my next question in regards to that.

Is—what kind of plan is there then? We've heard there's Winnipeg, these—like St. Amant, amazing place, great resources and respite options for families.

What is the goal, then, for rural? Rural and northern Manitoba?

So there's a lot of families, like you've said, that are, you know, they want—you—we want to keep the kids close to their families, or the youth close to their families. A lot of these families aren't close to Winnipeg, whether they're southern, northern Manitoba, any of those, you know, areas.

So what are we doing—what are you doing—what's the minister doing in that situation to keep respite close to home for those families?

\* (15:20)

**MLA Fontaine:** So we're going to—so, first off, you're absolutely right. But respite is available, as you know. I know you're a foster mom, so I know that you would have intimate knowledge of this: respite is available all across the province, right? And it's important supports for folks, not only in our urban areas but in rural and Northern communities as well.

And we're continuously looking for opportunities on how to strengthen, or what the needs are, what the gaps are. In fact, I just—I don't know what day it is today, it's Tuesday—I think last week I had a Zoom call with some parents out in the Westman region. I think they were all in Dauphin. I think I had a Zoom call with, like, three or four families who wanted to just discuss—and I wanted to hear directly from families some of the things that they're navigating with children—with their children with disabilities.

So we talked about the education system. We talked about respite. We talked about the services that they

need. They talked about, you know, the ability to connect with other families in that particular geographic region.

And so I'm, as minister responsible, always trying to look at opportunities, and to understand, really, to have a good sense of an environmental scan of what's going on across the province. So we're always looking at opportunities to, you know, strengthen the program. Respite is available everywhere.

I want to share this: we did make an increase, an increased support. So Budget 2024 invests over \$6.3 million to increase capacity in Children's disability Services program: \$3 million is set aside to enhance services, and then \$3.3 million is dedicated towards increasing family support services, including respite, child development services, autism outreach, behavioral services, supplies and equipment, therapies and other support services.

And so, through these investments, more families raising a child with disability will have access to the supports and services they require. And like I said, that was one of the things that we discussed last week on my Zoom call, was the supports that families need.

It's important to hear directly from families and, you know, they've shared that they're able to access that respite, but, you know, I think that we can always do better, or certainly to continue to ensure that we're paying attention for those opportunities to do better.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Can the minister provide the total of—the total number of Manitobans currently supported by the Manitoba Supports for Persons with Disabilities program?

**MLA Fontaine:** As of March 31, 2024, we have 10,498 Manitobans on the program.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** How many organizations does the Manitoba Accessibility Office currently provide training to—or provide services to?

\* (15:30)

**MLA Fontaine:** So I'm not going to be able to give you an accurate number. I can kind of give you—it's, it would be impossible. And I'll give you—I'll explain why.

There's about, like, 40,000 organizations that fall under the act in Manitoba, and so it would be impossible. But I do want to share some things here. So, for the standards, so for the AMA standards, so: the Accessible Customer Service Standard Regulation which was enacted in 2015; the Accessible Employ-

ment Standard Regulation enacted in 2019; the Accessible Information and Communication Standard Regulation, enacted in 2022.

We have self-guided online training modules, that folks can go online and do those training modules. We are just in the process of getting those training modules for the Accessible Transportation Standard Regulation. It's not ready yet, obviously; that was just 2024.

And so there is that training. The Manitoba Accessibility Office and the Manitoba accessible secretariat—compliance secretariat also do regular presentations to businesses or to community groups all over Manitoba.

So there's—they—there's that type of training as well, and then there's also training that other organizations provide, and a good example is, like, the Manitoba league for persons with disabilities. They do that training for businesses and community—schools, and all of that as well.

So it's impossible for me to give you an accurate number, but there's quite a bit. But we do have that online. And then as well the Manitoba accessibility endowment fund, which gives out \$50,000 per project—for projects per year. I don't know how many—how many did we give out? *[interjection]* About—there we go.

The Manitoba—thank you. The Manitoba Accessibility Fund is enhancing community collaboration to promote accessibility and is assisting in eliminating barriers to customer service, employment, information and communications, and gives approximately \$800,000 in grants each year.

And those grants—so those, you know, again, community organizations or schools or whatever it may be that apply for those \$50,000 grants can also be trained or can do training. So it's a lot. And I know that I said it somewhere; don't know where I said it, but, you know, Manitoba is—oh, I said it yesterday in the ministerial statement. We've taken a lead across the country in respect of accessibility, right? For the longest time, it was us and Ontario, and so now, we have some other jurisdictions that are on board with their own accessibility legislation.

But we really had taken a lead, and we've got the five pillar standards, and you know we've got one more to enact, so we're doing good. Is it—you know, we still have work to do, obviously, but I think it's something that we can, all of us—it doesn't matter which side of the House you sit on, as Manitobans, you know, we're committed to ensuring that all

Manitobans have accessibility. So I wanted to share that.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Thank you for that answer. That was a lot of great information.

So, in regards to the training that is offered through different organizations and through the Internet and all these different programs that are happening, is there regulated training, I guess, is my question. Does the Province monitor to make sure that there is a standard of training, that everybody kind of has the same basic knowledge when they're working with youth and young adults, or adults with disabilities?

**MLA Fontaine:** Miigwech for that question.

In spring of 2021, the Manitoba Accessibility Office launched the online learning portal on accessibility M-A-mb.ca. The portal features training modules that assist affected organizations with meeting the requirements of the accessibility standards for customer service and employment. The information and communication standard module will be launched this spring, 2024. These training modules are available for organizations to download and include part of their internal online training systems.

And then, again, the compliance secretariat monitors to ensure organizations are taking the training that they're required to do. And again, you know, I think I'd been minister maybe three days I'm going to say, maybe four days, maybe. And I went—one of the first—one of the things that I did as minister was I went to visit a bunch of our offices and the Department of Families has give or take, like 1,700 staff.

And, originally, I was thinking, oh, I'm going to go meet all the staff. And I was thinking, oh I'm going to bake everybody cookies. Until I found out, like, we have 1,700 staff. I was like oh, okay, let's modify that plan. And so, I spent a, you know, a good portion of the couple of months that I was minister just going to visit offices, so going to meet almost every single person that was working in the offices in the city. I'm actually planning a northern tour to go visit some of our staff in other community organizations.

And, actually, the first office that I went to—and again, I was maybe minister for like, three or four days, not even. The first office that I went to was the Manitoba Accessibility Office, and I got to sit down with all of the staff at the office and talk about the good work that they're doing, including the folks that are, you know, doing the compliance training, who travel all over Manitoba ensuring that they're working with organizations and having community meetings

and stuff like that, really taking seriously the training that they provide to ensure that, you know, we are moving towards accessibility.

So I want to just give a little shout-out to the Manitoba Accessibility Office. They do really, really good work and they're really dedicated individuals that are—that really believe in the work that they're doing and I'm blessed to work with them.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** I'd like to thank the minister for that answer. Thank you.

Yes, I agree that it's the work that they do for our vulnerable—our people with intellectual and physical disabilities is so important and there's so many amazing programs and workers—support workers—and all over their province that take care of the—our loved ones that need extra help. And it's wonderful to see what—how people come alongside those that need help.

One of the questions I have is, is there a reporting system of some kind, just to ensure organizations that are providing care for people who are vulnerable, that have disabilities: intellectual, physical disabilities. Is there a reporting program to ensure that they are being taken care of and looked after, if there's any complaints or any situations that are not positive. Is there something in that area for them, for somebody to call a report and it would get investigated.

\* (15:40)

**MLA Fontaine:** So, miigwech for that question. I think it was a great question.

We do have a variety of reporting mechanisms. Let me just start with the act has a duty for all Manitobans to report abuse and neglect of Manitobans with intellectual disabilities. So all of us, under the act, have that responsibility, should we see that. So that's one.

We have residential care licensing. We have licensing providers and staff who—that monitor services; we've got folks that regularly visit agencies to ensure that there's no issues and they're complying; we've got agencies that are required to report incidents, so they're required to report incidents, which are then reviewed by our licence and protection staff; we have—oh geez, what did I write here? I don't know what I wrote here.

Any—who—we also have funding agreements, right, with providers. And in those funding agreements, they're required to provide the department with reports, so both financial and operational, which would include any of those incidents. We have a protection unit that would report—or, would look into, investigate

any incidents. And, I don't know what I was writing there—the agency is often contracted to provide—it doesn't look like any further was written. Okay, yes.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Thank you to the minister for that answer. It's such an important thing that we don't always think about but it's important part. So you—the minister mentioned the act and reporting to that.

Who do they—if that's—who do they report to under the act, specifically, and who is that that would be reporting in regards to the act?

**MLA Fontaine:** Anyone who believes that an adult living with an intellectual disability is or is likely to be abused and neglected can report it directly to Provincial Protection Investigation Unit by telephone at 204-945-0471, or toll-free at 1-855-536-0482, or by completing and submitting an online report form. And that's the Community Living disABILITY Services abuse and neglect reporting form; that's what it's called.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** When will the Improving Quality of Life Employment Pilot Project be live to support young adults living with intellectual disabilities so that they are able to gain meaningful employment?

\* (15:50)

**MLA Fontaine:** I appreciate that question. Miigwech for it.

The Community Living disABILITY Services program has launched the Improving Quality of Life Employment Pilot Project to improve access to employment supports for adults living with an intellectual disability.

In February of 2024, the Department of Families launched the two-year Improving Quality of Life Employment Pilot Project; i.e., it is live right now, as of February. This initiative will enable approximately 30 young adults—miigwech—living with an intellectual disability, aged 18 to 20, who have traditionally not been eligible for supported employment services as they are still in high school, to explore potential opportunities for job readiness, skill development and competitive employment.

The employment pilot project will also support an additional yet-to-be-determined number of young adults living with an intellectual disability, aged 21 to 25, who are already eligible for but are not currently accessing supported employment services. Young adults living with an intellectual disability who are interested in participating in the employment pilot project will be asked to complete an employment

discovery tool, which will enable individuals to provide information about their interest in and experience with training, volunteering and employment.

The Department of Families is partnering with Community Living disability Services funded service providers in the communities of Beausejour, Brandon, Selkirk, Steinbach and Winnipeg to deliver the pilot project. These service providers expressed their interest in participating in the pilot project and have the required expertise in providing employment services. Once an individual completes the employment discovery tool, the information included in the tool will be shared with their community service worker to inform the planning and potential placement in the pilot project.

Individuals will participate in the pilot program for one year. At the end of the one-year period, individuals will be asked to complete a follow-up employment discovery tool regarding their experience participating in the pilot project. At the conclusion of the pilot project, the Department of Families will evaluate outcomes, including the effectiveness of supporting adults in early adulthood to achieve employment.

The Department of Families encourages all adults living with an intellectual disability who are eligible for the Community Living disABILITY Services and are interested in employment to discuss service options with their community service worker.

The Department of Families continues to review employment services that are available to adults living with an intellectual disability in other jurisdictions to inform future service planning. We know that adults with an intellectual disability are 'underrepresented' in the labour market.

In '22-23, 5 per cent of the 7,962 individuals on the CLDS 'caselord'—caseload were employed. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, CLDS took an under—a preliminary strategic redevelopment work to explore the expansion of its service menu to include more employment service options. This work has paused as a result of the pandemic; however, the department recently developed a multi-phased improving quality life initiative, beginning with a renewed focus on employment.

I think—again, I don't have much time left but I think all of us in the room would agree that we need to do more to be able to support Manitobans with intellectual disabilities to be able to get employment. And I recently, before I was elected, I did a tour at DASCH.

My youngest son—actually, just until May 24—had been working at DASCH. Then they didn't get their federal funding so now he doesn't have a summer job. But, anyway, he was working there for about a year and a half, and working with Manitobans with intellectual disabilities. And it—DASCH does such good work.

But they have, like, a training-for-work program that—the way they've got it set up is—

**The Chairperson:** The member's time is expired.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Thank you to the minister for that information. That answered a lot of my questions, so thank you.

And I agree 100 per cent with you. I believe that as—in-well, just in my past before I was an MLA, I had a deli so I owned a small eatery and—with my son and we had—somebody placed in our business, as well for that exact reason. And she has intellectual disability and she is one of our hardest workers and it's just a joy to have her working there. And she's been there for over five years, so she's—and a previous young lady used to work for us, as well and she didn't want to leave. She was able to graduate and go into a regular job that was stable and so that was really good to see. And she's the birthday manager because she wanted to stay on, so it's pretty sweet.

So I definitely understand how important it is for us to engage and to make sure that they feel like they're a part of our society because they are an important part for us and for them, and they contribute so much to our lives, the lives of them—of everybody around them so it's such an important thing.

So I—one of the questions I would have then, in this pilot project, you named a few of the different places. Is there an intention to expand this to the rural areas—more of the rural areas, the smaller communities, northern communities? There's so many with intellectual disabilities that want to get involved and have a job and get that experience, so that's just one of the questions I have.

**MLA Fontaine:** So when we were starting, there was an expression of interest that went all across Manitoba but including to rural and northern organizations and agencies and were invited to self-identify their interest to participate. It's a pilot project. Of course, we're going to be evaluating it, but we're obviously, you know, interested in further—again, once we've evaluated and see what the outcomes are, you know, committed to looking at this further. But right now, we're still at the pilot stage so I can't commit beyond that.

But again, I think it's important to know that we do have Beausejour, Brandon, Selkirk, Steinbach and Winnipeg, so we do have—okay, I think your colleague—*[interjection]*—there you go, there you go.

And so, you know, I think that we've shown a commitment to rural Manitoba as well, but certainly, again, I think that there's always room to improve. But we'll evaluate that as we go along.

\* (16:00)

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Just would like to ask the minister, for example, because our business at the time got involved, and it was, like, such a—amazing experience for both us and the client that was working in—and working in our business. So how do you—how does the minister come about choosing the organization or the businesses or the places that these individuals are placed in to work in this pilot project for that year?

**MLA Fontaine:** So miigwech for that question.

So, as I said in my previous one, the expression of interest. So it's the agencies that were selected that reach out to businesses and to organizations, right? And so those agencies will, from a strength-based approach, work with individuals to develop skill development, right, like their resumes, how to do interviews, whatever. So really supporting the individuals and really promoting independence.

And what I think is really interesting about this pilot project, and I would imagine that all of us would agree, that it's communities that know their communities best. They know what the needs are in their communities. And so I think that's a beautiful thing about this pilot project, is that everybody is on board about supporting, again, from that strength-based perspective of that individual, but also understanding the community and what those community needs are and supporting that in that way through this pilot project.

Again, I was just going to say, because I got cut off, the other opportunity, about DASCH and places like DASCH. I don't know if they still do it. I know that they kind of stopped during COVID, and I can't remember what they were called. I don't know if it was Life's Journey, where they would connect you with somebody in your constituency that was working somewhere in your constituency, and you'd get to spend like an hour, an hour and a half, with that individual, and that individual will show you your—their job. I don't know if—I can't remember the program. I don't know if they do it anymore, but I remember it must have been, like, I'd say like 2017 or something like that, I was connected with a young Indigenous man with

intellectual disabilities who had been working at Salisbury House on Main Street in St. Johns.

And so he and I spent, like, about an hour, hour and a half together, and I was washing dishes with him. But he was telling me how to do it, and I didn't do it properly at one point, and he really very gently said, you know, this is the way you do it. And then we went out and served tables together, and he was such a joy to be around. Like, he was just such a joy. And so I haven't seen him since. I know that he was working there for a little bit, and then, of course, the pandemic happened and so then—and then Salisbury closed down.

And so I—but I often think about him because he really is that quintessential example of why it's so important for folks, for all Manitobans, but obviously with—for Manitobans with intellectual disabilities—to be given that opportunity for employment. All of us, right, get a sense of pride and purpose in our work and everybody deserves that and that independence.

So, I can't say enough about this program or organizations like DASCH—or this other one, which I can't remember the name—that really support Manitobans to give them those life skills and support them on their own journeys. It's, you know, in our community we would say that's like heart medicine, right? That's heart work that you do—*[interjection]*—yes, exactly, yes.

So, I can't say enough and I—I'm—miigwech for sharing your story. I think that's really, really lovely, sharing the story of your folks that were working with you. I think that's really special. Miigwech.

**The Chairperson:** The member for Winkler-Morden. Sorry—the member for Morden-Winkler. I can't believe I did that. Oops. We talked about that.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Thank you, Minister, for that answer. I agree that we have a—like, we get filled, I believe, with a special spot in us because we have—just to be able to, you know, have that relationship with them and it's amazing.

\* (16:10)

I know the young lady that works at the deli right now. She gets very possessive of her jobs because she wants to make sure that that's her job. And she loves to do the baking, and that's her job, besides the dishes. And she's our dish manager, so she loves that. And it fills that spot in them as well, that they're able to do something that gives them value and fills that spot where they're feel valued and needed, and that's great.

In this project then, in regards to these clients who are in the—in this pilot project, what is the process, then, for them when they're at a place and they're doing this year's—this program, is there a remuneration or an honorarium or something that they get as a—as like a reward or something to—as having worked and gives them that value of, I'm earning my living and I'm paying for my own things. Is there that in that project?

*MLA Nellie Kennedy, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**MLA Fontaine:** So again, just to be clear, that the pilot program is about supporting individuals to be able to get the employment, right? So again, looking up—you know, they're strength-based, supporting independence and all that skills development.

Obviously, once they get employment, they'll be paid once they've secured employment. And I think what's important, as well, is that up to \$12,000 is exempt from their MSPD dollars.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** One more question to the minister, just in regards to the safety aspect of it: Is there an insurance or a mode of protection for both the organization or business that's having the client come in, and vice versa. Is there a safety, like a workplace safety program or something, that when this person with intellectual disabilities goes into a place like that of work or experience, that they are in a safe place and if something happens is, like, what is the criteria for that?

**MLA Fontaine:** You know, agencies will work with employers, right, to ensure that individuals are being supported and that they have the supports that they need to be able to do the job. And that, I'm sure, in respect of the safety aspects of the employment, those agencies are working with those organizations or those businesses to be able to support the individual.

I also just want to share, and I don't know if the member is aware that, actually, part of my mandate letter is to remove barriers to work with people with disabilities. So this is a part of that piece as well, but it was part of my mandate letter, something that I take very seriously, and something that we're actively engaged in in the department.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Just—I have one more question for the minister in regards to the topic of disabilities, and just a quick question: If you—do you receive—or, does the minister receive critical instant reports in regards—reports in regards to—under the act, and, yes, does she

receive reports on a regular basis about different things that happen?

**MLA Fontaine:** So, critical incidents don't come to the minister necessarily. Under the provincial—we've got a provincial protection investigative unit that those critical incidents go to and are investigated.

And so it's the director that is responsible for the act, and the minister can be advised when there's, like, an individual thing that needs to come to the attention of the minister. But for the most part it all goes to the provincial protection investigative unit.

And I think that's it.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Would the minister, like, share if she has received any, you know, advisements or anything about any situations at all since she's been a minister, and who this, I guess, yes, you already suggested, or said who you get them from. And if you do get advised, do you intervene at that point, or what is the responsibility of you for that, or the minister at that point?

\* (16:20)

**MLA Fontaine:** So, since I've been minister, there's been no critical incidents that have come to me. And, again, I think it's important to also recognize that, you know, if there's anything criminal in nature, that goes to the police, right? So it would go to the provincial protection investigative unit for the unit to investigate, but if it's criminal in nature, it would go to the police, wherever that would be.

But nothing since I've been minister has been directed towards me.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** I'd like to thank the minister for that information. I know that Manitobans with disabilities and intellectual disabilities specifically have a really special place in my heart and in many, many people—hearts in our province, so thank you for answering all those questions. Just important information that we just really want to know, so thank you for that.

I'd like to move on to another area. Can the minister list which community organizations they have been working with on the development of the new 24-7 drop-in centres for Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited people in Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson?

**MLA Fontaine:** Miigwech for that important question.

I want to go back a little bit and share so that you understand the rest of the question—or, the answer. In 2003, in March or April of 2003, Felicia Solomon Osborne went missing. She was 16 years old. She's

from the Norway House Cree Nation. And in July of 2003, her—part of her leg and her arm washed ashore the Red River around the Alexander Docks.

And in November of 2003, November—late October, November 2003, the family came down from Norway House and we hosted a—or, we had a vigil where Felicia's body parts—she was only 16—where Felicia—body—her body parts washed ashore. So we had a vigil.

And the thing about Felicia, the next day—and I will never forget this for as long as I live—the next day—so, her body parts wash ashore, and you can only imagine, you know, what her last moments were. And then, even in her death, she's so degraded and just so thought of as garbage, right, to be cut up and thrown away. And the next day, the Winnipeg Free Press, on the front page, it said: prostitute with gang ties found, whatever. She was just a baby. First off, she wasn't sexually exploited; she's just a baby. Second off, she had no gang ties, right? I remember the whole community being enraged at that.

So fast forward to November. We're there with the family. We're there with the grandmother. The grandmother's name is Darlene Osborne, from Norway House. Darlene, at the time, was chief and council; she was a council; she had been elected councillor.

After that ceremony, we were—there was a bunch of us Indigenous women, their family. And we started talking about that we needed a 24-7 drop-in centre that Indigenous women and girls could go if they were in trouble or if they needed help or if they were stuck somewhere. There's a variety in Manitoba of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls that, you know, tried to make phone calls to—can somebody come and pick me up, and nobody answered; it was in the middle of the night. There are a variety of missing and murdered that took a ride because they were desperate and have never been seen again.

So the vision, the seed for a 24-7 drop-in centre for Indigenous women and girls was actually born in November of 2023 on mere feet away from where Felicia Solomon Osborne's body parts washed ashore. And I always say that story because I don't ever want people to think once we've done it that, like, oh, this is, you know, this is our commitment and, here, we've got it done. I always, always want to make sure that, for always, the public and history will know that the seeds to that was born out of the grotesque murder of a child.



So I know I don't have much time, but what I want to share with folks is that, you know, that's something that's been needed and asked for in the community for many years, and we made it a commitment in the election, and we also announced in Budget 2024 a \$20-million commitment. We call it, like, the MMIWG2S strategy, but I'm actually moving us away from that because what I want us to be able to do is I want us to prevent. I actually want us to eradicate the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, right? Like, I don't want us to keep using that language because what it does is that it entrenches Indigenous women and girls and the violence against us. I want us to eradicate that, and the 24-7 is a big component and yet a small component of that work.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** I just want to thank the minister for explaining where that started because that's really good to know. I didn't realize that was the story that was behind what this is doing. So I think it's very important for us to have the 24-7 drop-in centres for—like the minister said, for us to have a place to go and, you know, we all, you know, just really, I believe, that this is such an important thing to do.

For me, specifically, I have young daughters, daughter-in-laws who I've been in situations where I felt like—believed that there was somebody stalking them to steal them and take them. So I've experienced that fear in that unsafe situation with them, and so I know it's very important. Very important.

In the—in regards to that question, is there, like, a partnership or is there organizations that will be worked with that can bring along their gifts and their strong, like, their passions and the things that they have to give to support these 24-7 drop-in centres, yes?

\* (16:30)

**MLA Fontaine:** So we identified, you know, Brandon, Thompson and Winnipeg as hubs of space where Indigenous women are potentially most at risk, right. Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited are at risk no matter where they are, right, across the country.

But certainly in Manitoba, I think we identified those three as, really, the potential for Indigenous women to be the most at risk, right. We've—since being appointed minister, we've actually been out and—so first off, let me say this: We appointed the special advisor on Indigenous women's issues, Cora Morgan.

And in that work, we've established a matriarch circle, so when we're talking about, you know, organizations or a collective—I'll use the word, a collective—of trying to do this work, it was really important to

first off have an individual in that special advisor role that can work directly with me to be able to execute this strategy, but then also to work with, you know, Indigenous women that have been on the front lines forever, right?

And so we established The Matriarch Circle and from, you know, the special advisor and The Matriarch Circle, we're developing a collective of partnerships and doing this work together, and really engaging and embarking on a revisioning on how to do this work, right?

I don't—I always say this for many years now, like—and I've been doing this work a long time. I've been working on MMIWG for, like, 26 years. And for all those years, it's always Indigenous women as, you know, all of these things, as less than, you know, the language of Indigenous women putting themselves at risk, which is just absolute nonsense. You know, all of these things that—so yes, like Indigenous women are all of this. The—we've got the exponential rates of violence against our bodies. We're all of these things, and yet we're also all of these things, right?

Indigenous women, particularly in Manitoba, are doing—are agents of change. They are agents of transformative change. You know, we've got lawyers; we've got artists; we've got politicians; we've got entrepreneurs; we have all of these amazing women. And I want to re-envision a different path for Indigenous women. I want us to reclaim these spaces. We are the agents of our own liberation. And so we're doing this work collectively. I don't always want us just to be this. I want to highlight all of this.

So, all of that to say that we're collectively doing this work together. Cora has been out to Brandon, I think, three times. We were out in Brandon, maybe three weeks ago. I did—honestly, I have done so many tours in my life, all around the world, to be honest—amazing tours. I'm telling you—and this is not a word of an exaggeration—like, whatever it was, three weeks ago, a month ago—our tour in Brandon was, hands down, one of the best tours I've ever been on.

I think we did, like, six or seven organizations—phenomenal organizations with phenomenal people—that are on—literally in the community doing just such amazing work. And so we're really looking for, and the reason why Cora had been out there for three times and the reason why I had gone out there, because we're looking for partnerships in the Brandon 24-7 drop-in centre.

I'll be doing that. I'm doing a northern tour sometime in July, so I'll be doing that on a variety of different things, but we'll be looking at partnering with folks in Thompson. So those folks that know the community are on the front lines.

And then here in Winnipeg, as I said, we've got a variety of different, you know, Indigenous women, matriarchs that are on the front lines, but we're also working very closely with Ka Ni Kanichihk.

Ka Ni Kanichihk, as you know, has Velma's House, which is a 24-7 drop-in centre. That's going to look very differently than what we're envisioning for the 24-7 drop-in safe space for Indigenous women and girls.

So we've done that outreach in Brandon. We're going to be doing that outreach in Thompson. We've already kind of started, but we'll be going up to do a tour. And then we've been doing that outreach in Winnipeg for almost since I was appointed.

And all around, everybody is really hopeful and excited to be able to stand up something that ultimately saves lives of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** I want to thank the minister for sharing that, because, as a woman and as a mother and—of daughters—and just of—I have friends, I have mothers, I have my mother, I mean; I have many people in my life, too, that your goal and your best is always for them to succeed and be safe and be in a healthy, good relationship with their spouse and their family, and never be in a place of danger.

So I understand that, and I agree with you wholeheartedly—or, with the minister wholeheartedly that our goal is to, no matter where we live or where we're from, to support everyone in our province, Indigenous women especially. It's just not the—I'm not satisfied with what's happening. We need to make a change and continue to change and make our world better, make our province better. And that is my goal as—in this position as a legislature—as a 'lator'—and in my goal is my—for my life.

So thank you for sharing that. Just so you know where I'm at, and I believe we all bleed red. We all—we're all sisters, and that is my heart. So I will always continually fight for women and for Indigenous women. And I have a very close friend who's Indigenous, and she's been my—in my life for years, and we just reconnected, so I was really excited about that. So, anyway.

So my question would be, then, you're already working—or, the minister's already working together—with organizations, or looking to bring organizations in to set up these 24 drop-in—seven—drop-in centres. Like, for example, like, I know you mentioned those three cities, Winnipeg, Thompson and Brandon. What would the—is the goal or the long-term spectrum for rural or—and northern smaller communities that are really struggling? For example, what happened in Carman, and in, like, the Genesis House in Winkler.

I just would love to see more—us be able to do more in those areas to support the Indigenous communities where we are. I know that 80 per cent of Genesis House clients are Indigenous women coming from domestic violent situations, and those are just things that, you know, when they're full, you just really want to make sure that nobody gets turned away and that they are getting what they need.

For example, with the 24-7 drop-in centre, is that something that is being looked at as well?

\* (16:40)

**MLA Fontaine:** So, miigwech for that question, and, you know, the question of shelters, not only here in Manitoba but across the country, is such an urgent and critical discussion, right? I remember years ago when I was the special adviser on Indigenous women's issues, and travelling to, whenever we had FPTs, and I think we were in, like, Ottawa one time and—oh, we were actually there for the round table. Actually, it was the first—and that would have been in 2015. So it would have been February of 2015 was the first-ever national round table on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited.

And it was the first time in history that—and that was under Stephen Harper; he was still the Prime Minister at the time, or was he? Yes, he was still the Prime Minister at the time. Was he? Or no? Pretty sure that he was. When did the Liberals get in? October of 2015, right?

Okay, so, February of 2015, Stephen Harper was still the Prime Minister. And at one point there was a question in the House and they asked, or, he was asked in media, about a national inquiry on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. And at the time, you can google it, he said, ah, he said, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is not on my radar. It's not my priority.

Okay. Fast forward to February, 2015. He took a lot of flak from that. And so in response to that, they had the first national round table on missing and

murdered Indigenous women and girls. It was the first time that the feds, provinces and territories and national Indigenous organizations and MMIWG family members all came together from across the country.

At that round table there was significant discussion on shelters and the fact that—and I remember there was a—one of the delegates from up—maybe in Nunavut—was Inuit and talking about how there was literally nowhere for Inuit women to go to be safe.

And so the conversation on shelters has grown and grown in the last many years, as you know. But now what we're seeing, and so, obviously, there's a need for federal shelters. I think there's been a little bit of movement. Here in Manitoba, we've got Shamattawa, Pukatawagan, Fisher River Cree Nation, Hollow Water, Keeseekoowenin and Norway have federal shelters on-reserve; they're funded by the feds. But the feds, in the last many years, haven't really come to the table in a robust way to commit to more shelters.

So we know we need more infrastructure across the country in respect of federal shelters. But now the language and the—has moved towards transitional housing, right? So there's one thing that when you need a place right now to be able to be safe, so that shelter infrastructure, but what more and more people that are on the front lines are—and community are recognizing is that it's an entirely different thing than when you're ready to leave and you have nowhere to go, right?

You can't go back to your community because maybe you have no housing because the housing stock on First Nations is atrocious, right, so you have nowhere to go in housing. And then often you're in urban areas, right? You've left your reserve, come to an urban area like Genesis House, right?

You're absolutely right that the vast majority of women that utilize that are Indigenous women. Dauphin shelter, the vast majority women are Indigenous women. Brandon shelter—that we were there; I told you about that, that tour—the vast majority are Indigenous women.

So now the language and the focus has shifted towards transitional housing. And so, you know, we're certainly prepared to work with shelters or organizations or women's resource centres that want to, you know, look towards transitional housing so that we've got somewhere safe for women and their children to go that can help build them up and build up the skills that they need to be able to go on their own.

I know that you've asked me about Genesis House in the House in—and here. The issue with Genesis House is that they keep applying for federal dollars and they keep getting denied by the feds. What I can say is that if the feds were to come to the table, we would be able to come to the table, so.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Yes, thank you, Minister, for that information.

I was able to talk to Minister Smith about that situation and some different options for them as well, so that's been really good conversations to have.

So in regards to these drop-in centres that amazing things that were going to be—that are being implemented, in the centres that—the 24 centres, are they—are—is the government going to be providing the 100 per cent of the operating fees—funding for this—for the centres? Will there be capital dollars available to set up and build things that need to be built—there's nothing there available? What's the goal for that?

**MLA Fontaine:** So let me just say this: I don't know yet, right? Like, I'm not going to say, like, yes, we're going to do that, or no, we're not going to do that. I don't know because we're in the very beginning stages of what that potentially can look like.

But what I want to be explicitly clear on because there's some confusion, not only here but also internally: these 24-7 drop-in centres, because I think what's happening is sometimes that the language is, like, it's a shelter. It's not a shelter, right? Like, we've got—well, we have shelters, right? We've got that model. That's not what we're looking at, right?

\* (16:50)

This is like a drop-in safe space combined with, like, you know, the vision. And, actually, I can even go back even further. I told you about how in 2003, da, da, da; 2008, under my predecessor, Gord Mackintosh, he had started this review of Tracia's Trust. And I was at Southern Chiefs at the time.

And, actually, in 2007, in August of 2007, a young woman from my reserve—her name was Fonassa Bruyere, she was 17 years old—she was found. She went missing in August, and three weeks later, at the very—the end of August, beginning of September, her body was found, kind of like in the city, but on the outskirts a little bit. And her body was found where, I think, three or four other Indigenous women's bodies were found.

Fonassa, she fell through the cracks. She wasn't in CFS care. She, at the time, had friends at Little Sisters,

which is a group home for sexually exploited young girls, but she wasn't in care. She kind of fell through the cracks—or, cracks, and she was murdered. As a result—again, a baby, 17 years old, right? And if you see pictures of her—I'll share them tomorrow with you—like, just a baby. And same with Felicia. Just babies, you know?

And from that, literally, I think it was, like, maybe four or five days later, there must've been, like 40 stakeholders all gathered at Sage House, at Sage House's old location. And we established the Sexually Exploited Youth Community Coalition. And it was—everybody was there: AMC, you know, SCO, MKO, the police, Ma Mawi, Ka Ni Kanichihk. Like, everybody that does work was there.

And so then, fast forward, Gord Mackintosh does this kind of re-visioning or revamping of Tracia's Trust, and then in—I can't remember what day it was, but it—in 2008, we had a path session in Marymount, in the basement of Marymount, and we developed this beautiful path session. Out of that path session came Hands of Mother Earth, which is a group home which is outside the city. That was the vision of Mae Louise Campbell. She said we need to have a space where Indigenous girls can get out of the city. StreetReach was a part of that initial path session that day, and 24-7.

And what we were saying about these 24-7s is that, again, in this visioning path session, was that it's not a shelter. It's—we—what we envisioned was, you know, if you—there'd be a van that's attached to it that if you—a, you know, and a 24-7 phone line, whatever, that you can be called.

But there was also the ability to have wraparound supports. So if I'm, you know, a 16-, 17-, 18-, 15-year-old girl, or 26, whatever, and I find myself, I have to come to this 24-7 safe space or drop-in centre, you know, and the next morning, okay, like, what do you need? Do—is it housing? Is—what's going on?

So you know, I want to be very clear that the 24-7 is not a shelter. It's more than that. And it's capturing all of those Indigenous women and girls that fall through the cracks, like Fonassa Bruyere, like Felicia Solomon Osborne, like Claudette Osborne, like so many that just, nobody was there to respond when they needed somebody to respond to them, and that's what this place will do.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Thank you, Minister, for that information.

I actually had the opportunity to go to Marymount last week and spend some time there. So I really,

really—it was really good experience. And one of—my question was going to be, what is the vision, what kind of services, exactly, will be coming from this drop-in centre?

And you've answered some of those questions. If I were to be in a situation, specifically, for example, and I needed help, where would I get information and be educated that this is available?

#### *The Chairperson in the Chair*

Like, what would you—what would your vision be of how to reach the women and the girls—the babies—that we're talking about, that really just need something like this. And, like, how would we reach—or how—what was the goal to reach them, and how would you educate them that this is there? And what kind of—if they were to come, what would be the first step that would happen when they walk in the door? And who would be there, specifically, to walk them through it? Is there special training for people like that? What is the vision about that?

**MLA Fontaine:** So, again, we're just at those—the—you know, what all of that specifically is going to look like, I can't tell you right now because, again, we're working with community. And I think that that's really important, that, you know, this is done in partnership with community. This came from community. This vision came from community. And, you know, it's community that's on the front lines of doing this work. So this will be done in concert and in partnership with community.

And the other thing is, it may look different in Brandon than it does in Thompson and it, you know, than it is in Winnipeg. I don't know. I would imagine, yes, they're all going to be—kind of look similar, but I would imagine that, you know, the services or the supports or how things are laid out in Thompson is going to look different than in looks in Winnipeg, right, when Thompson, you've got so many northern communities and First Nation communities. Like, I don't know what that's going to look like. So I can't give you that answer.

What I can tell you for sure is that we're going to work in concert with community. And that's why, as I said in my whatever answer, that's why it was so important for me to establish first off the special adviser position, again, but also The Matriarch Circle. We have matriarchs from every single corner of Manitoba. We have matriarchs from every single cultural—Indigenous cultural group. We have matriarchs that are in justice, in health care, in addictions, in whatever. We've got—literally every matriarch that is a part of this circle

represents Manitobans and therefore has that community connection.

Like, I would imagine that the—when you talk about, like, how is this going to be shared with folks, that's why community is so important. Like, hey, you know what, you can go here tonight. Here's the number.

Here's a—and, again, I'm assuming that—I don't know at this point—I'm assuming there's going to be a 1-800 number. I don't know that; would love to see that, but—and maybe it's not that; I don't know. But here's a number. They've got a van. They will come and pick you up. They'll bring you somewhere safe. You know, what those services are entirely going to look like, I don't know, but there's going to be wrap-around supports. That's the vision.

And you raise a really good point about training. And I'm so proud of this training. I think that this training is hands down one of the best. And so, we have shelter training micro credentials. And it's in partnership with Red River Polytechnic. And so this program, it trains folks to work in shelters and, you know, 24-7 organizations.

One of the things that organizations are going through, and shelters, like, all across Manitoba, is that they're—they need staff, right? Like, a lot of organizations are having a hard time finding staff, particularly to take those overnight shifts. And so we have this micro training that we—and how many weeks is it, 16 weeks? It's about 16 weeks, give or take—I could be wrong, but—of training.

But if you want to become, like, a support worker, we will pay for everything. You need a computer? We're going to pay for a computer. You need—whatever it is, we will support you to be able to take that training, and we're building up that infrastructure not only for Winnipeg but for across the province.

Because those workers, those support workers or whatever—what are we calling them—*[interjection]*—shelter training support workers are so critical to the overall infrastructure. And so I'm really, really proud of this program, and we've already had—how many folks have—*[interjection]*—about like 28 or 30 rounds of graduates already.

And so, we've got current ones going on right now. It's a great program. And we'll support your tuition. We'll support all of that. So, really, really proud of that work. And, again, it will go to support, you know, not only these 24-7s but all of the other infrastructure that we have across the province.

And it's done online, right? So if you're in the North or you're in some of our First Nation communities, you can take the training online.

**The Chairperson:** Order, please.

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

## CHAMBER

### EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

\* (15:20)

**The Chairperson (Tyler Blashko):** Okay, will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Executive Council.

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber and we ask the members to please introduce their staff in attendance.

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Joined today by Sarah Thiele, the Clerk of the Executive Council, and Mark Rosner, the Chief of Staff.

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition):** I'm joined by Braeden Jones, Chief of Staff. Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** As previously stated in accordance with subrule 78(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Just sort of taking a look at a little bit ago, the last time we sat in Estimates; and I'm glad that we had the opportunity to kick off the Estimates process considering that we were, you know, delayed in getting to the Estimates process, so I'm glad that the Premier had given permission to the House leader to move us into Estimates. So that's great, and I appreciate after a couple hours of questions the last time we were in Estimates, that the Premier was able to get me the org chart that he presented near the end of the Estimates.

So again, you know, I think we sort of left off with the unfortunate situation that is troubling Manitobans that happened in Carman. And we know that the Premier once again had to—had offered his prayers with the family and the community, and I basically had asked him to just make a comment on the fact that for years when they were—when he was in opposition and some of his now-Cabinet ministers, we would

make a comment on the record—myself included, including some of our other Cabinet ministers and MLAs—that we would offer thoughts and prayers with a specific family or whatever topic we would be talking about.

And it's—as I pointed out in the last Estimates process just a few days ago, that now, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has offered prayers which, again, is great. But, boy, Honourable Speaker, I tell you, back when the NDP were in opposition, whenever we as Cabinet ministers would offer thoughts and prayers to a family or to a situation or to a community, there was an awful lot of ridicule being thrown across the Chamber.

And I mean, I'm just, again, thankful that the Premier is now seeing the light in some of the verbiage that he uses. But I just—I'm seeking some clarity as far as why he would not have stopped that ridiculing that was happening when he was in opposition.

**Mr. Kinew:** You know, I think what I've always tried to do in the public sphere is to be serious and reverent of people who take their faith seriously, because I am one of those people. I start each day with a prayer, and it's an important part of my life.

I also think to my colleague's comments, and I think what discouraged them about the former PC government was thoughts and prayer without action. There's a—important distinction. Of course, thoughts and prayers are always welcome, but when you're in government, it's incumbent to act. And we saw in the former PC government a remarkable lack of action on many important priorities here in the province.

But if the question is getting to whether there is compassion across the partisan aisle, of course there is. You know, when I used to sit in the Estimates committee with Brian Pallister, we'd have some testy exchanges and you go back and forth with the vim and vigour that we've come to expect in this place. But at the same time, I can recall when he talked about family members being stricken by cancer, slowing the pace, taking time to show respect and show deference to his family's experience, such as any Manitoban would do. And so that's the course that I'm committed to.

There's a very, very serious document that was tabled in the House today. It was a freedom of information request that was provided to our team on May 27, 2024. Well, the freedom of information request is dated that day. I'm not sure, I guess, when we actually received it. Which means that this is new information.

Specifically, I think you need to understand that there is a context here in which I pointed out at the end of 2023, as reported in the CBC on December 27 of that year, that the former government tried to ram through an approval for the Sio Silica project on October 6. The document that was tabled today shows that on the same day, October 6, that a briefing note was generated for the outgoing premier of the day, Heather Stefanson, and it has to do with licensing approvals for the Sio Silica project.

Again, current members of the PC caucus went out to deny this, but Kevin Klein—interesting to see he and I on the same side of an issue here—refuted the PC caucus members' denials and had said, in fact, what we are saying as the NDP government is correct, accurate and that he was inappropriately pressured to try and approve the Sio Silica project.

This pack of documents also lays out that not only was that briefing note generated on October 6, but on October 12, responding to a request from multiple former ministers of the Crown, including Finance, Economic Development, Investment and Trade, and Agriculture, that civil servants, who are bound by duty to respect the caretaker convention, were being pressured to share information regarding the Sio Silica project, including this briefing note generated for the premier.

Such was the level of activity that the then-clerk of the Executive Council, Kathryn Gerrard, said, and I quote: I will continue to state, as provided to these ministers, that we are in caretaker convention until the new government is sworn in. End quote.

And again, for the record, those ministers were the Finance, EDIT and Ag ministers of the day, which is to say, Cliff Cullen, the current member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) and the current member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson).

Clearly, the clerk felt what was taking place—the then-clerk felt what was taking place on October 12 was inappropriate. It was then forwarded to a deputy, who forwarded the same to his minister—outgoing minister in the transition period—on the same day, October 12.

Mr. Chair, do you know who that outgoing minister was? It was Kevin Klein.

\* (15:30)

All this information that I've just laid out to you was forwarded to Kevin Klein on that day, October 12. So as I've laid out here, there's obviously a dispute over the facts with respect to current members of the PC

caucus and myself. Kevin Klein enters the fray, and he bolsters our case.

Interestingly, shortly after—shortly after members of the PC caucus went out into public and to try to double down on the misrepresentations, Rochelle Squires wrote a column in the Winnipeg Free Press, in which she pointed out that the current member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) inappropriately pressured her to approve the mine, too. And do you know what date that took place on, according to Rochelle Squires? October 12.

**Mr. Ewasko:** It's interesting that once again, the Premier (Mr. Kinew)—you know, this is Estimates, and so I was hoping for us to be able to get into some budgetary items and get some questions answered, and it seems like the Premier is once again going down a vein of question and question and various different things and putting misinformation on the record and repeated information.

And he's taken this opportunity in Estimates to again grab the microphone, much like we have seen over the last almost eight months now, and again be more showman than statesman and not really step up and do the role of a premier that—the role of the Premier should be doing.

It's unfortunate that, again, the Premier seems to be getting even more and more famous for dodging and deflecting questions. He had the opportunity just a few minutes ago, prior to Estimates, to scum and speak to media, and once again, even though the Premier has his media experience from way back, dodged the media and said that we needed to get into Estimates.

And Estimates is very important; a very important topic and piece and process in our democratic society here in Manitoba. And so he wasn't in a hurry to get to Estimates following up the budget, the budget debate, and so it's interesting that once again, he talks about process today. And he says let's respect the trial process. When I asked him a question in Estimates just last week, he said—he doesn't really believe what he's saying, because he feels that if he says things enough, people will tend to believe him.

But, in fact, that we know better, and Manitobans are starting to pick up on it, as well. He doesn't believe in process. Only when it suits him. I've said multiple times that—and the documents that the Premier is talking about today again is older documents, and it's unfortunate that he's using one of his new MLAs to be the messenger on that as opposed to him standing there and saying what he needs to say in front of the media.

But it's old information. The media has that information. PC caucus, I can only speak to PC caucus, members are going to work with the Ethics Commissioner and through the process, respecting the process. We know evidence of the Premier not respecting the process. We talk about the tobacco court information in regards to the many years of that, going into courts with other provinces.

But no, no, this Premier, the Premier of Manitoba, decides to go to his party AGM, party convention, and tries to grandstand. But that's nothing new. Been watching this Premier for quite a few years, and I'm seeing more and more signs of that, of a little more selfishness than what he actually was elected to be doing.

Today, we saw him dodge and deflect away some of the questions in regards to a historical church in our city, a monument that people come from all over, not only Manitoba but the country and, in fact, the world, at times, asked him a very serious question about how we potentially help, if he's going to potentially help. He dodged it; put it back on them.

Then we asked some questions in regards to crime and how more and more violent crime is happening in, not only Winnipeg, but in Manitoba under this Premier's watch. And again, almost eight months, no serious plans. He had lots of time in opposition to come up with some plans. He has not done so. And he's failing miserably. And that's why he's feeling that he needs to dodge and deflect any serious questions and come up with other things.

**The Chairperson:** The honourable member's time has expired.

**Mr. Kinew:** I do feel compelled to point out that the member opposite said old information. It's new to us. This Freedom of Information request was satisfied on May 27, at 2024.

When did the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) know about this? He was a member of the Executive Council under the previous administration. When did he become aware of these inappropriate efforts to pressure Kevin Klein and Rochelle Squires?

You want to talk about deflection, Mr. Chair? You want to talk about skirting around the issue? These are questions that he, in his capacity as the Leader of the Opposition and as a former member of the Executive Council, should answer in the public interest.

There is a serious substantive issue having to do with the subversion of the democratic will of the people of Manitoba. This is not just one party saying that the other party was behaving inappropriately in a transition period. Multiple former ministers of the Crown of that defeated administration have corroborated our story and said that what they experienced and what they witnessed was wrong.

There is a substantive issue here. This is new information being put on the record. The member opposite likely has some knowledge or some information to share, particularly seeing, and I quote, old information, end quote, being the term of art that he uses here today. This is old information to him. Perhaps he would like to share the context.

Again, if we examine the record there is a serious substantive issue here. The clerk of the Executive Council was alarmed. There had to be multiple reminders, not only of the caretaker convention, but an additional reminder that civil servants couldn't be brought into this; that it had to be ministers, no doubt because civil servants knew duty and respect for the democratic will of the people.

PC colleagues that the member opposite currently sits with apparently did not show that level of respect.

So again, the current Opposition House Leader, who was then the minister of Agriculture; the current opposition member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), who was then the member for EDIT; the defeated, or actually, resigned during a budgetary process, former minister of Finance, Cliff Cullen, they're all invoked in this email, which came on the same day, October 12, that Rochelle Squires reports in her column as being inappropriately pressured.

I might ask staff to get four copies of this column from Rochelle Squires so that we can table it, just so that the members opposite have it at their disposal. The title of it is: Gradual, then sudden, corruption.

It's a remarkable headline for a former minister of the Crown to print, coming as it was, just over three months after their administration was defeated.

\* (15:40)

The substance of it is Rochelle Squires sharing on the record that she was inappropriately pressured to approve the silica mine. Yet the phone call came, as she asserts, from the member for Red River North on October 12, same day that civil servants were being put into a very awkward position by many defeated members of the Crown who, for whatever reason,

were trying to approve a silica mine in eastern Manitoba.

The mine proposed site is not too far from the member opposite's constituency. I'm sure he would have heard quite a bit about this issue. He may have asked many times, I assume, what was going on with it on behalf of constituents, legitimately so. There's no evidence that anything other than that took place.

But I do think it's important that the people of Manitoba have some insight as to why so many members of the Crown—ministers of the Crown, rather, including the defeated premier, would be engaged so strenuously on this. And why does the timeline of these documents align with the timeline on the record, not just to myself and other members of our team, with Kevin Klein and with Rochelle Squires?

So again, the member opposite likely has some information. He let slip that comment about old information. So I'd invite him to share with the people of Manitoba: When did he become aware, and how, of this inappropriate attempt to subvert the caretaker convention?

**Mr. Ewasko:** Again, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) is doing a great display again this afternoon of dodging and deflecting. And he knows—he knows that there's copies of old FIPPA documents online. He knows that. But, again, he's using his time in Estimates—he's using Manitobans' time in Estimates to get some answers on this government's failings—failings across so many, so many departments.

There is a process. The Premier flip-flops like that pickerel on a dock whether he's going to follow a process or not follow a process. There's a process with the Ethics Commissioner. And all members of the PC Party has agreed to abide by that process and work with the Ethics Commissioner.

So it's unfortunate, Manitobans, that your Premier is busy dodging and deflecting on many questions and comments that are important to you. Could be crime, could be the fact that—I mean, the Premier says himself—what did he say just a few minutes ago? And I'm not going to direct quote because I don't—I'll look it up in Hansard. But he makes a comment about the democratic role of the people of Manitoba. And I know that his chief of staff's probably rolling right now, thinking, yes, you shouldn't have said that, because you don't. Actions speak louder than words.

The Premier doesn't believe in the democratic process for the people of Manitoba. He's taken a



BITSA bill, he's thrown in many other pieces of legislation, stapled it on the back of the BITSA bill and is trying to ram it through without any public consultations. But that's how this Premier rolls.

Last night, we had committee, and there was an opportunity for members of the public to come and share their thoughts and views at committee. And more than 50 per cent of the presenters had said damning information and comments in regards to this Premier (Mr. Kinew) and his government bills about the lack of consultation. Not even lack of consultation—no consultation. And the Premier sits here today, again, grandstanding; again, more showman than statesman and tries to put additional things on the record.

So again, I'm hoping that the Premier will answer some of the questions that, as the interim Leader of the Official Opposition, as I'm putting forth to him.

He—of course, the cameras and the recordings don't necessarily pick up everything, but prior to the Premier raising his hand to actually put some words on the record, he was doing the old schoolyard bully tactics, murmuring under his breath just loud enough for people to hear, and he thinks that this is not caught. He knows—he knows what to do. He's not that far removed from the old bullying days, and so he's bringing it forward into the Chamber. And it's unfortunate.

So I am going to resort back to a question that I'd asked the Premier last time we were in Estimates, and that is, the public inquiry into Myah Gratton. You said that there was going to be a public inquiry.

Where are we at with that, now that we're a few days past last Estimates sitting?

**Mr. Kinew:** I welcome accountability questions on this topic, because I'm the first person to have raised the top—the possibility of an inquiry into the matter. The PCs stand up and try to, I guess, press the issue; it's totally fine with me.

But, again, there is an investigation, which continues, which will lead to a trial and a judicial process. Information will come to light through that. And if at the end of that we still have unanswered questions, then, as I've stated previously on many occasions, I'll be open to an inquiry.

I wonder if the Sio matter should be the subject of an inquiry someday. There is the Ethics Commissioner, however, so we'll definitely respect that process. But we have information that the public

has a right to know. So we're sharing it. May 27, 2024: that's the date of this FIPPA document. The deflection the member opposite is trying to wave away and say that this is somehow old is completely false.

I answered every single question in question period today substantively on every topic that was put my way. And after touching on those topics, I then used the remainder of my time to touch on a very important issue here, which is that the outgoing administration inappropriately tried to approve a major new mining development in the province after they had lost power. That is not in the public interest.

There are numerous unanswered questions about this. The heart of The Conflict of Interest Act goes to the question of members here, especially ministers of the Crown, not furthering other people's private interests. And so I think that's important for us to understand, because if you read the public comments from former members and current members, former members of the PC administration and current members of the PC caucus, you'll see that there's quite a bit of variation in terms of whether there were private interests involved.

One says that the former premier did have a conflict and had to recuse; another said that, no, there was no conflict. Former premier herself has never answered these questions, so perhaps she will. So we will see. What about other members of the former administration? Were there private interests at play? It's clear that there was a flurry of activity the Friday following their defeat in the general election of 2023. Was that their own personal interests, or was that somebody else's private interests they were acting on behalf of?

Why was the advisory note generated for the premier? Why, after that advisory note generated for the premier, did multiple ministers of the defeated PC administration request it?

\* (15:50)

Why did the clerk of the Executive Council of the former government feel compelled to remind them that only these ministers, and not their civil servants working closely with them, should be forwarding these to other people? Why did the former clerk of the Executive Council feel compelled to remind them that they were in caretaker convention? Does the member opposite support the Sio Silica project? People in his constituency have spoken out quite loudly against it. Same with the member for Dawson Trail (MLA Lagassé).

In the end, we decided to approve one silica project, CPS, and we said no to the Sio project. But I want to state clearly for the record that it had nothing to do

with these inappropriate attempts to subvert the will of the people. We evaluated each project on their merits, economically, environmentally, and we said yes to CPS and no to Sio.

However, regardless of the eventual approvals, or not, of these projects, it is significant that the outgoing administration seemed so focused on trying to push one through prior to our new government being sworn in. That is, on the face of it, something that requires further inquiry. And here, I don't use inquiry in the technical sense that we often use in this Chamber. I use inquiry in the broader sense that I'm sure the Ethics Commissioner will be taking up and that, legitimately, Manitobans have a right to know the answer to.

And so this is a substantive public issue that we are disclosing.

**Mr. Ewasko:** And once again, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) goes ahead and doubles down on misinformation on the record. Again, more and more times, when the Premier goes off-script, he says things that he possibly shouldn't.

So, for one example, let me just say that the dodging and deflecting that the Premier is doing on many questions that are important to Manitobans continue today and he's trying to muddy the waters. And why is he trying to do this? He's doing this because he's trying to deflect from the failings of many of his front-bench ministers, including some of his other ministers that are maybe even sitting close to him today.

It's unfortunate, but it's the reality that Manitobans are going to see more and more of these failings by this Premier. So again, we respect the process of the Ethics Commissioner. Everyone on the PC Caucus side has said that they would work with the Ethics Commissioner, work through the process and that during that transition—and the Premier made a comment, and affirms this, actually—that there were no political or policy decisions made during that transition time.

Because he's patting himself on the back, so he says, to approve CPS and disapproved Sio. But in fact, here's where we go with the fact that the Premier continues to put misinformation on the record and tries to deflect and dodge, again with misinformation, to Manitobans, is that CPS was actually approved July 27 of 2023.

So taking credit for certain things and not taking credit for others. But we saw this not that long after the 2016 election when his previous mentor, Greg

Selinger, felt that he was the star candidate in the 2016 election for the NDP, and it didn't take that long for, again, the true colours to come out, characteristics of the Premier to come out and stab his—figuratively—figuratively, just so that anybody's not going to be clear out there, because we know that there has been some history on certain violent things—but figuratively stabbed the former premier, Selinger, in the back and then carried on. And why? It's because we're seeing more showman than statesmanship. It's self-serving. It's not really for the betterment of Manitobans; it's for the betterment of the MLA for Fort Rouge, the now-Premier.

The Premier said that the inquiry is in the public interest. And I quote this from May 22, 2024 Estimates, and I quote, he says: "But this is in the public interest, so we will be sharing updates with the people of Manitoba as we go." May 22, 2024, his Families Minister says, I will not commit to making it public.

So which is it? Once again, we're seeing Cabinet ministers in the government not having proper communication. They can't get on board with one another. There's more deflecting. So which is it, to the Premier?

**Mr. Kinew:** It's striking that on the day in which too much communication from the outgoing PC Cabinet ministers to one another on the inappropriate approval of Sio Silica that the member opposite wants to talk about communication among Cabinet.

I have excellent communication with my colleagues. I hold each of them in high esteem. I would never ask any of them to violate the caretaker convention.

The member opposite has lines; we have facts. The fact is, on October 6, the former premier of Manitoba, after her defeat in the election, had a briefing note on the approval of Sio generated. That is the same day that they tried to rush through the approval of this, and we told them to stop. We said no decision should be made on this until—

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Rattled already. Geez. Can't even wait for the five minutes.

#### Point of Order

**The Chairperson:** The Leader of the Official Opposition, on a point of order.

**Mr. Ewasko:** The point of the order is the fact that the Premier continues to get off-topic, but I know he's—

you know, again, he's trying to distract. So the point of order is that he's off-topic. He should stick to the question that's asked, or at least close to it. It's not serving him well and it's not serving Manitobans well.

So that's my point of order, Honourable Chairperson, and I brought this up at the most timely time that I can possibly bring this forward to you.

**The Chairperson:** The First Minister, on the point of order.

**Mr. Kinew:** On the same point of order. Timeliness is not a condition of a point of order. That is a matter of privilege. Clearly the member opposite is rattled. This is not a rule that is under consideration. He cited no rule.

In order for a point of order to be found, it has to relate to a rule. What this seems more likely to be is an interjection. Perhaps the member opposite doesn't want to talk about Sio or CPS, but he clearly touched on those topics during the five minutes of speaking time that he just exercised.

And so, proceeding in this committee as we do in a global fashion, I am choosing sequentially to touch on the very same topics that he raised in his time to posit, postulate and in some instances ask questions.

So, again, there is no rule that is being cited. This is not a point of order, and I will be happy to continue answering the question once I'm not interrupted again.

\* (16:00)

**The Chairperson:** We'll just need one moment to consult.

I want to thank you both for your contributions on the point of order. As it turns out, there was no point of order. Historically, the boundaries of relevance are very broad for Executive Council.

But I do encourage everyone involved in the Committee of Supply to have a productive discussion.

\* \* \*

**The Chairperson:** And so, with that, the First Minister's time restarts at five minutes.

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, thank you for your learned interjection there, Mr. Chair.

So I believe the record will show what I had already laid out. And, again, it is effectively that the inappropriate attempt to approve this silica mine that the member opposite clearly knows something about, citing, as he does, various facts and dates to do with

silica projects in Manitoba; his comments, therefore, raising new questions, questions that he has not addressed though is clearly showing some knowledge of.

That happened on October 6, the inappropriate attempt. And yet, interestingly enough, Rochelle Squires said October 12 was the date in which she was inappropriately pressured, she alleges, by the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton).

These documents align with that. Flurry of activity, civil servants cautioning, flagging considerations, and a number of ministers engaged, the names of whom we have all kind of heard over the course of this afternoon's deliberations and proceedings.

On the question of the terrible tragedy that took place in Carman, there is an ongoing investigation internal to government, and there are a lot of pieces of information and a lot of insights which are being pulled together. I do believe it is in the public interest.

However, there are also a lot of rules around what can be shared publicly with young Manitobans who are in the care of the Child and Family Services system. Minister of the Crown—former minister of the Crown, as he likes to call himself in the media, the member opposite, namely—ought to be familiar with these provisions of the CFS act in Manitoba.

As a result, I think my learned colleague from St. Johns is right to show a note of caution with respect to the public disclosure, seeing as the final version of this document, putative as it is in the current instance, has not been drafted, and therefore, she can't make final determination about what can be shared publicly and when.

When we're talking about kids in care, when we're talking about something as tragic as this I think it's important for us to proceed very judiciously and deliberatively.

And so we will continue. This has been an issue that's affected me personally. I was compelled to visit Carman on multiple occasions to speak with family members and acquaintances and to return again to offer supports on an ongoing basis to the community that I saw exhibit strength in the face of terrible adversity.

And so the timelines of the completion of that internal report are still being pulled together. I think it's important to know that we expect that that will be soon. We will share this information when we're able to. We will watch the ongoing court proceedings, of course, and continue to engage with Manitobans to see

what substantive questions remain about what went wrong and what can be done in the future to protect vulnerable Manitobans.

I have to say, though, that examining what went wrong and trying to answer important substantive questions in the public interest goes to the heart of the matter that we've been talking about here today. Manitobans deserve to know, and so we're going to continue to share what we can on this and other substantive public policy issues.

But I do want to point out for this committee that the member opposite has not addressed whether he had knowledge of this issue, but in fact, does make comments which suggest that he is aware of the general context at the very least.

And so I would like to know whether he had specific knowledge of these attempts by his colleagues to violate the caretaker convention. And I think Manitobans have a right to know as well, too.

Uncomfortable questions to consider, but they should be answered.

**Mr. Ewasko:** And the only one that seems to be uncomfortable in this process, answering any questions, is the Premier (Mr. Kinew). And I think part of it is because we're coming up to eight months since he has been the Premier of Manitoba and we've asked many questions here in question period, asked questions in Estimates.

We've pointed out, on more than one occasion, the failings of not only himself, but some of the ministers that he's appointed to be ministers of various departments. They're either too busy to pay attention to their departments, or they're just not doing their homework. Just saw that again as an example of the Education and Early Childhood Learning minister, and I think the Premier, again, is trying to deflect, as he's done so—not even masterly—he just deflects and dodges the questions because he's trying to make sure that some of this is not sticking to him.

But, unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on what you're watching or how you're seeing this play out, the Premier himself has shown signs of disapproval with his ministers; the fact that he's bringing forward the BITSA bill because his Families Minister didn't do their job on the due diligence on bringing forward legislation, according to the rules.

The Premier likes to talk about rules. We know how the Premier's dealt with rules in the past. Now

he's walking it back as far as what's allowed to be presented and shared to Manitobans and the public.

So my question to the Premier—I'm not going to use my whole five minutes, because I know that's the Premier's M.O.; he'll just talk as long as he possibly can and run the clock with tidbits of misinformation on the record.

\* (16:10)

So I'm just going to ask the Premier: That review that is happening, which is an internal review, who's doing that review?

**Mr. Kinew:** Yes, the review is conducted under section 4 of the CFS act, and it is being carried out by the relevant civil servants in the Department of Families who engage with this, and we have the highest and utmost respect for civil servants. In fact, the documents germane to our deliberations here in the House, I think, show us why.

Obviously, we chose to go in a different direction. The former clerk of the Executive Council that existed under the PCs is not somebody that we're currently working with, but I respect her capacity, and I see, in black and white, evidence of her integrity. And so I think it's important for us all to remember the duty-bound civil servants, good work that they do.

When it comes to BITSA, budget implementation and tax statutes act, that the member opposite raises, I'll point out for the committee that this is considered by the Committee of the Whole House. So the PCs have, you know, gotten up in question period on numerous days and tried to make some sort of issue about whether this will come to committee, and the answer is, yes, it will. It will be considered by the Committee of the Whole House.

Perhaps it'll be considered by other committees, as well. But it will be considered by the Committee of the Whole House. And I'd like to know when the PCs brought BITSA to be considered by a committee other than the Committee of the Whole. I'd like to know which year in which the PC former administration did not include multiple amendments and multiple clauses with their budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act.

Again, there are talking points and notes and, you know, things that the PC caucus is working up, but the fact is, the PCs always used the Committee of the Whole House process. They always included multiple provisions and clauses within their budget implementation bills. We, of course, will be happy to continue

to engage with them on questions of democracy because, again, today we have new evidence of them working across multiple former ministers of the Crown to subvert the democratic will of the people of Manitoba.

Manitobans voted on October 3. They spoke in no uncertain terms. It was a clear verdict not only on seven and a half years of cuts to health care and chaos within public services, but also on the very negative campaign that was run by the PCs. The seat count is very clear, and it's not close. And I could list the names of former ministers of the Crown who had their political careers dramatically affected on that day. Perhaps I'll start with Kevin Klein and Rochelle Squires. I wonder what they're up to now.

I know that Kevin Klein, of course, has a new business venture that we're watching with great interest. Rochelle Squires, also writing in a newspaper. I respect them and their rights to be able to proffer a living for themselves. Interesting that the two of them, though, would be united in their unequivocal indication that the outgoing administration behaved inappropriately and violated the caretaker convention.

So again, we respect the process. There's also an important series of facts that we've ascertained here and believe that the people of Manitoba should know. And when you put what is on the record to date on this issue of Sio Silica together with this new information, the very least you could say is that there are significant questions that need to answer. You could probably, using deductive and inductive reasoning, arrive at more substantive statements than that. But, again, I try to be measured; I try to be pragmatic. But I am very, very curious to know about what the member opposite knew about what his colleagues were up to in the dying days of the transition period.

I respect the fact that if he's spoken to the Ethics Commissioner, he probably should not speak about that publicly. But in due course, I am sure that these facts will come out, and I look forward to hearing them. Ooh, I think I touched a nerve there.

**Mr. Ewasko:** I think the only nerves that the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) talking—or, touching on is the fact that, again, seems to be dodging and deflecting some of the questions, and he's not taking accountability. He's the leader of the NDP government, and fact is that 75 per cent of Manitobans did not choose him. I've stated this in the past. We lost the election; he did not win it. And I think that's why, as far as nerves go, that's why he's nervous.

And he's also nervous because he knows that his Cabinet ministers already have failed him. He's put them in situations, in charge of departments where they've already failed some of them. It's unfortunate because it's not him that they're failing. They're failing Manitobans.

But, again, the Premier, he can't handle that. He can't handle that because it is all about the Premier. And we know that he has other aspirations as well. And so, time will tell, time will show more and more of those out there because he's definitely not as advertised. Definitely not as advertised. Far more showman than statesman.

And so, the question on the inquiry—and he mentioned section 4 of the review. So what is the limitation of a section 4 review?

**Mr. Kinew:** So, again, we can produce copies of the CFS act if the members opposite would like.

Section 4 review, in this instance, is examining the interactions that may have taken place with the victims of this terrible tragedy and the child-welfare system, and I believe is also entertaining, to the extent possible, whether perhaps there were instances where other forms of involvement should have been contemplated but perhaps weren't.

\* (16:20)

It's difficult to speak in detail on this without knowing the outcome of said report. But I can tell the committee that it is being conducted by the civil service within the Department of Families, as well as by the relevant staff within the general authority. So, of course, there's currently four authorities within the province. It's our hope that with Indigenous nations exercising their authority under bill C-92 at the federal level that we will be able to dramatically transform the CFS system to be able to better meet the needs of kids in our province and the expectations of Manitobans from all walks of life.

I do note that in his answer, the Leader of the Opposition states clearly, and I quote: We lost the election. End quote. And that's a substantive matter here on the issue of the day. They lost the election and yet continued to try to make public policy decisions that significantly affect the lives of Manitobans, including in his own constituency and neighbouring constituencies.

Much was made over the impacts, potentially, on drinking water. Much was made over the potential environmental concerns. A lot of due diligence was

conducted into the economic development claims being made by the proponent and other related actors. And so these are important public policy questions.

The previous government had not made a decision on whether or not Sio should be approved in Manitoba. I assume they were waiting to see the outcome of the election, knowing that this was a hot topic politically in the constituencies of Lac du Bonnet and Dawson Trail and many others out there—again, some people supportive of the project, other people vehemently opposed. It seems like, if I had to guess, the outgoing PC administration didn't want to touch that political hot potato.

Though, judging by their actions during the transition period, they clearly had an important—well, not important in the public interest, but more so important to them—desire to ram this project through after they lost government. So what would drive an outgoing administration to fear a political issue so much that they dare not approve it while they were legitimately in office? And yet, on the flipside, what would attract them so much to that project that they would risk what they are currently experiencing in order to force it through after they'd already lost power?

Again, if people in the constituencies mentioned opposed it, and the members opposite took it seriously, perhaps they would've just spiked the project then. But they refused to do so, presumably because of some other interest. Perhaps a political interest, perhaps a private interest. Maybe the public interest, though they've never made the case to that extent.

So I think this is very important for us to consider. But, yes, the PCs refused to engage with Sio while in office, and it's clear, not only in black and white from the facts shared today but also from the comments of their former colleagues, that they did try to engage with it by rushing it through after they lost power.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, Honourable Chairperson, once again, for the hundreds of people that are watching at home, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) again doesn't only dodge and deflect any of the questions; the fact is, he didn't answer the question. So I said, what is the limitation of a section 4 review? Didn't answer it.

So let me get this straight. So you got the director, you got the civil service and you got the authorities. They're in charge of doing the review. A systematic issue that absolutely failed Myah.

The Premier sits there and dodges the question. Let me repeat that: The director, the civil service and

the authority are in charge of doing the review on the ones that failed Myah. Said it twice for the Premier.

Does that sound like something that should be happening? And I ask that question to the Premier: Is that the way it should be happening?

**Mr. Kinew:** I just want to point out for the benefit of the committee the logical inconsistency of the member opposite's position.

In a preamble in which he alleges that I'm not answering questions, he repeats facts that I've already shared on the record and attempts to say that those are points that I've not previously shared with the committee. I realize he's got his talking points and his lines and he has difficulty pivoting off of them but, again, if the question previously is, what is the limitation of the section 4 review, I offered numerous limitations in my previous answer. And any close reader of Hansard will be able to ascertain what I'm referring to.

A few examples were, again, so the—some of the limits about what we can disclose under the act. Some of the other limits are what we can share at this committee at this stage while the report is still being drawn together. And there are other limitations that I alluded to.

To the substantive question at hand here that the member poses with some emotion, is this the way it should be? I would say that we have to show respect for the courts and law enforcement. And yet at the same time, we should take action immediately to start answering the questions of what went wrong.

So our Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) has done so. They've initiated the section 4 review, which is an internal process so that we can begin to ascertain what led to this terrible tragedy. And yet to do so and engage in this examination in a way that is consistent with respecting the due course of justice and the continued public confidence in the administration of justice within our province, these are important considerations.

Public confidence in the member opposite, though, in the member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson), the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton), Cliff Cullen, Heather Stefanson, these should be immutable. Questions of an election should hang on policy choices. What is the right way or the wrong way to approach health care in Manitoba? We've said that investing in health care is better than cutting health care, as was practised by the former PC government.

Unfortunately, though, judged by the campaign that they mounted, the members opposite wanted to focus on wedge politics, to touch on—well, I don't even like to mention the distasteful ads that were run. They know. And now we see that we're also confronted with whether—questions about their former administration should consider whether they behaved inappropriately during the transition period. It is clear that they did.

The will of the people was exercised on October 3. The outgoing PC administration took actions on October 6 to disrespect that will, and again, on October 12. Since then, there has been a—internal to the PC Party; perhaps don't want to overstate things by calling it a conflict, but saying it's an internal dialogue is probably understating things, by the same token.

\* (16:30)

Rochelle Squires and Kevin Klein—again, not natural political allies with myself—have raised the alarm, and their comments are at odds with what the member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton) has said. In fact, at odds to the extent that both of their accounts cannot both be true.

Similarly, new information suggests that more people were involved in the outgoing administration. And so it's a significant public policy question. I first came to learn of the caretaker convention years prior, but I think it's an important principle. And I can commit to the people of Manitoba that I will always respect the caretaker convention. I think it's significant.

And I think it's significant for the members opposite, clear as it is that they will not weigh in except to maybe tip their hand a little bit that they know quite a bit more than they're letting on. I'd encourage them to reflect on what it means to respect democracy and respect the will of the people.

**Mr. Ewasko:** And respect. Isn't that interesting that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) is using the term respect, and respect for democracy?

And we know, and we will continue to show Manitobans, that those words are hollow from the Premier. He couldn't be talking farthest from his true beliefs about respect for democracy and what Manitobans think or feel.

He also says respect for the courts. Well, we've seen that's not true on many occasions. He also says that he's got first-hand experience with transition—transitioning, the caretaker situation in governments, and he says he's got experience from that years ago.

I don't even know what he's talking about. Again, he's putting information on the record that he has nothing to back that up.

He talks about various notes and speaking points and talking points and those types of things. Well, generally, when you are in Estimates, now whether it's the Premier or a minister or an opposition leader or critic, there are the odd note that comes in. And if the public were able to see the stack of files that have been cruising in here for—to aid the Premier, it would be interesting.

So it's just interesting how the Premier throws shade over various different things and—but this is, again, this goes to those—that schoolyard bully tactics that I know he's done for many, many years. And myself, on this side of the House, is not going to put up with it. We're not going to be intimidated by the Premier. He likes to, you know—and I see some members on the government side nodding their head, and I mean, he's done that in caucus; we know that. We know that.

So, again, so we've got the director; we've got the civil service, and we've got the authority, and right here in the CFS Act, 4(3), it says the director may—and I'm quoting from the act, and I know that the Premier was, boastfully, and a tad bit of arrogance as well, saying that, you know, we'll get—he's going to get us a copy of the act, but no need.

So I'm going to read this out to the Premier because I know he doesn't know this: The director may, in writing, authorize a person or an agency to perform any of the director's duties or exercise any of the director's powers.

Why would the director not use the authority and delegate the authority to investigate to an independent third party? And why would the Premier not be encouraging that?

**Mr. Kinew:** All this paper on my desk documents the violation of the caretaker convention under the PCs. It is quite an impressive assortment of documents.

On the question that the member arrives at, I guess the answer is we're looking into what went wrong to try and figure out what can be done better in the future. And having had a seat, front-row seat, for the PC time in office, I can tell you that on issues like police headquarters or on the pandemic or specific incidents such as the one that we're talking about here, there was never any exigency or urgency to move forward with the sort of process he's proposing. Member opposite knows that to be true.

Of course, we hold ourselves to a higher standard. That's why we are investigating. That's why we are reviewing what took place, and that's why we are open to an inquiry into the future.

Though I am very interested that the member opposite wants to talk about the caretaker convention; began his preamble by talking about it. So what I will say is this: The transition into government last fall was my first time observing the caretaker convention with respect to an incoming government administration.

However, as an MLA, I became aware of the principles of the caretaker convention years prior. Which is to say that any member of the public should expect that the members opposite would've known about their responsibilities under the caretaker convention. Any MLA should know this.

The caretaker convention is most clearly described at the federal level, of course, deferring to the procedural experts in the room here, as represented by the clerks of the Legislative Assembly. I would point out, for the benefit of the committee, that we quite often adopt rules, practice and precedent from the federal House of Commons. And in this instance, the caretaker convention, as articulated there, offers us a guideline of what to do and what not to do.

Long story short, after you've been defeated in election, you should not try to ram through the approval of a sand mine in eastern Manitoba. However, we see a torrent of documents that the member opposite comments on, that document the furious activity of the former administration to do exactly that.

So the caretaker convention is a significant consideration. And it is one that we should all be aware of, as MLAs. But even if we weren't, if the clerk of the Executive Council of the day were to raise the alarm about the caretaker convention needing to be respected, perhaps that would be the opportunity to learn and educate one's self. That's exactly what happened on October 12, 2023. The former clerk of the Executive Council, and I quote: I will continue to state, as provided to these members, that we are in caretaker convention until the new government is sworn in. End quote.

Then, of course, there's a bunch of text that's blacked out. It cites a section of a different act, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, specifically, section 23(1)(a), and it says, under that section of that act, that the head of a public body may refuse to disclose information to an applicant if disclosure could reasonably be expected to reveal

advice, opinions, proposals, recommendations, analyses or policy options developed by or for the public body or a minister.

\* (16:40)

Seems likely that the redacted section refers to the advisory note generated for the former premier, Heather Stefanson. Former clerk of the Executive Council flagging that the caretaker convention needed to be respected when it came to what that note contemplated, which was the approval of the Sio Silica sand mine in eastern Manitoba.

For the record, I don't even know how to pronounce it. Is it Sio? Sio? I hear both. Perhaps the member opposite can enlighten me.

**Mr. Ewasko:** In regards to the question that, again, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) is dodging, but to answer the pronunciation that the Premier has now put, he could turn to his minister, the MLA for St. Vital, because I know that the minister himself took a picture just last week, I believe, at the Manitoba Prospectors and Developers Association event that Sio was the main gold sponsor.

So he could turn and have that conversation with his Minister of Economic Development and Trade and Natural Resources, the MLA for St. Vital. But I know, once again, that would be the Premier actually having a conversation with his Cabinet colleagues, where I know that that rarely happens.

So we already know that in regards to Ms. Myah Gratton and the family and the community and it's absolutely a horrendous situation that should never, ever happen again. But we do know that these things do happen, and it's horrendous.

And the Premier is using the inquiry, again, the inquiry—the internal inquiry—that the director, the civil servants and the authority are going to be doing the internal inquiry. And the Premier's wondering, what went wrong?

So I guess, to the Premier, when was he made aware of the phone call to Child and Family Services?

**Mr. Kinew:** I can take the matter under advisement to provide a substantive and thorough response, but I can tell you that I became aware on one occasion in speaking to the late Myah-Lee Gratton's mother. It's a conversation I don't think any parent wants to have, and certainly my heart goes out to her, with a ton of compassion. And I can only imagine.



The review is important to our administration for those reasons, and also for the people of Manitoba. I think it's safe to say that people in the province were rocked by what happened, upset and want there to be a thorough hearing of the facts and course forward. And so we are taking action in that direction; we already have, and we continue to steer the ship in that manner.

At the same time, there have been many inquiries and commissions which have examined related issues going back to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, which did contemplate the child-welfare system in Manitoba; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, whose first Calls to Action deal with child welfare; the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, two-spirit people; a number of reports from the children's advocate; the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry and others.

And so what we won't do is use process as an excuse for inaction, as we saw under the previous PC administration. So we are taking a serious review of what took place here, and this will be subject to independent review by the children's advocate, and at the same time we're taking action to implement what has already been called for in all those inquiries and commissions that I alluded to and mentioned specifically. On May 13 of this year, you saw the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) and our team committing to Indigenous nations in Manitoba that in keeping with those recommendations, calls to justice and Calls to Action, that we will move ahead with the transfer of jurisdiction as soon as an Indigenous nation is prepared to do so.

I've had the opportunity to talk to people directly affected by the Carman tragedy, and this topic has come up in those conversations, and it is consistent with the opinions and wishes that we've heard articulated in those conversations. And so we will take action. The goal of our administration is I hope not to have to deliver more speeches such as I did in the wake of this terrible tragedy. I hope not to have to hear the news of other young people experiencing such a terrible outcome. And so that's the goal. That's the plan. That's what we're doing.

When it comes to the issue of the day, a short time ago, the member opposite went into the hallway and said, I quote, if you've taken the time to take a look at it, already has and the Ethics Commissioner has that document as well. End quote.

So, again, speaking extemporaneously, as we often do in front of the media and as I'm sure the

member opposite was, again, there is an important public policy question raised by his comments in front of the media today.

We found out about this document on May 27, 2024, or later. In the scrum today, the member opposite asserts that the Ethics Commissioner already has that document. How would he know? On what basis did he assert that to media?

And, actually, of course, the member opposite, if he has spoken to the Ethics Commissioner, should not share what he said to the Ethics Commissioner, but I do believe that he's free to disclose whether he has spoken to the Ethics Commissioner.

So, two separate questions here for him to consider, but the most substantive one is probably, if he is aware that the Ethics Commissioner has the information that we tabled in the House today, how does he know that?

**Mr. Ewasko:** Once again, I know the Premier (Mr. Kinew) longs for the time to be back in opposition so that a lot of the authority and difficult decisions that premiers and governments have to make will—he will no longer have to do that, because he has shown over the last almost eight months that he's not ready for this job. He thought he was. Surrounded himself with some—or appointed some of his colleagues to ministerial roles that I think have upset him because they're not fulfilling their obligations not only to their departments, Manitobans, but him directly.

So the Premier states transition of authority, transition of care, but that's not necessarily keeping kids safe today. So what did the Premier and his minister do to immediately protect children in care? Children cannot wait. What specifically changed?

\* (16:50)

**Mr. Kinew:** What we did immediately was to reach out to the people affected directly by this terrible tragedy. Out of respect for those folks, I've talked a bit about some of those conversations, but I'll probably leave it at that.

To the community affected, I attended vigils and memorials in Carman, and I share that with this committee so that you could understand that, in attendance of those events, I heard many references to the important work being done by Carman Wellness Connections.

I also heard about a desire to memorialize the victims of this terrible tragedy. The immediate action: we went back and we found sustainable core funding for Carman Wellness Connections. And unlike the

members opposite, who put out press releases and never found the budgets to pay for the commitments that they were making to the people of Manitoba in an election year, we actually put it through the formal budgetary process and funded these initiatives.

Carman Wellness Connections is an organization, I would point out, that it was not just there in the aftermath. They were there supporting families living in situations, whether it was poverty, dealing with mental health, dealing with the child-welfare system. There's a lot of people in Carman who aren't that well off and need help. There's a lot of people in Carman who are better off and still need assistance, as it is through mental health and other initiatives that I think we've all become more aware of since the pandemic.

This terrible tragedy took place in the early months of the year. These are some of the things that we can point to specifically for those most impacted by it. When we talk about the system, child welfare, well, one of the first things we did was negotiate a settlement to the child special allowance lawsuit, a settlement that was necessary because of the previous government's effort to legislate away the rights of children in the child-welfare system.

The Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) was a leading advocate in making sure that that task was accomplished and it was to rectify a situation that went to the courts because of the actions of the previous government under a BITSA bill. *[interjection]*

Lighthearted moments for the committee to entertain; perhaps the Creator is seeing fit to bring a moment of levity during a very difficult conversation about a tragic moment in our province.

C-92, the declaration on May 13 to proceed; a core recommendation of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry. So there are many things that we have done to advance the protection of children in our province, in the direct, immediate sense, but also in the broader systemic and structural sense.

And I want to make clear for the committee that these are just the steps that we have taken to date. This work will continue, and our goal is to ensure that children in Manitoba are safe. We want kids to be safe when they're growing up in their own homes, the homes of extended family members, the broader communities in which they are raised, or when, by necessity, they are in the child-welfare system.

But there is a tone of moral condescension that I hear from the member opposite, which is inappropriate, given what his former administration is shown to have

done during the transition period. I'm happy to engage on issues of 'sednastic' public policy, but I would encourage the member opposite to come forward with the tone of humility, given that, as it is, on a day in which his former premier, his colleagues, some of whom are current colleagues in the Legislature today, are shown to have violated the caretaker convention and therefore disregarded the will of the people of Manitoba.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, I asked a fairly straightforward question in regards to the actions of this Premier (Mr. Kinew) and his minister. We know that the Premier admitted that he was aware of the call. He's going to give us a more substantial answer sometime in the future.

It truly doesn't overly matter. The fact is is that he did receive a call. He was aware of it. And even though vigils and memorials—they are—they're very nice. But it does not protect children. And listening to the Premier in his last answer shows, once again, and he admits that nothing has changed. It's been months. It's been months and nothing has changed.

It's upsetting, Honourable Chairperson, but it's a fact that this Premier admits he was aware of the call to CFS, and months after this tragedy, nothing has changed. And his own director, director of the system, is the one that is reviewing what potentially went wrong or is reviewing the system, when the director themselves has the authority and may, in writing, authorize a person or agency to perform any of the director's duties or exercise any of the director's powers.

The police service has the individual Independent Investigation Unit for situations just like this, and this Premier, been sitting on this for months and nothing has changed.

Why has nothing changed?

**Mr. Kinew:** I said extensively, in my previous answer, all the things that have changed. I would like to table, for the benefit of the member opposite, a document that outlines the caretaker convention. I'd encourage him to read it before we come back to this committee again on a future sitting day.

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

Call in the Speaker.

#### IN SESSION

**The Deputy Speaker (Tyler Blashko):** The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Tuesday, May 28, 2024**

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