



Second 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

| Member | Constituency | Political Affiliation |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 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 |
| COMPTON, Carla | Tuxedo | NDP |
| COOK, Kathleen | Roblin | PC |
| CORBETT, Shannon | Transcona | NDP |
| 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 |
| JOHNSON, Derek | Interlake-Gimli | PC |
| KENNEDY, Nellie, Hon. | 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, Hon. | River Heights | NDP |
| MOSES, Jamie, Hon. | St. Vital | NDP |
| MOYES, Mike, Hon. | 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, Hon. | 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 | Ind. |
| WHARTON, Jeff | Red River North | PC |
| WIEBE, Matt, Hon. | Concordia | NDP |
| WOWCHUK, Rick | Swan River | PC |
| <i>Vacant</i> | Spruce Woods | |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 6, 2025

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): I'd like to table the sequence for the consideration of departmental Estimates in the Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: No further tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Asian Heritage Month

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): This May marks an historic milestone for our province: the inaugural official celebration of Asian Heritage Month in Manitoba. For the first time, we come together to recognize and honour the countless contributions of Asian Manitobans to our shared history and future. This is more than a symbolic moment; it reflects our province's ongoing commitment to diversity, inclusion and mutual respect.

Asian Manitobans have played a vital role in shaping our communities culturally, socially and economically. From business owners and educators, to health-care professionals and artists, generations of Asian Manitobans have contributed immensely to the growth and richness of our province.

We believe that diversity is not just something to be acknowledged; it must be actively celebrated, supported and reflected in the policies we create and the communities we build.

This moment of recognition was made possible by my colleague, the MLA for Fort Richmond. In 2024, as Manitoba's first Chinese-Canadian member of the Legislative Assembly, she introduced Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act, and with the unanimous support of this House, it became law on June 4, 2024.

In closing, Honourable Speaker, Asian Heritage Month is not only a time for celebration, it is also a time for reflection and commitment. It reminds us of the ongoing work needed to elevate Asian-Canadian

voices, dismantle systemic barriers and ensure that every Manitoban feels seen, valued and heard.

Today, we honour the past, celebrate the present and look forward to a more inclusive future.

Thank you.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): Asian Canadians have a long and proud history of building our province and shaping our communities into what they are today. This month, we celebrate people of Asian descent among the pioneers and leaders of our great country and province.

Over my lifetime, I have been blessed to meet countless people from the Asian-Manitoba community who've made a home for Filipino, Punjabi, Chinese, Vietnamese, Arab and many, many more diverse, profound cultures right here in Manitoba.

The customs of respect, dedication and perseverance are unmistakable across my experiences with the Asian-Canadian communities. But most of all, no matter where I go, there is caring and loving embrace for everyone.

I urge all Manitobans to embody the values of caring and love just a little more this Asian Heritage Month as communities across Canada grieve from the heartbreak that unfolded at the Lupa Lupa [*phonetic*] Filipino event in Vancouver.

In the face of such incredible hardships, we should feel more encouraged than ever to stand with one another as Manitobans, as Canadians.

To all those affected by the grave tragedy, we support you, we grieve with you, and we will move forward together with you.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Bengal Tigers Club 20th Anniversary

MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond): Honourable Speaker, as we're celebrating Asian Heritage Month, it is with immense pride and heartfelt gratitude that we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the cricket team of Bengal Tigers Club, a remarkable milestone that speaks not only to the club's longevity but to its unwavering commitment to building communities through the unifying power of sports.

Founded two decades ago, the Bengal Tigers Club has been a beacon of hope and a pillar of strength for our community, especially in areas like Fort Richmond where diversity and inclusion are at the heart of community life. With a passion for sports, the club has successfully bridged the cultural gaps and fostered a sense of belonging among people from diverse backgrounds.

Recognizing the South Asian community's love for cricket and other sports, the club has dedicated itself for—to promoting sportsmanship, excellence and professionalism among children, youth, women and seniors.

The club's impact extends beyond the playing field in Fort Richmond. By celebrating culture and encouraging awareness, the Bengal Tigers Club has helped newcomers connect, integrate and thrive in their new home, including many families who live in Fort Richmond.

Equally commendable is the club's focus on youth development, offering opportunities for skill building, confidence and leadership from a young age. As the community matures, the club has thoughtfully expanded its programming to include seniors, promoting active lifestyles and improving health outcomes for all the adults. I have seen first-hand how families in Fort Richmond have benefited from this inclusive and community-driven approach.

Honourable Speaker, the Bengal Tigers Club is a shining example of how grassroots efforts can create lasting and meaningful change. I invite my colleagues to join me in congratulating the Bengal Tigers Club on this important milestone.

I also ask that the names of the honoured guests in the gallery today be included in Hansard. Guests: Abu, Abul, Maruf, Mohammad, Shamsul Arefin, Zafrul and Foysal.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Abu Saleh M Kabir, Abdul Baten, Abul Fazal Md Didar Chowdhury, Maruf Hasan Khan, Mohammad Ashraf Haque, Shamsul Arefin Taseen, Zafrul Hasan Shuvo, Foysal Kabir, Md Rajbul Haque, Zia Uddin Fahad.

Koko Platz Rec Club

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): As we all know, local community and recreation clubs are an important—are important because they foster a sense of belonging, provide opportunities for people to gather and contribute to the overall well-being of the community. In Portage la Prairie, the Koko Platz Rec

Club has provided services including an outdoor rink, a playground and a community club since the 1980s. Unfortunately, in 2021, the club was destroyed by fire.

New board members with a new mission began fundraising for a new and improved Koko Platz Rec Club. In 2023, the redesign of the club began and construction started in the summer of 2024. This July, the building will be complete, and next winter, skating will resume for the first time in five years.

What makes this project so remarkable is the original fundraising goal of \$500,000 was surpassed by almost \$200,000, thanks to the generosity of the community and the tireless efforts of the board.

Many of these board members are young adults who spent time at the Koko Platz Rec Centre and are now raising their own children near the club.

People like Julianne [*phonetic*] Toews-Dewis, Colby Orchard, Brandwyn Kinnear, Kaitlyn Coltes [*phonetic*]—Coates, Tanner Waldvogel, Sara Proctor and others have taken the reins so their children's children and the entire community of Portage la Prairie now has a place to gather and play and to connect with others, no matter what the season.

Sara and Brandwyn are here with us today, along with their daughter with us today, representing the board of the Koko Platz Rec Club, and I'd invite you all to join me in saluting Sara and the—Sara, Brandwyn and the rest of the board on a job well done.

* (13:40)

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Prior to proceeding with members' statements, there's some guests in the gallery I'd like to introduce. We have seated in the public gallery, from Woodlawn School, 80 grade 3 and 4 students under the direction of Simmy Gandhi, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen).

We welcome you all here today.

Movement Centre of Manitoba

Mrs. Rachelle Schott (Kildonan-River East): Honourable Speaker, located on Henderson Highway right here in Kildonan-River East, the Movement Centre of Manitoba is a registered charity that has been teaching independence and transforming lives for 28 years. It provides specialized conductive education and occupational therapy programming to help individuals living with neuromotor disabilities increase their

mobility, confidence and independence in activities of daily living.

I've had the opportunity to tour the centre twice to learn from the hard-working clients and staff, including the executive director, Jennifer Wojcik, who is with us here today in the gallery. The family-like environment at the centre can be felt the moment you walk through the door.

Over 100 clients and families access the centre's programs each year. The centre serves clients of all ages, from infants to older adults, who are living with neuromotor disabilities, including cerebral palsy, developmental delays, spina bifida, acquired brain injuries, stroke, multiple 'sclerosis' and Parkinson's disease.

The Movement Centre helps clients improve, build and regain life abilities, including skills such as fine and gross motor, self care, cognitive, speech and communication, social and emotional, self-esteem, confidence and motivation.

Personal connections, friendships and support are integral to the centre's capacity.

This life-changing work is only made possible by the centre's incredible community, relying on the generous support of their clients, families, donors, sponsors and community partners.

On June 22, the Movement Centre's seventh annual Perogy Run will be held at Kildonan Park. This all-abilities wheel, walk, run event is one of the largest fundraising initiatives for the centre, raising over \$600,000, all of which goes directly to the programming. I was so honoured to attend last year, and I invite all of you to support this year's event.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Manitoba 55+ Games

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Honourable Speaker, this summer, from June 3rd to the 5th, the city of Steinbach will welcome more than 1,000 people for the Manitoba 55+ Games.

While the games kicked off the curling event in March, the majority of the competitions will be held in June, with events ranging from bridge to baseball to timed walking. This year's games will also feature events in the recently opened Southeast Event Centre. The beautiful new centre, which was supported by all levels of government and significant private investment, is a state-of-the-art facility for both sports and social gatherings.

The games are being led by committee chair Audrey Harder and by the Pat Porter Active Living Centre. It will require hundreds of volunteers to make the games a success, but Steinbach and the region are well-known for giving both their time and their financial resources for important causes.

Much has changed since Steinbach last held the 55+ games in 2011. In addition to the new Southeast Event Centre, there are a number of new facilities that participants will be able to enjoy. As well, while I was much too young as the MLA to participate in 2011, this year, I qualify, in age, if not athletic ability.

But some things haven't changed since Steinbach last hosted. The Manitoba 55+ Games are still about much more than competition. They're about friendship and encouraging all Manitobans, of all ages, to stay active. They're about Manitoba's collective sense of community. And, like in 2011, Steinbach will enthusiastically welcome all of the visitors and make them feel at home.

I want to thank all of the event organizers and volunteers for the work they put into hosting this year's games and invite all of my colleagues in the Legislature to visit Steinbach in June for the Manitoba 55+ summer games.

Red Dress Day

Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures): Today I rise to commemorate an important day not only in my constituency of Keewatinook, but for every Manitoban. Red Dress Day serves to remind all of us of the ongoing crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit persons.

As people gathered on Red Dress Day, I am reminded that this day of remembrance was inspired by Métis artist Jaime Black, who created the REDress Project in 2010. The artist hung red dresses on trees, statues and doorways to highlight the absence felt by families and friends of those who went missing.

Since the last installation of the exhibit in 2011, the artist has collected hundreds of donated red dresses which are hung to bring awareness to the issue.

Inspired by the powerful and moving artwork put on every day by Jaime, communities began to organize Red Dress Day every May the 5th.

Communities come together to raise awareness about the prevalence of violence against Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse persons, and how

often their missing persons cases are left ignored and unsolved.

On this day, we come together to mourn the impact felt by the violence against our relatives. Our aunts, sisters, daughters, mothers, cousins and grandmothers deserve the ability to live life freely without worrying about violence and without worrying if anyone would care if they went missing.

Taking care of those around you is central to a safe and happy community, and it is a responsibility to look after our relatives.

Honourable Speaker, it is imperative that Red Dress Day and the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit persons is not just an issue of our women and two-spirit relatives to bring forth; it is a societal issue that is the responsibility of us all, and therefore it is an issue for all Manitobans and all Canadians to talk about and address every day.

This Red Dress Day, I stand before the House to express my sorrow and my support for those who have been affected by missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit persons.

I know that there are families, not only in my constituency of Keewatinook, who have experienced such a significant loss, but all across Turtle Island; and I ask for leave for a moment of silence for all members to remember those who are no longer with us.

Miigwech, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Is there leave for a moment of silence?
[Agreed]

Leave's been granted.

A moment of silence was observed.

The Speaker: Thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba's Economy GDP Growth Targets

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Yesterday, Manitobans learned that this Premier is sad and lamented that no one congratulated him in 2017, but that is simply not true. On October 5, 2017, the current member from Interlake-Gimli congratulated him in this very Chamber.

So on my second day as the Leader of Opposition, I stand and congratulate the now-Premier for being

hand-picked by Greg Selinger to be the next leader of the NDP in 2017.

Now that that's out of the way and the Premier has had 24 hours to think about the questions I asked yesterday, which he did not answer, I will ask them again.

Manitoba is ranked dead last in GDP growth under this Premier and his NDP government. What are his GDP growth rates for Manitoba this year?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Well, that didn't last long, did it?

Honourable Speaker, you were here yesterday when the member opposite was heckling the amazing Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism (MLA Kennedy); didn't even manage to make it through 40 minutes after that new day.

And, by the way, new day in Manitoba: a message on health care and affordability, unity for all people in this province. They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and, indeed, I am flattered.

However, when it comes to the economy, the biggest threat we're facing right now is from Donald Trump. I was pleased to see Prime Minister Carney, in the Oval Office, tell Mr. Trump that Canada will never be for sale. We will never be the 51st state.

Why did the member opposite thank Donald Trump? Well, I would very much like to hear him explain why.

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

Budget 2025 Tax Revenue Projections

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): So once again, Honourable Speaker, Manitoba: you can see a clear answer—a clear question to the Premier; no answer.

* (13:50)

He refuses to answer the simple questions in this Chamber. It is your right as Manitobans to know, what are his GDP growth targets? Instead, what does he want to do? Put false information on the record. He wants to attack and he wants to bully, just like he has always done.

So I'll ask him again, Honourable Speaker. The entire NDP budget is built on the premises that there will be record income tax and business tax collected. He cannot—can he not simply answer the question.

If he can't tell Manitobans what his targets are, will he at least tell Manitobans, where is this increased tax revenue coming from?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): We're going to grow the economy—it's the only way that makes sense—by investing in you, the people of Manitoba.

And I just feel so much joy being able to work with you, the people: \$3.7 billion of infrastructure so that Manitobans in hard hats and steel toes can go to work every day building up this province we love.

When it comes to GDP targets, we want to be a have-province. That means increasing our real GDP per capita to above the national level in the coming years. That is something that the PCs never had their eye on.

When the member opposite was in government: 8 per cent inflation. Ever since we've been in government, inflation has been during the Bank of Canada target range.

So, Manitobans, business owners, what do you prefer: 8 per cent inflation under the PCs or staying within the Bank of Canada's target range under us? Plus, with us, you get somebody who will stand up to Donald Trump every day, not suck up like the member opposite.

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

Provincial Deficit Increase Concerns

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): There you have it once again, Manitoba: bullying and name-calling by this Premier.

And if anyone wants to suck up, there's only one person in this Chamber who has rubbed shoulders with a billionaire, thanked them and then given them a million dollars of your taxpayer dollars. Who was that? This Premier with Elon Musk, your Honourable Speaker.

Premier seems to think he's immune from answering the questions. No answer on GDP targets, no answer on how he's going to grow the economy.

If the Premier won't answer those questions and he's going to hide his secret target for GDP growth, will he at least tell us—Manitobans have a right to know—how high will the deficit grow under this Premier and his careless NDP government?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): You know, the people of Manitoba deserve answers; that's something they never got under the PCs. But every day that we've been in office, we've been very straight up with you.

We're fixing health care. We're making life affordable. That's why we're re-opening emergency rooms that were closed under the PCs. And that's why we're hiring nurses who were let go under the PCs. And that's why we cut the gas tax; it's lower at a permanent level than it ever was under the PCs.

What else did we do in office, Honourable Speaker? Well, we're repairing that PC deficit: \$2 billion. So how high would the deficit get? The member opposite was sitting at the Cabinet table when it reached record levels.

And now that he's in opposition, what did we learn in the media today? Well, the PC party itself has a record deficit of almost \$700,000, so please keep asking about deficits because the member opposite has no credibility when it comes to the books.

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

Free Trade and Mobility Within Canada Request for Support for Bill 227

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, Manitobans are worried about paying their bills. They're worried about putting food on their table. They're worried about getting by day to day.

And this Premier still refuses to answer questions in this Chamber for you, Manitobans.

Yesterday, my colleague, the member for Midland (Mrs. Stone), put some incredible, 'powerfac'—powerful facts on the record. The NDP government is refusing to support our call to remove interprovincial trade barriers. She brought forward Bill 227, The Free Trade and Mobility Within Canada Act, and this NDP government and Premier voted it down.

The Premier's depriving Manitobans of a massive economic growth potential at a time we need it most. The new Prime Minister is even committed to getting rid of interprovincial trade barriers by Canada Day.

Will the Premier today commit to support Bill 227 and the dismantling of interprovincial trade barriers by Canada Day, yes or no?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Yes, we're dismantling interprovincial trade barriers. We're doing a great job led by the amazing Minister of Business, Mining,

Trade and Job Creation (Mr. Moses). But, really, it's everyone around the table who's pitching in, something you never saw under the PCs. In fact, you didn't see it in their leadership just over a week ago. The members opposite somehow came together to have somebody who got less votes than the other guy become their leader.

So perhaps the barriers that need to be brought down are those within the PC caucus between them and the rank-and-file membership of their party. But while they continue to ploy and play with division, we're about uniting all Manitobans and all Canadians.

Yes, we're working to knock down interprovincial trade barriers; we're also working on nation-building projects that connect provinces and territories. Where do they stand on that? They criticize; they throw stones; they never built a thing in their lives.

We're working together with you to build, build, build Manitoba and Canada while he continues to—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Khan: And Manitobans, you'll notice no details, no specifics, no dates.

The question was: Will the Premier commit to removing interprovincial trade barriers by Canada Day, yes or no? He said yes. We're going to take that as he's going to get rid of them by Canada Day.

If trade barriers aren't the barrier, then is it that they don't want to get rid of the NDP-created artificial barriers and red tape? Because that's what Bill 227 calls for.

So, point-blank: Does the Premier support streamlining the approval process to approve—to remove artificial barriers and red tape supporting interprovincial trade barriers, and will he support Bill 227 today—by Canada Day; yes or no?

Mr. Kinew: We don't need to wait for Hansard to come out tomorrow to know that I said yes on the first one. Not only is it going to happen by July 1, when we get to Canada Day, I'll be waving that Canadian flag so hard, saying: I love this country. We'll never be the 51st state. We'll always be the true north, strong and free.

And what will the member opposite have to say to Canadians who want us to stand together against the threat of Donald Trump? Well, let me check my notes here. Apparently, it says, on the 25 per cent

tariff threat—his exact words—and I quote: I would say thank you. I would say thank you. End quote.

Well, perhaps we'll get an answer for whether or not he's going to continue the lovefest with Donald Trump by Canada Day. Will he share his answer now? Yes or no?

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

Mr. Khan: Manitobans, it's very telling what the Premier just did right there. When did he choose to end the quote? Before the quote was actually over. His own member, the member from Kirkfield—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —said: Thank you. Thank you. He's gone.

Who was I referring to in that quote? His best friend, Justin Trudeau. Thank you, Justin Trudeau is gone.

The Premier purposely chose to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: The Premier purposely chose to leave that out.

Honourable Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The government bench needs to quiet down. I can't hear the question, and I'm sure you can't either.

Mr. Khan: Once again, you can see the childlike behaviour, the bullying by the NDP—[interjection]—and they're doing it again. And they're doing it again, Honourable Speaker. I'm sure you can hear that.

So the question again is simple: Will the Premier support Bill 227? The member from Midland has already brought it forward. It's already ready to go. Why will he not support Bill 227? He has a chance today.

Yes or no, will he support Bill 227 and get rid of interprovincial trade barriers?

Mr. Kinew: No, we won't. The work is already happening.

So let's talk about Canada. The member opposite, in his answer there, here's what he's saying his defence

for thanking Donald Trump is, and I just want you to follow the logic. He wants our democratically elected former prime minister to be removed by a foreign power.

That's our democracy. That's what our veterans stood up for. And he wants to be threatened by a foreign leader, to have the votes of Canadians and Manitobans ignored.

We will never be the 51st state, and we will never allow foreign leaders to determine our democracy.

Of course, on the members opposite side, what do they do? Well, they allow the person with fewer votes to lead their movement. And, in fact, I believe it's the person with the least amount of donations on their side of the House in a while, too.

* (14:00)

We noticed that the member opposite donated \$646.25. The 25 cents, a remarkable act of generosity, but it didn't bring him up to even half of what the average donation—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Chinese Tariffs on Canola and Oil Lost Revenues for Manitoba Farmers

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, China has imposed a 100 per cent tariff on both canola meal and oil. These were large markets for Manitoba canola growers.

Will the minister provide the dollar value of this lost canola business to Manitoba?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture): Let me first start off by thanking all agriculture producers in the province of Manitoba.

Not only do we have challenges for agriculture producers—the hard work they do with China—but also our neighbours to the south. And I think we don't need to reiterate the importance of the member opposite, of his choice of supporting Mr. Trump and then encouraging the tariffs that are being proposed.

Our government, our producers, are challenged today with the hard work they do, and the canola growers will eventually have to be heard. And we will—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Portage la Prairie, on a supplementary question.

MLA Bereza: Honourable Speaker, the people of Manitoba and the farmers deserve to know, so let me

help the minister with the answer that he has not answered: Manitoba exported \$938 million worth of canola oil and meal to China. Manitoba is now locked out of that business.

Honourable Speaker, what countries will these Manitoba farmers be able to sell their nearly \$1 billion worth of canola to? Who will it be?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, there are challenging times for agriculture producers across Canada. There's no doubt. But also, the reality is that the decisions that are made are beyond our control. We are patiently awaiting the federal Agriculture Minister and the government to get in tune how we can continue to support our agriculture producers, the canola growers.

And a prime example as the ag stability program. Business risk insurance programs are in place, and we will continue to work for the betterment of agriculture producers across Canada, across Manitoba, and I know fair well member opposite knows darn well we as a government look after our agriculture producers, not only today but into the futures for the betterment of food production—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Portage la Prairie, on a final supplementary question.

MLA Bereza: Honourable Speaker, I just want to point out, did anybody hear a country there? Honourable Speaker, Enns Brothers employs over 350 people across Manitoba. They now face 25 per cent tariffs on their equipment sales.

Has the minister had his staff determine the impact of these tariffs on Enns Brothers, one of our great employers in Manitoba, yes or no?

Mr. Kostyshyn: It's quite ironic that the member opposite, the critic, would somewhat be talking about a 25 per cent tariff. Maybe reach over to the left and maybe make a nudge to the member opposite that sits there, the one that supports the tariffs of US and approves in Trump's bleeding.

So I'm going to ask the member opposite from Portage la Prairie, are you in support of your—

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

I would remind the minister he's got to direct his questions through the Chair, not directly at members opposite.

Mr. Kostyshyn: I guess my question, finally, is: Is the critic from Portage la Prairie in—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

**Moose Population Counts for Northern Manitoba
Request to Publicly Release Numbers**

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): The minister has expanded the moose tags this year for—in the northern part of the province. This decision is one generally made after studying population counts.

Will the minister make this data public?

Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures): It gives me a great opportunity to talk about the moose hunting that goes on in the province of Manitoba, something that members opposite totally ignored; they did nothing but shame Indigenous hunters across all of Manitoba, try to pit Manitobans against each other time and time again.

What do we do? We do things with a scientific-based approach and we're going to take that to Indigenous communities and we're going to have that consultation across all of Manitoba, because that's the right thing to do.

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

Mr. Wowchuk: Historically, this data has been made public so that Manitobans could follow along themselves and ensure that conservation and responsible hunting is taking place.

Why is this minister refusing to be public with the counts?

Mr. Bushie: Historically, Manitobans have been engaged across all aspects of moose hunting in—province. Members opposite, seven years, they did not do that.

So they talk about historical treatment of hunters here in Manitoba? That's something they ignored each and every day in their failed seven and a half years.

So what are we doing? We're taking a real solid approach to how we do this. So when we come time—enhanced moose surveys to be able to come to the table with the accurate figures for the province of Manitoba when it comes time to moose hunting.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Swan River, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Wowchuk: No answer on what's happening in the North, perhaps in my local area. We have a collapsing moose population in the Duck and Porcupine mountains.

Will the minister update population numbers and share moose management plans for this fall?

Mr. Bushie: Perhaps if calls to the member's MLA office didn't directly go to voicemail, he'd have an answer when it comes time to being able to respond to his constituents. Because each and every day, they ask us on a daily basis, right from when we formed government, how come we didn't have engagement, how come the PCs did not engage us when it comes time to moose management and management of our natural resources? And I honestly don't have an answer for them as to how or the rationale as to why they did that.

Because for us, we take a different approach: collaborative, science-based approach to natural resource management here in Manitoba.

**Buy Canadian Policy
Implementation Timeline**

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): This PC team supports Manitoban and Canadian businesses and many manufacturers proudly operate in my constituency and in our neighbouring communities.

What is the status of the minister's buy Canadian policy and when will it be revealed to the public?

Hon. Mintu Sandhu (Minister of Public Service Delivery): I thank the member for the question.

Our government is a listening government. We are listening to Manitobans and we are listening to the business community, and we will always prioritize Manitobans and Canadian jobs first.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

Mr. Guenter: The minister should be able to communicate to Manitobans exactly what his government is planning. They've talked a big game; I'm giving him the opportunity to back it up.

When will the minister provide the actual details of a buy Canadian policy?

MLA Sandhu: Honourable Speaker, as I said earlier, we—our government is a listening government. We are listening to Manitobans, we are listening to the business community, and our whole front bench and the backbench, everyone is out in the community, listening to the Manitobans.

I will—want to make sure the member from Borderland stays tuned.

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

Mr. Guenter: Well, that's a disappointing answer. We're now months into a trade war. It's been two months since the minister first introduced the bill. Either the minister has neglected to do the work or he is refusing to share it with Manitobans.

Why would the minister suppress this important policy for Manitobans? What is the specific date that the minister will release this policy to Manitobans?

MLA Sandhu: Our job is to listen to Manitobans and to make sure we're delivering on their priorities.

* (14:10)

Unlike my—member opposite and the official Leader of the Opposition, who thanked Trump for putting the tariff on Canadians to our jobs. We're like—again, my main focus, our government's main focus, is protecting Manitoba jobs and Manitoba economy.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Department of Families Review Death of Myah Gratton—Report Recommendations

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Families when she would release a report that was promised over a year ago. Manitobans have lost faith in her government and want to read it themselves. Instead, the minister talked about herself.

When is the minister going to release this information to Manitobans?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): If the member opposite would care to learn her job, she would know—and do a little bit more research—she would know that by law I'm not able to release that report. Juliette Hastings has that report and her lawyer has that report, and that's all that's going to get it.

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

Ms. Byram: Instead, the family wants to take a—make a personal attack on me here. But more concerning, yesterday the minister confirmed that Juliette Hastings, a grieving mother, had to undertake legal action to gain even partial access to a report that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) promised to make public.

Why did the minister think it was appropriate to suppress this document to the point it required legal intervention?

MLA Fontaine: It allows me to get up today, again, just to reflect on one of my answers yesterday, and that was that we went on the year anniversary to Carman, and as I was starting to share that each and every one of the folks that were in attendance on that very, very cold night, of which I didn't see the member there, and now wants to get up in the Chamber today. But I think it's so important that every single member that spoke about the family talked about how loving the family were to one another, and that Myah was a big sister to all of those siblings.

You know, Carman is a tragedy. It will go down as one of Manitobans'—Manitoba's biggest tragedy in respect of intimate partner violence.

Our government is committed to ending 'intirprint' partner violence—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

The honourable member for Agassiz, on a final supplementary question.

Ms. Byram: The Premier said the whole document would be made public. The minister disagreed. Now, instead, Manitobans get no information.

We are asking about a report that was promised over a year ago; will the minister release the recommendations from the report?

MLA Fontaine: No, I won't, but what I can assure the members opposite is that we are already actioning the recommendations that were found in that report almost immediately.

And what I'll also remind the member opposite is that I'm the one that ordered the section 4 review because we take the protection of children very, very seriously.

And to that end, we've also put money where our mouth is. We've increased—we've got \$13.7 million to help women escape intimate partner violence. We've got \$20 million in Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag of which we are building transitional shelters, 24/7 safe spaces—drop-in safe spaces. We are doing the work to prioritize—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Provincial Out-Migration Retention of Skilled Workers

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Manitoba has been losing more young people to other provinces than it's gaining. According to recent statistics, over 3,500 Manitobans left the province last year for job opportunities in provinces like BC and Alberta.

This government promised to create 10,000 new Manitoba jobs and reverse this trend, but recent data suggest that Manitoba's job numbers have plateaued.

What is this government doing differently to ensure that young Manitobans and skilled professionals see a future for themselves here?

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation): I thank the member opposite for that important question.

It is important for Manitobans to understand how we're providing more opportunities for young people. After seven and a half years of a government that turned their backs on young people and provided less opportunities, our government is changing course.

I think one of the primary ways is by investing in youth's education and their ability to complete high school. One of the key pillars of that policy is to make sure that we feed kids in schools.

So I'm very proud about our nutrition program—universal nutrition program in schools. This is going to help kids and more young people get educated, make it to their grade 12 and give them the tools to succeed in our education system and in our labour force for years and years to come.

Thank you.

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

Internationally Trained Professionals Credential Recognition Barriers

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): One fundamental strategy to fill job vacancies is to support newcomers. However, internationally trained professionals continue to face delays and barriers when it comes to credential recognition.

What steps is this government taking to speed up credential recognition to better fill Manitoba's labour gaps?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): It's my pleasure to get up I think for the first time here in a very, very long time.

You know, part of my mandate letter as Immigration Minister was to remove unfair barriers to credential recognition, beginning with internationally educated health professions. And this is something that we've been doing with a whole-of-government approach.

We've even instituted a nurse re-entry program that's the first of its kind. And we're seeing graduates

already from this nurse re-entry program, and we're going to be expecting about 80 of them—or, 80 new nurses by the end of this year, and it's going to be my pleasure to be there along with our Health Minister, our Advanced Education Minister and our jobs minister there at graduation day for these nurses.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

Government's Job Creation Commitments Request for Quarterly Progress Reports

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Manitoba's economy has long depended on traditional sectors, yet we are way behind Alberta and BC in many critical sectors: everything from technology and innovation to green energy to hospitality.

Manitobans deserve to know if this government is delivering. Will this government commit to releasing a quarterly public report on the progress of their job creation commitments, including metrics on out-migration and sector-specific growth?

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation): I thank the member opposite for that important question.

We are certainly taking very significant steps to increasing the—not only the ability for more Manitobans to have the education and the tools to take advantage of the job opportunities but creating more opportunities right here in manufacturing, in information technology, in aerospace, in biotech. These are incredible fields we have in Manitoba, and it's all powered by a great Manitoba economy and so many great business leaders.

That's why it's concerning for me to hear when members opposite make thanks to the tariffs that are threatening the business community here in Manitoba. And, quite frankly, I think that has no place here in our Manitoba business community.

And so I think this is an opportunity for members opposite to get up and say that they actually don't want to thank Donald Trump—unless they actually do.

Emergency Room Closures Plebiscite Legislation to Prevent

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson): For two terms of a PC government, emergency departments across rural Manitoba were cut and closed one by one. Emergency departments in Carberry, Ste. Rose, Roblin and Pine Falls all saw doors close or significant

operational reductions. On top of that, these same PCs closed three major emergency departments in Winnipeg. They did all of this with zero consultation with Manitobans, Honourable Speaker.

While members opposite thank Donald Trump and his attacks on North American democracy, we are protecting your right to weigh in on critical services like emergency care.

Can the Minister of Health please share with the House how our government is working with and listening to communities in Manitoba to ensure that they have a voice at the table?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I want to thank my colleague from Radisson for introducing Bill 216, which makes it clear that no health authority can close a hospital emergency room or a health centre in a region without being approved in a plebiscite by Manitobans in that region.

We're proud to say that our government has never closed a single emergency department. In fact, Honourable Speaker, we are opening the emergency rooms that were closed under two terms of a failed PC administration.

We've heard how the PC cuts and closures have hurt Manitobans. We are listening to Manitobans, and we're reminding them that their voices are at the table and our government works for each and every single Manitoban in every corner of our great province.

* (14:20)

Health-Care Wait-Times-Tracking Website Timeline for Implementation

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): In February 2024, the Minister of Health told the media that Manitobans could soon expect a brand new wait-times-tracking website.

It's been 15 months. Where is the website?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): One has to wonder, you know, where the member opposite stands on health care. She sits next to a Leader of the Opposition that she supported going door to door to door selling memberships on his behalf, when he told Manitobans that he would privatize, create a two-tier American-style health-care system if it were up to him.

The leader opposite has thanked Donald Trump for the tariffs that are hurting our health-care system. Where does the member for Roblin stand on that?

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

Mrs. Cook: I asked the Minister of Health a simple question about a promise they made to the media 15 months ago. They promised Manitobans would know where they are on the wait-list for diagnostic tests and surgeries.

It's been 15 months. Where is the website?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, that member is well aware that our government has made massive investments in strengthening health care right here at home, creating a centralized platform, SWIM, to make sure that Manitobans have clarity on where they are in the wait-list process for different procedures. And that work continues to make it even better and even stronger for all Manitobans.

We've invested millions of dollars in creating thousands more surgeries right here in our own province, but if it were up to the member for Roblin, we'd be sending Manitobans to California for care that they should be getting right here at home.

So I'll ask again: Does that member support Donald Trump and two-tier American-style health care, or does she stand with Canadians and stand with Manitobans?

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

Mrs. Cook: I think it's clear that what happened is the minister made an ad hoc promise to the media while under pressure, and has nothing to back it up.

It's a simple question; the minister should be able to answer it. They made the promise to media 15 months ago that Manitobans would know where they are on wait-lists.

Where is the website?

MLA Asagwara: In addition to a novel and important platform, SWIM, that has centralized the wait-list for procedures and surgeries in this province, we're going further than that. We've invested in remarkable technology right here in our province.

For the first time, we have a robot, a surgical robot performing surgeries right here in our province. As a result, we've recruited new surgeons, new nurses and allied health-care professionals to the front lines. We're investing in making sure that Manitobans get the care they need faster in their own province.

The member opposite and the leader to her right would soon see Manitobans go out of our country for

care they deserve to get here at home. We won't take that approach, and we will not take lessons from someone who doesn't stand for Manitobans and Canadians.

Aquatic Invasive Species Funding for Decontamination Sites

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): This government may have finally acknowledged the danger aquatic invasive species pose.

How many inspections and decontamination sites will the Province fund this year?

Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): It gives me great pleasure to announce that we are investing with communities 540,000 more dollars to combat aquatic invasive species.

And one of the things that we're doing is that we are working with community; we are working with Indigenous leaders and Indigenous communities, we're working with municipalities. That's why AMM was with us during our announcement. We have great work—a great working partnership with them. We're so happy to continue that work each and every day.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Riding Mountain, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Nesbitt: Well, thank you to the minister for confirming this government's dollar amount they're investing this year.

However, this government's entire province-wide initiative is \$540,000 whereas Ottawa budgeted \$810,000 for the Clear Lake curtain that failed almost immediately.

Why is this minister allocating less for an entire province than the federal government did for one doomed project?

MLA Moyes: Let me clarify for the critic because he seems to be mistaken. We are actually spending—that was a \$540,000 increase in our budget. And it's absolutely a \$1.2-million investment this year, so thank you very much. We're doing better than anything members opposite ever did.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Riding Mountain, on a final supplementary.

Water Testing and Public Reporting

Mr. Nesbitt: Last year, the minister refused to commit to added water testing in public reporting. Manitobans deserve to know the health of our waterways.

Will he tell the public today?

MLA Moyes: Sorry, I'm a little confused. Will I tell the public what today? I'm not exactly sure; that's not exactly a clear question.

What I will say is we're taking a science-based approach where we listen to scientists, where we listen to the experts. Right now the water temperature isn't quite high enough to do that testing. We will get that out to the public as soon as possible.

Medical Navigator System Online Appointment Booking

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): Frankly, I'm still reeling from the fact that the new Leader of the Opposition said he supports foreign interference, which is absolutely wild.

But, you know, every day, our government is taking steps to take patients' experiences better when accessing health care in Manitoba. We're improving accessibility for patients and we undo damage that was done by the previous government.

Can the minister please tell the House—the Minister of Health—what kind of innovative investments they are making to help patients navigate our health-care system?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I want to thank my colleague for that really important question.

Honourable Speaker, in the time it takes me to answer that great question, you could book an appointment in Brandon or in Winnipeg on our new MediNav application online. MediNav.ca helps guide patients to the best place to get the care they need in non-emergency situations. Just go to the site, create an account with your Manitoba health card number, share your concern, and it gives you a list of options of where you can get care same day, weekends, holidays and evenings.

Not only does this improve Manitoba's health-care outcomes but it makes sure that people are getting connected to primary care. We are making sure that Manitobans are getting care right here in our own province, close to home.

Free Trade and Mobility Within Canada Request for Support for Bill 227

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition asked this Premier a very simple question about supporting Bill 227 to remove interprovincial trade barriers.

This Premier said, no we won't. If the legislation is good enough for Nova Scotia, it's good enough for PEI and it's good enough for Ontario, why is it not good enough for Manitoba?

Does this Premier truly stand with Canada as a united country and province, and will he remove inter-provincial trade barriers and support 227 today, yes or no?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Why? Because Manitobans deserve the best, and that's what we're doing. We're giving Manitobans the best approach to knocking down internal trade barriers.

Now, we're not seeing the best from the members opposite, as the front bench passes Mentos back and forth.

I want to also point out that the Leader of the Opposition was heckling throughout question period today—so, day 2; try again tomorrow.

I will say, try again this year, perhaps, when it comes to donations. When you donate \$646.25, as the member opposite did to the PCs, it shows maybe you're not a true believer. Maybe you don't really believe in that political project that you're a part of.

Of course, the MLAs opposite, they only donated \$1,100 average across all of those seats.

Who donated more? Wallay [*phonetic*], our buddy—\$5,500 minimum, in the Brandon debate. He called on all of them to donate more.

Honourable Speaker, I think we found out why they didn't want Wally to be their leader.

The Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: And just before we move on, there's some guests in the gallery I'd like to introduce. We have seated in the public gallery from Poplar Grove School, 12 students under the direction of Jamie Penner. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Dauphin, the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn).

We welcome you here today.

* * *

The Speaker: Petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Two things.

Pursuant to rule 34(7), I'm announcing the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Fort Richmond (MLA Chen). The title of the resolution is Protecting Women's Health in Manitoba.

* (14:30)

And can you also please resolve the House into Committee of Supply for the consideration of departmental Estimates.

The Speaker: So it's been announced that pursuant to rule 34(7), that the private members' resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business—[*interjection*]

Order, please.

The next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Fort Richmond. The title of the resolution is Protecting Women's Health in Manitoba.

And at this point in time, before moving on, I have a leave request for the House.

Last year, I was asked by—I asked the Clerk and the Assembly staff to develop a process to allow for the live interpretation of languages spoken in this House other than English or French. I am pleased to report that the Assembly staff are now able to provide this service to members.

Last week I received a request from the government caucus to provide live interpretation of the Cree language for a statement to be given in this House on Thursday, May 8, 2025.

I would note that this would be the first time in the 154 history of this Assembly that we would be able to provide live interpretation of an Indigenous language during our proceedings.

I believe this would be an important step in advancing the Assembly's commitment to reconciliation.

Accordingly, I am seeking leave of the House to allow the Assembly to provide live interpretation of languages other than English and French, spoken

by members during proceedings of the House and committees.

Under this agreement, a member wishing to address the House or a committee in another language: (1) must provide adequate notice to the Clerk of the language they wish to speak so that the appropriate interpretation/translation services can be arranged; (2) must provide notice 90 minutes before the commencement of the House sitting to members of other recognized parties and independent members.

Please note that the Assembly will endeavour to provide these services for all requests, but in some cases may not be able—this may not be possible in the event of a lack of available interpreters.

These provisions will remain in effect until the end of the Second Session of the 43rd Legislature.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Leave has been granted, and I thank the House for this bold step into the future.

* * *

The Speaker: And now, as previously announced, we will resolve into Committee of Supply.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

HEALTH, SENIORS AND LONG-TERM CARE

* (15:00)

The Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I do.

The Chairperson: Minister.

MLA Asagwara: On behalf of the Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, I am pleased to present the financial Estimates for the 2025-26 fiscal year.

Our government is committed to rebuilding health care after years of neglect by the previous government.

We are committed to ensuring that those on the front lines are treated fairly and with respect.

We are committed to improving patient care and ensuring that all Manitobans, no matter where you live or how much money you make, are able to access and to have good quality, public, Canadian health care.

Indeed, at a time when our national sovereignty is under threat; when our neighbour and former ally has launched a trade war against Canadian jobs; and when far-right politicians seek to undermine our public systems, it is important to reaffirm our collected and fundamental Canadian values.

Public health care is one of those values. Canadians agree, Manitobans agree, no matter your income, you should get timely, quality care.

Health care should be equitable, it should be accessible and it should be universal. That is the Canadian way. Budget 2025 reaffirms this notion. Budget 2025 marks a historic turning point in our commitment to rebuild and strengthen Manitoba's health-care system.

The Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care is allocated \$8.8 billion, a historic increase of \$1.2 billion. Of course, when we include the broader health sector, the summary budget for '25-26 totals almost \$9.4 billion. That is an increase of over \$1 billion, over 14 per cent.

Manitoba's top priority is health care. That is why they elected our government. The previous government was at odds with Manitobans on this very important priority. For two terms of government, our health-care system was neglected, cut and dismantled. And, so many of the challenges we see in health care today are a direct result of their bad decisions.

Three major emergency departments were closed, resulting in overcrowding and long wait times all over Winnipeg. Rural emergency departments were shuttered all across our great province. Hundreds of staff were fired or quit after years of disrespect and being ignored by those in the previous government.

No investments were made in building capacity, and instead, patients were sent to the United States, out of—not only out of province, out of country—to receive the care that they should have been receiving here in Manitoba, and receiving that care out of country at private clinics.

Meanwhile, institutions like the Cardiac Centre of Excellence, a jewel in our province, an internationally renowned institution, was dismantled piece by piece.

A program that was the envy, globally, was torn apart by the previous government, leaving Manitoba patients without streamlined cardiac care.

And now, with a new leader at the helm of the PC caucus, it is clear that if they were in power, they would take it even further. The PC agenda is to bring American-style health care right here to Manitoba.

The PC leader sat at Heather Stefanson's Cabinet table when she cut health care, when she dismantled these invaluable structures that provided great care to Manitobans. He supported the previous government's cuts, and he's been silent about that harmful record. He's refused to say if he thinks the cuts were a bad idea.

I notice that the peter—the leader, rather, of the PCs lost the constituency of Turtle Mountain in his leadership campaign, lost by—lost the constituency of Turtle Mountain, rather, in his leadership campaign and lost it by quite a bit when you do the math. I wonder if that's because his government closed the Carberry ER in that very community.

I've been to that community. I've met with the wonderful people of Carberry alongside the Premier (Mr. Kinew), and we had the pleasure, on a really wonderful, sunny day, to reopen the Carberry emergency room.

The people of Carberry are good people. They are good Manitobans. They deserve quality health care, and that is where we stand on our side of the House. But I am not so sure where the Leader of the Opposition stands on this issue. He supported the previous government and Heather Stefanson's move to cut health care and close emergency rooms every single step of the way.

The Leader of the Opposition went as far, recently, as to thank Donald Trump for the tariffs that are creating so much instability in Manitoba households. And, yet again, the opposition finds itself very much on the other side, the other spectrum of the issue, that everyday people, everyday Manitobans, are on.

The PC leader likes American tariffs. We know that now. He likes American-style politics, likes American-style health care. Fortunately, where they are at odds with Manitobans, our government is very much on the side, the same side, of Manitobans.

We began repairing the damage done to health care by the PCs in our first budget, last year's budget. Last year, we began fixing the relationship between

health-care workers and government, and we've hired a net-new over 1,600 health-care workers as a result.

We recognize there's much, much more work to do, and we're committed to doing that work. We signed historic collective agreements that finally brought fair deals to the front-line workers after the previous government refused to negotiate with them at all and froze their wages for years.

We ended the practice of funnelling money into private, for-profit American clinics, and instead began building up our public health-care system right here in Manitoba by investing in beds—hundreds of beds—and surgical slates.

We've increased access to primary care to alleviate burdens on emergency departments. We've improved safety measures in those very same emergency rooms. We began construction on the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home and took the first steps of rebuilding the Victoria emergency department.

And despite mockery—ongoing mockery, quite frankly—from the opposition, we met with, and we continue to meet with front-line staff in their workplaces as part of our listening tour, where they shared their ideas on how to fix health care in Manitoba.

We know that solutions are found at the bedside. They're found on the front lines, not in the boardroom. And so with that in mind, we instructed health authorities to redirect funding from the bureaucracy—from internal bureaucracy—directly to the front lines of our health-care system.

Fixing health care is a long-term budget. It's a long-term approach and project. It will not happen overnight. It will take years. But Budget 2024 re-established a foundation for that to be built upon, and Budget 2025 begins the building.

I want to be very clear that our government is committed to supporting the front lines. We understand that patient care begins with those who deliver it, and our government is stepping up to meet the front lines where they've been for many years. Budget '25 builds on the retention and recruitment efforts of our first budget.

We know that under the previous government, Manitoba was losing health-care workers. Front-line staff did not want to work in such a toxic culture. Our government, on the other hand, values front-line workers. That's why in Budget 2025, we invested an additional \$780 million into front-line staffing, and we're working very hard to make workplaces safer. We've hired

over 100 institutional safety officers across Manitoba and more—dozens more—are on the way.

***** (15:10)

We've installed weapons scanners at Health Sciences Centre and introduced amnesty lockers. We've upgraded security equipment and lighting around sites, making the environments more safe.

We're investing in flexible child-care spaces and expanding the Provincial Travel Nurse Team to support rural and northern care, and as part of our \$48-million investment in training front-line staff, we're adding 176 new training seats across the province for health-care professionals. We're making Manitoba a place where health-care workers want to work again.

Budget '25 puts shovels in the ground for emergency departments like Eriksdale and the Victoria ER. It includes \$7 million to renovate the Children's Hospital emergency department, and we know that is such an important space for children and families in some of their scariest health-care moments. We've added 97 fully staffed beds to relieve bed block, in addition to the more than 240 beds that we've already added and staffed. We've set up a Lower Wait Times and System Improvement Team, focusing on improving emergency room wait times.

Fixing the mess the PCs left in our health-care system, in our emergency rooms, is a key element to fixing health care overall. And so we are continuing to do that work. We're building on the expansions we made last year in primary care, and primary care is a big part of this conversation. Last year, we saw over 138 net-new doctors here in Manitoba.

I know I'm running out of time, Chair, so thanks.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

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

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I didn't initially have an opening statement because I'd like to just get into the substance of the questions, but I feel compelled to respond to a few of the things the minister put into their opening statement.

And, first of all, I'd just like to help them with their understanding of rural Manitoba. Carberry's not actually located in the constituency of Turtle Mountain. It's, in fact, located in the constituency of Agassiz. I hope that's helpful.

If it were possible, you know, I think that the minister would be more interested in using their

10-minute opening statement to talk about all of the good work that their department is doing, hopefully, to make health care more accessible to Manitobans, to increase capacity, to lower wait times. But they didn't do any of that, which tells me that there's not a lot of good news to share.

Instead, they spent 10 minutes engaging in partisan political attacks. It's clear that this NDP government is perhaps scared of the new Leader of the Opposition. They launched a Trump-style attack website about the Leader of the Opposition within moments of his win. And they used taxpayer dollars to do it; I think it's important that Manitobans understand that that's what the NDP is using their tax dollars to do.

But that's not what we're here in this committee to do. My job in this committee is to hold the NDP to account for their broken promises and for their failures and to ask on behalf of Manitobans when we can expect to see results. Because what we've seen in almost two years of NDP government is that things are, in fact, getting worse. Wait times are getting longer.

The average wait time—the median wait time, I should say, in Winnipeg ERs at the moment is four hours. That's a decade-long high for the second month in a row. At the Grace Hospital ER in west Winnipeg, which serves my constituents, the median wait time is almost seven hours. And one in 10 patients at the Grace Hospital right now is waiting over 16 hours for care.

And you don't have to take my word for it. Front-line health-care workers are speaking out about the NDP government's failures. The minister touched on the listening tour and they seem to feel that they're being mocked for it. They're not being mocked for listening to health-care workers, they're being questioned about the fact that nothing has resulted from all of that listening.

And, again, it's not just me saying that. The president of the Manitoba Nurses Union said just yesterday on social media, quote: If the government had truly been listening during their listening tour, would we be here again over a year later with no measurable progress? Nurses are beyond tired of the spin of being used for announcements, campaigns and photo ops only to be ignored when the decisions are being made. Unquote.

So if the minister is truly listening, then they need to heed the words of the president of the Manitoba Nurses Union and other front-line health-care workers who are speaking up about the situation in health care right now under the NDP. They can deflect, they can

look backward, they can try to blame, they can try to turn the conversation to Donald Trump, they can try to attack the Leader of the Opposition.

But what Manitobans want and what Manitobans expect is accountability from the NDP for the promises that they've made and have failed to keep.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: I thank the member for their opening statement.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 21.1, bracket A, contained in resolution 21.13.

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

MLA Asagwara: So the team that I have with me today is my deputy minister, Scott Sinclair, ADM Sandra Henault, ADM Suzanne Gervais, ADM J.P. Fradette, my director of ministerial affairs, Alissa Brandt and policy manager, Michael Pereira.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Cook: I'm going to start with a few simple questions about the staff in the minister's office.

Can the minister provide a list of all the political staff in their office, with their names, positions and salary classifications?

MLA Asagwara: I did have some additional comments for my opening remarks but ran out of time, so I'm just going to continue those remarks first, and then I'll address the question after that.

In terms of primary care, our government is building on expansions we made in the last year in primary care. We saw over 138 net-new doctors join our workforce here in Manitoba, which is a huge success and a team effort. And I want to be clear about that: our government doesn't do this work alone.

We have wonderful partners across the health-care system. We've got very, very talented people in our Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care who care deeply about the well-being of Manitobans and who work hard every single day to make a difference. And the strength of the folks in our Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, working with post-secondary institutions, regional health authorities, front-line staff and health-care workers, unions. You know, we've been able to work with partners, the colleges, the CPSM. We've been able to work collaboratively to have a net-new over 138 doctors join our workforce here in Manitoba.

Almost 4,000 Manitobans—patients have received care at our new minor injury and illness clinics. That's 4,000 people, Manitobans, who were able to get care when they needed it, without waiting in an emergency room.

Now, as we build up health care, we're going to add more extended hours primary-care clinics. We've seen how well those have gone. We know that—I think it's now at about 12,000 or 13,000 Manitobans have accessed our extended hours primary-care clinics in addition to the minor injury and illness clinics, which is phenomenal.

Our government launched medinav.ca which was very, very well received, not only in Manitoba but certainly across the country. We launched that website to help Manitobans navigate our health-care system with ease and get them appropriate care faster. I've heard from several of our own colleagues and their family members who have benefitted from [medinav](http://medinav.ca). And we're improving access to primary care with investments to expand virtual-care visits with nurse practitioners through QDoc.

* (15:20)

And I want to thank the Nurse Practitioner Association of Manitoba; you folks, these folks have been a wonderful partner. We've been able to work together to take steps like, in our first budget, doubling the nurse practitioner training seats. We've added nurse practitioner job opportunities across the province. We're moving in the direction of making sure that nurse practitioners have more 'opportunities'—opportunities for different types of specialized training in post-secondary. It's a really important partnership with expert nurses across our province, and I want to thank NPAM for their collaboration.

We know as a government that with better access to primary care, we will see better outcomes for

patients across Manitoba. Something that's really important is access to surgeries. You know, our wait times for surgeries and diagnostics need to be addressed. Those wait times and backlogs were not cleared or addressed by the previous government. Addressing this has been a pillar in our strategy. And while the previous government did not build capacity here in Manitoba to address these issues, we're doing that in this budget '25-26, as we did last budget.

We've bought a new mobile MRI for the North—the first ever in our province's history—and we've got the staff in place to operate it. We're investing \$4 million to add 800 new hip and knee surgeries at Selkirk Regional Health Centre, along with \$13.7 million for Selkirk to open 30 new additional medicine beds—acute-care beds; 8 and a half million dollars will go toward 50 new transitional-care beds, and we will increase the number of fully funded critical-care beds from 101 to 131 in our province.

These are all significant investments and improvements, none of which could have been done without direct input from the front lines: from nurses and allied health-care professionals, doctors and team members who we've met on our listening tour stops; who have really helped inform the way our government invests in health care. And I want to thank all of those folks who have not only shown up to listening tour stops, but have actually followed up afterwards—we've had coffee, we've had meetings, we've had forums, we've been able to dig even further into the details of the ideas and concerns they've brought forward and work at fixing health care together.

So, I want to thank them.

There's capital projects that are a priority for our government as well. When we say we're building health care, I want people to know that we actually mean that literally. Budget '25 sees funding for three new personal-care homes in Manitoba: Lac du Bonnet, Arborg and Park Manor in Transcona.

So, along with the emergency departments I've already mentioned, we will begin the work on the new CancerCare headquarters in Winnipeg as well. And we're making very clear that we're holding true to our commitments to Manitobans who need to hear those four magic words as it pertains to cancer: You are cancer free.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: The minister didn't answer the question about the political staff in their office, so I'll repeat that and add my next question as well.

Can the minister please provide a list of all the political staff in their office, with their names, positions and salary classifications? And also, a list of civil servants that are employed in the minister's office.

MLA Asagwara: I'll start with my director of ministerial affairs, Alissa Brandt, who is also in the room with us. So I'll speak extra kindly about my director of ministerial affairs.

I am going to elaborate a little bit just because I do think it's important. You know, none of us do our jobs alone; certainly, ministers don't do this work alone. We have—we're fortunate to have some really, really incredible people, really incredible teams who do this work right alongside us and who are just as invested in Manitobans having a health-care system that is improving for them, that serves their families and communities the best ways possible.

Alissa Brandt is my director of ministerial affairs, is just a rock star human being, a really great person, somebody who is—loves this province, and you can see it in the way she does the work. And I can't thank her enough for her leadership on our team. She's a senior officer 7, which is an interesting—it's interesting language, senior officer 7. But that's the official, I guess, designation. Yes, and I just want to again thank her for her leadership on our team.

Special adviser's name is Raina Loxley, senior officer 1. Raina is just another really great team member who's super smart—razor, razor smart—sharp, loves graphs and charts certainly much more than I do. I see the value of them, definitely, but it's really helpful to have somebody with the level of public health expertise that she brings to the team, and, again, commitment to making health care better for Manitobans.

Special adviser, specifically on policy, Michael Pereira, professional officer 9. Really, really wonderful member our team, really has a strong, strong understanding of what Manitobans are paying attention to in health care and brings a really wonderful lens in terms of relationship building in health care and working with leaders, which I think is really important. It's something that, you know, we really didn't see a lot of effort, positive effort made by the previous government, so it's great to have folks on our team who bring that to the table in such a genuine way.

Special assistant Allen Mankewich, special assistant to the minister 4. Wonderful, wonderful human being. People probably know Allen based on his advocacy in communities in many ways, but to have that level of

integrity on our team has been a wonderful, wonderful asset.

El-Shaddai Nyakiir. Let me find that specific detail for El-Shaddai's role. Senior policy manager 4. Super smart, super sharp, graduated with distinction from the University of Manitoba. A really brilliant human being. Again, somebody who's passionate about making health care better for our communities, and honestly just a superstar person. And I have full confidence that her career is going to be outstanding. Another really great person on our team that contributes in invaluable ways, and I can't thank her enough for her contributions on our health team.

Sara Fehr, EXM 4, executive assistant. Another really wonderful person on our team, cares deeply for our diverse communities, has a really good understanding of the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion and making sure that when we're in spaces, when we're doing a lot of the outreach that we do as a government and as a team, that everyone in the space feels welcomed and is heard. And I think that's a really, really important way to approach health care. And approaches health care in a—through a compassionate lens in their role as the executive assistant.

Issues manager, Charles Mancini, professional officer 9. Wonderful, wonderful member of our team. Issues manager, I think, kind of tells the story of some of the work that Charles is responsible for, Charlie's responsible for. But really, truly, you know, again, we don't do what we do without our team members, and he is such an integral part of our team and making sure that we understand what's going on with Manitobans. We hear directly every day but really keeps us up to speed to the minute on what's going on, and I appreciate that.

* (15:30)

Luc Guénette, professional officer 9, and Naline Rampersad, professional officer 9. These are folks—our officer is Luc and press secretary Naline. Again, just wonderful folks on our team. Can't thank them enough for what they do in helping us communicate health-care issues and working together at really important tables on health care.

Special—

The Chairperson: Order, please.

Minister's time is expired.

Mrs. Cook: I would invite the minister to continue their answer.

MLA Asagwara: Special adviser, Eric Jacobsohn. I think folks are pretty familiar with Dr. Jacobsohn. I'll expand a little bit on my remarks in terms of him as our special adviser on health. Dr. Jacobsohn is a highly, highly reputable physician, specialist here in Manitoba. He is someone who really and truly has incredible relationships across the health-care system and has been practising and been an expert for decades, has really historically done transformative work in our health-care system in Manitoba.

You know, his voice, his expertise, his understanding of how to approach health care, how to close health-inequity gaps, how to communicate effectively and build relationships with other physicians. His role as a special adviser has really and truly been so helpful, so fundamentally important to what we've been able to execute as a government.

You know, we often talk about health-care issues that are not actually related to critical care. We talk about that a lot. But Dr. Jacobsohn has been really a wonderful voice and expert when we're talking about the importance of enhancing and improving access to primary care. Really an innovative thinker in terms of how we can do better in the primary-care space in Manitoba. And I really—it's been an absolute pleasure being able to work with him and I can't thank him enough for his expertise.

I just want to go back to speaking about the folks who do comms, because I—you know, the way that we—or press secretary, rather, which is pretty self-explanatory but we saw for a number of years under the previous government the way that health care was, of course, cut and dismantled, but also the way health care was talked about.

And I think that's a really important area to focus on, because the way we talk about health care matters. It's so important. Government has a tremendous responsibility and opportunity to talk about health care in a way that emphasizes the invaluable nature of health care that we have. We've a public health-care system here, universal health care in Canada, The Canada Health Act; these are all values that are so fundamentally important to protect and to strengthen.

And our government takes very seriously our role in espousing that, sharing those values with Manitobans, and then backing up those values with investments. Which is why Manitobans have seen us invest in strengthening public health care and care right here at home.

And, you know, there are a number of experts we've been able to work with, folks across health-care system—our health-care system, rather, who have been waiting for an opportunity to have their expertise heard, to contribute to strengthening our public health-care system. And everyone also recognizes that after years of damage, it's going to take us time—it's going to take us years to fix that damage and really build up the health-care system to where everyone wants it to be.

But we're taking real action. We're taking meaningful steps. And we're seeing the benefits of all of that collaboration and those shared values really benefitting Manitobans, whether it's net-new health-care workers or net-new beds, you know, we're seeing the system take these steps and make a difference for folks while also, again, recognizing that there's so much work for us to do.

There's so much more we have to do to address the challenges and to really make health care a place that, you know, across the board no matter where you work, you have your needs met. And no matter where you live, as a patient, you have your needs met in the right ways at the right time, in the right places.

And so we're committed to continuing to do that work and making sure that we engage with and surround ourselves with experts and Manitobans who didn't have their voices heard for years, but genuinely now have a true partner and collaborator in government.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Are any of the staff—the political staff—in the minister's office on secondment or employed as part of an interchange agreement with another organization, and if so, which ones?

MLA Asagwara: So the response to that question would be—that would be Dr. Jacobsohn, special adviser. That's the one role. And then I'm just going to provide a little bit of clarity on the other roles. I didn't—I spoke, sort of, you know, from my own personal lens, but I didn't provide the formal description for each of the political roles previously.

So for director of ministerial affairs: in that role, Alissa supports the minister in advancing their mandate by providing strategic advice to move our government's health agenda forward; manages political staff in the office, ensuring they're supported in their duties; directs and participates in policy development, Cabinet and Treasury Board submissions, legislative proposals; helps in communicating health initiatives effectively

with the public and the media; lead point of contact for stakeholders.

For Michael Pereira, he supports the minister in advancing their mandate through strategic policy development.

Allen Mankewich, rather, reports to and manages casework, acting as a point of contact for MLAs as the lead on agency board and commission appointments, attends meetings and briefings to support the work of the minister, maintains open lines of communications with stakeholders.

El-Shaddai Nyakiir leads on the development of legislative proposals and legislative House processes; works with the Seniors and Long-Term Care division to ensure the advancement of Manitoba seniors' priorities; attends meetings and briefings in support of the work of the minister.

Charles Mancini supports ministers' offices and the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) offices in the management of day-to-day issues; provides services to a variety of ministers as well as needed, helping to manage day-to-day issues as well for other ministers, and not just the Minister of Health.

Luc Guénette supports the Premier and ministers in planning outreach events and tours to connect people across Manitoba, and he does a really, really great job of that.

Naline Rampersad supports ministers in responding to media inquiries, organizing press conferences and announcements and engaging in strong media relations.

And I believe that covers it, and I did answer the member's question on interchange agreements.

Mrs. Cook: And I appreciate the additional detail about the staff responsibilities.

So, by my count, that's 10 political staff working out of the minister's office. But I notice there's been some turnover.

Can the minister disclose how much severance has been paid to previous political staffers during the minister's time as Health Minister?

* (15:40)

MLA Asagwara: I could be mistaken—I don't think so. I think the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook) asked about civil servants as well, so I think I'm going to—I'd like to provide that information now.

Jennifer Howarth is an AY4, and I—actually, before I get into all the names of the civil servant staff,

I do want to acknowledge that the work that these folks do is honestly incredible. These folks are amazing. The volume, the sheer volume, of correspondence that comes into Health is remarkable. And as a new minister, about a year and a half ago, I thought to myself, okay, new government, you know, that's probably to be expected and it might to some degree change or slow down over time. It's not slowed down at all, the volume; if anything, it's increased. People are really eager to meet and have conversations.

And I was in a—I had the opportunity this week, actually, to sit at a round table with Grand Chief Settee, Mayor Smook, northern representatives, and, you know, it was really quite something to hear them talk about how—and grand chief talk about how they hadn't been welcomed into the Legislature like this before, under the previous administration, to sit down and have regular meetings and conversations about how we can work together and address really important issues.

And that means a lot. We take that—I know I take that very seriously, and the folks who are responding to processing, handling, engaging with, mapping, tracking, lot of that volume, all of those really, really important interactions from Manitobans who are reaching out to share ideas, experiences, et cetera, civil servants are doing a lot of that work. It's incredible work that they do every single day, and they do it with such wonderful, wonderful attitudes and with such good-heartedness, and it really does make a difference.

So I cannot thank them enough for what they do in our office, on our team, and, you know, I don't think we get the opportunity to talk about that enough. So I just wanted to express that.

So Jennifer Howarth is an AY4, Brenda Ranville is an ATM, Amina Mugosa is an AY4, Carly Schnek *[phonetic]* is a CL4 and Paulette Kramer is an AYD.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you for that. And I'm just again going to restate my previous question and add a little bit more detail to it.

If the minister could please provide how many staff have left their office since October 2023, and how much severance has been paid to departed political staff?

MLA Asagwara: You know, Budget '25-26 is a budget that we're really proud of as a government—certainly all of the budget we're really proud of, Health in particular. Being the Health Minister, being a former health-care worker myself, I take a lot of pride in the fact that our government is showing Manitobans that

we continue to prioritize health care and to invest, to really and truly invest, in making health care better.

We talk about the fact that Budget '25-26 is a budget that builds Manitoba. It really does: \$3.7 billion to build. I should say it three times: to build, build, build. That's our mantra with this budget, and Health is no exception. We've got some really important capital projects that are supported by this budget. It's a budget that, you know, finds this really important balance of, yes, investing in building health care, whether it's three personal-care homes, reopening emergency rooms, doing the work to build the new CancerCare headquarters, doing the work to build—to re-establish the Mature Women's Centre, all of these really important infrastructure projects.

Also investing in what is required to make those buildings and projects and infrastructure a true success for Manitobans, and that's people. That's investing in the people who provide care on the front lines, at the bedside. It's investing in training opportunities. It's investing in retention and recruitment and really novel ways in Manitoba of doing the work of adding to our health-care human resource capacity and, finally, getting Manitoba in the game—you know, as some folks might say, in terms of recruitment. It's something that other jurisdictions were pretty far ahead of us in regards to and it's wonderful that we've been able to as a government work across departments to really move us in the right direction.

Earlier today in question period, our minister of immigration and labour, who is doing a phenomenal job, really and truly a phenomenal job—came into her role, you know, with a department that had been cut by the previous government with an approach that wasn't helping our immigration outcomes in Manitoba and turned it around completely: in our first budget, turned it right around.

And she mentioned today in question period that the work that she has done to support us being able to have internationally educated health-care workers finally have a pathway to practise in their own province has been done in partnership across departments. Minister of business, mining, training and job creation and myself: we've all—and Advanced Education and Training—we've all been working together to establish these historic projects, pilots, pathways to benefit health-care workers and fundamentally benefit Manitoba patients and families.

And so, you know, it's—I think it's really important for us to highlight the approach that's being reflected in this budget, the collaboration beyond our government with partners. It's important for us to reflect on

the impact that we believe as a government it will have over time. Again, we know it's going to take time. That's just the reality of it.

You can cut a bed in two seconds; it takes no time to cut a bed from the health-care system. It takes much more time and effort to add a bed. We know this, which is why, you know, when we see that the previous government cut 500 beds from across the health-care system, and our government is on track to add hundreds. We've already added hundreds, but right now we're close to 300 beds and we're going beyond that.

It's an aggressive timeline. We've been able to do that in about a year and a half, but we know there's much more to do and that adding capacity where capacity was cut takes real time and sustained effort, and it takes true partnership.

So all of that to say, you know, we're here to talk about Budget '25-26. I look forward to sharing and answering questions about that. And in terms of Budget '25-26, no, there has been no one who's left and no severance paid.

* (15:50)

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Just because I'm curious because I had found him to be quite helpful in the past when I had questions, what is the status of Shemar Barnes and his employment with the minister's office?

MLA Asagwara: Yes. I think it's really important to state for the record that Shemar Barnes is a wonderful person, just a wonderful human being who cares so deeply for this province. He's a really special person who we're really proud and I'm really proud to have as part of our government. You know, the guy went and got a promotion, and you can see it on his social media if you follow him online. But I'm thrilled for him. Anywhere he is in our government, we're lucky to have him.

And, you know, again, I think I'll take a couple of moments to not only talk about wonderful and dear Shemar but just to talk about this team that we have—this team that we have that's led by a Premier (Mr. Kinew) who made history and this government that we have that, for the first time in our province's history, looks like the province that we serve, a very diverse caucus and a very diverse team.

You know, again, none of us do our jobs in isolation. None of us can do what we do without our teams, without the infrastructure of people who show up and

do this work because they care deeply about this province that they're a part of. And I'm a very, very proud prairie kid. I'm a very proud Manitoban and Canadian, and I feel pretty fortunate to be part of a government that is able to connect with communities in a really unique way, in really important ways; understands the importance of representing all Manitobans of all identities, all walks of life, all income levels, all educational backgrounds. That's really important to us and for us.

And so it's—you know, it takes real effort and intention to build teams and community that look like the province that we serve, and we take that seriously. So there's a lot of work we've been able to do, but—and we're grateful for that, to be able to serve Manitobans in this way, and we're going to continue to work very, very hard not just in health but certainly across government to support Manitobans having better health-care outcomes.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Glad to hear that Shemar is doing well.

And in the spirit of appreciating staff, I, of course, wouldn't be able to do the job that I do without the staff that we have in the opposition caucus. And as the minister will know, being in opposition is quite different than being in government in terms of the staff responsibilities, the number of positions that we have, and opposition staff are expected to do quite a bit of work and to wear many different hats.

So we are very fortunate in our caucus to have dedicated and talented staff who are issues managers and communications officers and policy analysts, all rolled into one in many cases. So I know that my colleagues will agree with me that their role in our ability to do our jobs is essential, and I just want to put on the record how much I appreciate them.

I'm going to shift my questions now to health-care services under the minister's purview. And I have so many questions, I'm just trying to decide where to start. I think I'd like to start with the ER wait-time strategy announced last week.

There was no—in the strategy itself there was no goal listed, no wait-time reduction target. That came out in the media, that the minister is intending to reduce median ER wait times—and it wasn't clear if that was within the province—is that in Brandon, is that in Winnipeg—by one hour.

So I'm just wondering where that goal came from, why it's not in the strategy and if the minister could provide more details about that one-hour reduction.

Is it in Winnipeg? Is it in rural Manitoba? Is it in Brandon? I think those details are important.

MLA Asagwara: So the lowering wait times—Lower Wait Times and System Improvement Team—first, I want to say thank you to all of the experts who are taking part in this historic effort. We've actually, in Manitoba, we've never had an effort like this. We've never had a team, a table of experts come together in this way to address really, really urgent and important needs in an emergency department and, quite frankly, the system as a whole in this regard.

The folks who are doing this work are dedicated practitioners. These are experts. These are people who have a personal connection to the health-care system. If folks watched the announcement, they would have seen that our engineer, Heidi, shared her own personal story, which was—it's a heartbreaking story, it really is.

And it's pretty incredible, and I think it's really a testament to Manitobans, that through that heartbreaking story and that journey for Heidi and her family, she is willing and wanting to be part of an opportunity to make health care better, to improve emergency department performance, to improve the system so that other families don't have that experience.

* (16:00)

The priorities that are outlined in the strategy really speak to a few key areas, one of which is staffing. We've hired a net-new over 1,600 health-care workers. Our government is going to continue to aggressively do that work and set really ambitious targets.

But it's also about primary care. We know that. It's also about making sure that Manitobans have access to the primary care that they need in order to mitigate folks trying to get their primary-care needs met in emergency rooms, which we know has been happening. We have stood up, extended our primary-care clinics, minor injury and illness clinics, to address that. And we're seeing thousands and thousands of Manitobans benefit from that infrastructure.

Beds are a big part of this conversation as well. We've added hundreds of beds to our health-care system, be it in medicine, family medicine beds, critical care, psychiatric care, transitional-care-unit beds, beds in community for folks who are unsheltered, who need maybe more wrap-around supports and services. We've added a number of beds

to help take some of those pressures off the emergency department, and that work, again, is ongoing.

The two big metrics that this team of experts is working really hard in collaboration with sites across the province and the front lines, the two metrics that they're really working to address here are the waiting-to-be-seen times and the left-without-being-seen times. So those two really important—sorry, metrics, rather, left-without-being-seen percentages.

And so there's a number of initiatives outlined that this team has been working on. They've been having a lot of important conversations assessing directly on the front lines what's happening at different sites, listening to service providers. I myself have been able to participate in really meaningful conversation with different programs that have a direct relationship with emergency department performance. You know, a big part of this conversation is addressing flow through our system; access block is the language that people are most familiar with. And so those are the two metrics that we need to address.

As a government, we want Manitobans to have the best. We want the best for Manitobans who are accessing care in our emergency departments. And so we are committed to working as hard as we can with our experts, with our partners, to move wait times in the best possible direction, to lower those wait times to improve the system and to make sure that this is a long-term, sustained effort.

And so, for our government, it's about trending those numbers in the right direction, keeping those numbers trending in the right direction, but making sure that we are getting the best results possible for Manitobans.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Okay, so there was not a lot of clarity in that answer about where the one-hour wait-time target came from or what it applies to. But that target is out there, so I can only assume that the department has done some analysis of the additional capacity that's going to be required in various areas of the health-care system to achieve that target.

So I'm wondering if the minister can share, for example, how much additional capacity is required within the home-care system in the City of Winnipeg to lower wait times in our ERs because as we know, that's closely tied to the bed-block issue.

* (16:10)

MLA Asagwara: While I wait for clarity on some information for the member, some specific numbers, I will offer some thoughts and some of the work that we're doing.

The member—the critic is correct that there's a lot of work that needs to happen in order for aspects—the strategy as a whole, but certainly initiatives to be effective. I mentioned earlier, staffing is a huge part of that. And as Dr. Olafson talked about at the announcement—Dr. Olafson is a co-chair of this team—she really emphasized that much of the work that needs to be done is actually in community. So much of the work that needs to be invested in and capacity built needs to happen before someone ever, you know, gets access to or goes to an emergency room for care.

And that's a really important part of this conversation. The critic is correct that home care is a part of that conversation. As a government, we've worked really hard to expand opportunities for more home care to be not only accessed by Manitobans but obviously to train people to provide that care. So there was an initiative that was run out of the WRHA to credential folks in community as health-care aides, and we've expanded that across the province to other regional health authorities.

We really encourage other regional health authorities to see that as a valuable approach and to see the benefit of training people to become health-care aides and also ensuring that they have the opportunity to essentially ladder up their skills. So perhaps you begin your career as a health-care aide who's not fully certified just yet, but then you have the opportunity to maybe challenge that process, the examination that you would normally have taken, and then you become fully credentialed as a health-care aide.

We know in Manitoba that health-care aides have the ability to also skill up within their profession. So perhaps you're a health-care aide with, you know, the training that you've received and then you get additional training to become an operating room attendant, health-care aide, someone who actually gets trained on different skills in the ORs. I had the opportunity to meet some of those folks recently; they're phenomenal people, they're so passionate about what they do and they're really invaluable to the teams that they are a part of, whether it's in thoracic or other aspects of our surgical-care system.

And so, you know, encouraging regional health authorities to take that initiative and provide enhanced training opportunities for folks to become HCAs, home-care workers, has been really beneficial. Again,

we recognize there's much, much more work to do and we want to make sure that we create the conditions where these folks want to practice.

Bargaining fairly, settling agreements has been a big part of that. Our government was able to successfully see an agreement established with 25,000 support-care workers. That was a huge deal; I mean, 25,000 Manitobans who previously had their wages frozen for years were never allowed to get to the bargaining table. So that's, you know, work that we're doing to improve access to training opportunities, improve access to care in communities and also shift the narrative in terms of the experience that health-care workers had for many years previously.

As of March, 2025, March 31, 1,700 health-care aides were hired, net-new health-care workers—sorry, home-care workers were hired. That's a big number. That's health-care aides who are now part of our front lines, who are providing care to Manitobans every day. And I can't thank them enough. I had the pleasure as a front-line nurse work with many health-care aides, highly skilled folks who are invaluable to multidisciplinary and any health-care team they're a part of.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Okay, so while we're waiting for an answer to the question about capacity that's required within home care to achieve that ER wait-time reduction target, I am going to ask a different question.

In March, the government announced that it was taking steps to entice American health-care workers, I think specifically nurses, to come and work in Manitoba.

Can the minister provide a status update? How many nurses have come to work in Manitoba from the US?

MLA Asagwara: While I wait for the numbers on that piece—the US recruitment of nurses—I do want to take this opportunity to talk about the importance of the time that we're in, in terms of recruitment.

Here in Manitoba, we, like folks across the country, we are watching health-care workers in the United States be treated unfairly in many ways; be navigating an experience that is scary for some folks, painful. Some people have described it to me—some American health-care workers have reached out to me and described what they're dealing with in their home states and communities as terrifying. That's the

language that health-care workers that have reached out to me from the US are using.

And what I've also heard from American health-care workers is that, you know, they've gotten to know a little bit about Manitoba over the past 18, 19 months or so, and they like what they see. They like what they see here in Manitoba. They see a government that is standing up for health care and health-care workers, a government that recognizes that although health care—there are real challenges in health care, that if we work together, we can address those challenges meaningfully; and that Manitoba is a place that welcomes people of all backgrounds, experiences and identities. And we will support you collectively to have the best outcomes possible.

That message, that reality of what we're all working and striving toward as a province is resonating for folks in the United States, and I think that's something, as Manitobans, we should be proud of. I think, as Manitobans, we should be really proud that in the last provincial election, Manitobans sent a very clear message. They rejected hate. They rejected division. They made it very clear that they don't believe it's right for marginalized and vulnerable people to be targeted by governments. And that was a response that Manitobans had that wasn't just observed in our own province. Across the country, in the United States and internationally, people were paying attention as a result.

And so the health-care workers who have reached out to me from the US, I want to say thank you. Some folks have shared some really painful personal stories. I actually met a US-trained paramedic a couple of months ago, and his wife is a physician in the United States. And they come up here frequently in the winter months—believe it or not, yes, in our winter months—to enjoy our outdoors.

And they were asking questions about, you know, how could they potentially work in Manitoba. Had many of these conversations. I know my colleague, the MLA for Kirkfield Park, has had those conversations with US-trained health professionals as well. Many of us are. And we have, as a result, been successfully able to recruit and welcome US-trained health-care providers to Manitoba. And we're in ongoing conversations with many, many folks.

This is an opportunity for us to not only strengthen our health-care system, but to really, really welcome people to calling Manitoba home. We know that in our province, no matter—anywhere, actually, but one of our values and understandings here in Manitoba is that diversity is a strength. Diversity makes our health-care

system stronger and when we welcome diversity with open arms, it can lead to better outcomes at the bedside.

And so there are folks that as recently as last week I was talking to, who trained in Minnesota, who are looking to come to Manitoba and we're actively working with them. And there are steps that our government is taking, working with different colleges: so the CPSM, College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba, College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba, to make sure that the pathway to practise is barrier-free for those who are trained in the United States.

We also recognize that there's work to do to make sure that folks can acclimate really well to Manitoba. They can have a soft place to land here, not just in terms of landing from their flight, but really landing in community. And we're committed as a government to supporting those efforts and making sure that people really enjoy not only being a part of our communities but practising in our health-care system as well.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: We're getting quite backlogged here with questions that have not yet been answered, and I'm not clear if it's because the minister is refusing to answer or because they are just waiting for information from their staff.

* (16:20)

So, just to backtrack, we are waiting for information about how much additional capacity is required in the home-care system to achieve the ER wait-time reduction target. We are waiting to hear how many nurses the government has recruited from the US.

MLA Asagwara: So, to date, we are actively and successfully recruiting about half a dozen American-trained nurses with much more work going into that process. This is a more, obviously, recent development for us in Manitoba. We've certainly expanded our efforts to the retention and recruitment office to have an expedited pathway list of countries.

Previously, Manitoba did not have that at the college level. Other jurisdictions have had that for quite some time, but here in our province we didn't have that. So we work with the College of Registered Nurses to make sure that we had a list of countries, and we continue to do that work with them.

Those relationships are really important. We recognize that, you know, there are jurisdictions where there's comparable education and really strong health

infrastructure and we should be supporting folks who want to practise in Manitoba from those countries and being able to do so.

I'll also note that we've had many internationally educated nurses here in Manitoba for many years, for quite some time, who never had a pathway, who never had an opportunity to be a part of a process to practise in our province.

As I stated earlier, we've worked very closely in partnership with the Minister of Immigration, Minister of Advanced Education and Training (MLA Cable), minister of business, mining and job creation in order to develop a pilot pathway, which has been very successful. We've already had folks graduate.

The Minister of Immigration already stated we're looking at about 80 graduates. These are folks, again, who have been living, working, raising their families here in Manitoba who previously didn't have a government that was willing to support them and work with them to create a local pathway to practice. And so those are IENs who—some of which from the United States—who have been living in the province who now have a way to join our front lines.

This effort—in terms of specifically, I guess you could say, targeting the States in terms of recruitment—is more recent, and we've had webinars where we've seen dozens of nurses participate and attend and get information. As I said before, people are becoming more and more familiar with Manitoba, which is a good thing. This is a great, great province, and we want to welcome as many folks as possible to join our health-care system.

So I've had the pleasure of talking to some of these nurses who are interested—who are actually in the queue—myself, some of which are young, new grads who are very, very eager to work in our province, and not just in Winnipeg. Folks want to work in rural and northern communities, which I think is phenomenal, right. We need to make sure that, as we're doing this recruitment work, that we're not focusing solely on urban settings, that we're focusing on the needs of rural communities and northern communities.

And in my experience going out and meeting with, whether its reeves or mayors or council members in rural Manitoba, or health committees in rural Manitoba, folks are very, very keen to welcome internationally educated professionals and to support them and their families in being a part of their rural

communities and calling rural Manitoba home, or northern Manitoba home.

And so we're going to keep this work going. We're in conversation with many physicians as well in the United States, and we look forward to welcoming more and more nurses to our health-care system in the province from the United States.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you for that.

I just wondered what changes the minister is considering making to make it easier for nurses within Canada to come to Manitoba, or for nurses who are practising at a different level to perhaps become RNs. I'm thinking of a nurse that I spoke with who is an LPN, and her understanding was that an IEN could come in and challenge the RN exam, but she, as an LPN, a practising LPN in Manitoba, could not do so.

So I guess there's two different questions there. We've talked a lot as a Province and as legislators in the Chamber about interprovincial trade barriers, and one of those is labour mobility. And there is labour mobility legislation, of course, and I realize that a number of these issues fall under the purview of independent regulatory bodies, but certainly the government has worked with colleges to streamline entry requirements at times.

So it's sort of a two-part question. What changes is the government making to make it easier for nurses to move between provinces and come and practise in Manitoba? And what, if any, changes are happening to make it easier to increase the number of nurses we have practising in the province?

MLA Asagwara: You know, it's interesting this conversation that we find ourselves in, right, during this particular time around what's happening in the United States and pathways to practise and all of that, and I do think that, first and foremost, I would say that our government has done a few key things to support nurses practising in Manitoba.

One, we ensure that they're able to collectively bargain fairly, instead of having their wages frozen for over four years, and get a fair deal. I would say that's a pretty important approach for any government or administration to take. Nurses were certainly not met with respect under the previous administration and, you know, their wages being frozen for multiple years—not the best approach, certainly.

So I would say, first and foremost, treating nurses with respect, listening to them, making sure they can

bargain fairly. It's a pretty important step to take as a government and we were very happy to be able to do so. We're going to continue to treat nurses with respect but also say that, you know, our government has been very clear: We support Manitobans; we support Canadians; we're proud to be Manitoban; we're proud to be Canadian.

We support a strong public health-care system. We believe in strengthening and protecting that. We are protecting Manitoba jobs. That includes health-care jobs. We're creating more jobs and opportunities. We're making life more affordable.

In contrast, the PCs are thanking Donald Trump for tariffs, the same tariffs and the same terrible approach to, you know, attacking a sovereign country's economy and autonomy that is resulting in US health-care workers wanting to come to Canada, including our province, our great province, which we are and will continue—[interjection]—bless you—to welcome them with open arms.

Those are really important approaches that our government is taking—and certainly sharing the message to nurses locally that we're here to listen; that even if things are challenging, we're going to listen; we're going to work with you and we're going to action your ideas.

* (16:30)

Our government, myself and community partners—MNU, the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba, different registrars—went out many months ago and announced that we're making it easier for Manitoba nurses, for Canadian-trained nurses, who had recently retired to rejoin our health-care system. That pathway was made much, much easier and faster for those folks. And as a result, we had about 60—over 60 recently retired nurses rejoin the front lines of our health-care system.

I had the opportunity to speak to a nurse actually at an announcement in rural Manitoba—it was in Lac du Bonnet, actually—a wonderful, recently retired nurse—over 30-year career in health care—who rejoined the front lines of our health-care system when she heard the call and she knew that our government was working with our partners to make it easier for her to do so.

Our pilot program, again, for Manitobans who have been living in our province for years and never had a pathway to practice, we developed a pilot to get now 80 of these nurses, IENs—they're Manitobans who have been living here for a long time and finally have

a way to practise in our health-care system. We have been working with the colleges, certainly with the CRNM, constantly clarifying their obligations as a college to adhere to the free trade agreement, to respect and support the portability of nurses in and out of Manitoba—certainly, into Manitoba—and to join our front lines.

This question—the question that the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook), the critic, asked in terms of—the bridging is really what she's referring to—program opportunities. It's really a question for Advanced Education and Training. But what I can say, because we do work collaboratively, is that our government has been working to make sure that that is a very robust opportunity, so bridging from LPN to RN, BN status, that it's very robust and that it's an opportunity that—from what I've heard from LPNs themselves, that is more timely, so a duration that really better meets their needs.

So that work has been happening, recognizing that it's important to get input from LPNs themselves, which we've been able to do. And I want to thank the LPNs who have reached out to me, including the new grads that I saw just a handful of weeks ago at the new grad day. Many LPNs there, you know, pulled me aside and had questions and concerns and ideas for what we can do in health care, and I want to thank them for those conversations. And we're working very hard to make sure that there are opportunities to bridge, to ladder up skills, to pursue opportunities in our health-care system.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: One of the success stories of the previous PC government was the creation of the provincial nurse float pool.

So I wonder if the minister could just update us on how many nurses are now part of the provincial float pool and how many hours the float pool worked in the last fiscal year.

MLA Asagwara: The provincial float pool is a tool that we have as a province to meaningfully not only address staffing concerns, but to provide an opportunity, and a competitive offer, quite frankly, for nurses to return to the public system which is a very, very important priority for our government, wanting to take all necessary steps to strengthen our public health-care system.

Again, during a time where we see the leader, now Leader of the Opposition, thanking Donald Trump for tariffs, and actually touting the privatization of

health care, American-style health care. And I know the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) wants to heckle me right now in committee because it's tough to hear; it's tough for me to say.

I couldn't have—if you'd asked me a year or two ago whether or not any member of the Legislative Assembly would be thanking a foreign government for their open attacks on our sovereignty as a nation, and attacks on our economy and our fiscal health and health-care system, I probably would've said no way. You know, we maybe sit on different sides of the political aisle, but surely we're united on this issue. Surely we understand the importance of being united fundamentally as Canadians and protecting the structures that protect Canadians of all backgrounds, identities and socio-economic status. Not perfect, work to do, but surely we're united on that front.

And so it has been troubling, very troubling for us and certainly for me as the Health Minister to see the Leader of the Opposition thank Donald Trump for tariffs and for an approach to health care that would really harm Canadians and Manitobans.

We had taken a different approach; we have really found ways through partnership to maximize the opportunity that we have with the float pool. The provincial float pool, again, is a tool that we can really use to encourage and support nurses in returning to the public sector, which is really important. And I'm happy to say that in one fiscal year, in one budget, we were able to see a 117 per cent increase in nurses participating in that float pool; approximately 300 nurses are now a part of the provincial float pool.

* (16:40)

We've had over 10,634 shifts filled—127,610 hours worked—as a result of that float pool, with much more to come.

Our government is actively working with MNU, actively working with Shared Health, working with all of our partners to make sure that we're taking the necessary steps to build capacity in the float pool and, again, continue to recruit back to the public system nurses who left in droves under the previous government because they were disrespected, because their jobs were cut from underneath them, because their emergency departments were cut and closed, and because they knew that government at that time didn't have their back.

We're taking a different approach, and we're going to keep enhancing the float pool so that we can continue to strengthen our public health-care system.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: You know, while the minister says that they're taking a different approach, I think what we've seen and what all of us as legislators should be concerned about is the fact that nurses are not happy with this government. And I'd like to put their words on the record because I think that's important. They are the experts here, in fact.

Manitoba Nurses Union president Darlene Jackson told the Winnipeg Free Press on January 12 of this year, quote: "Our nurses tell us continuously that things are not getting better in health care, that, in fact, there are areas where things are deteriorating. Nurses are frustrated. We were promised a change." Unquote.

And more from The Globe and Mail earlier this year. Quote: The Manitoba Nurses Union said despite the new hires, its members have yet to report any noticeable relief. The union said it would like to see improvements in the working conditions for nurses, including a reduction in mandatory overtime. Without addressing the working conditions, no matter how many nurses they hire, we will continue to struggle with retention, said Jackson.

Again, Ms. Jackson told the Winnipeg Free Press earlier this year, quote: I think this is a wake-up call for the public to say to government, this is not acceptable. Things are not rosy in health care, despite what's been said. We are in a terrible crisis. She also said, quote, our nurses tell us continuously that things are not getting better.

And just yesterday, the president of the Manitoba Nurses Union said publicly, quote: If the government had been truly listening during their listening tour, would we be here again over a year later with no measurable progress? Nurses are beyond tired of the spin, of being used for announcements, campaigns and photo ops, only to be ignored when the decisions are being made. Unquote.

So I just wonder how the minister can claim to have made so much progress and claim to be a listening government when front-line health-care workers in our health-care system are saying the exact opposite.

MLA Asagwara: I'm happy to answer that really important question. And the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) is smirking at me from across the table. I'm not sure if he's trying to intimidate me or what exactly is going on over there. But that's a really important question that I'm happy to answer.

You know, our government recognizes that after seven and a half years of nurses being mistreated, being disrespected, being harmed by the previous government, that it takes time—it takes real time to effect the kind of change in the health-care system that a lot of nurses are wanting to see.

Now we recognize that collectively, by listening to nurses, by listening to the front lines, we have been able to take some really important steps, but there is much, much more work to do.

I've had the opportunity to meet with MNU, to meet with Darlene Jackson. I take very seriously concerns they bring forward. I take very seriously the ideas, the issues that they bring forward on behalf of their members.

And as the minister and as a government, we are committed to continuing to not only listen but to take the actions necessary to ensure that we can change the experience for the better that nurses have in our health-care system.

We know in very real ways that there are areas of the health-care system where things are moving in the right direction. We know that there are areas of the health-care system we have much more work to do, and we're committed to doing that.

That is in contrast to the previous government's approach where they just slammed the door on nurses, quite literally, froze them out, shut them out, froze their wages for years. Of course, nurses are frustrated. Of course, nurses are tired. You know, this was how they were being treated during a global pandemic, mind you. Nurses are still recovering from that.

So I take to heart what nurses have to say, and we take their feedback very seriously, and we're going to keep working very hard to improve the health-care system for nurses.

I think about the fact that nurses, when I was in opposition as the critic for Health, were telling me how unsafe they felt in health care, and how for years under the previous government, they had legislation in place to hire and train institutional safety officers, something that nurses called for, that unions called for. The previous government didn't do it.

I was shocked to become the minister and to see that no direction had been given, no action taken out of the minister's office to make the workplace for health-care workers safer by implementing institutional safety officers that everybody agreed were important in doing that necessary work.

And so we set a target to have institutional safety officers trained and on site by the spring, and we were able to deliver on that. And that's not to pat ourselves on the back at all; it's to say that we recognize there's work to be done, that we need to take steps to make sure that nurses and health-care workers are safer, and we're doing that. But there's much more work to do.

So our government's going to keep doing that work. We're going to keep listening to nurses. We're not shying away from feedback or criticisms or concerns. We welcome it. It's being open and listening and taking action that improves our health-care system. And I know that nurses didn't have that for seven and a half years, and I understand the harm that that did. I hear that from the recently retired nurses, the 60-plus who have returned to the front lines of our health-care system under our administration.

So we're going to keep doing that work together, improving the health-care system for nurses and health-care workers, and I'm always happy to meet with health-care workers to have these really important conversations.

And I want to take a moment to thank the health-care workers who have reached out to me to share their hopes for health care, and I want them to know that our entire team is here to continue to work with you, on your behalf, to improve health care and the conditions that you work in.

Mrs. Cook: I know the minister and the NDP campaigned on ending mandatory overtime, and I think when they were in opposition the minister twice introduced a bill that would end mandatory overtime for nurses.

So I just wonder when the minister plans to follow through on this commitment and end mandatory overtime for nurses?

* (16:50)

MLA Asagwara: I know that the critic definitely understands and appreciates that in order to make a dent in addressing mandatory overtime, we have to staff, right? It's all about making sure you've got more people on the front lines. It's about being able to hire net-new nurses and health-care workers and it's about being able to retain the health-care expertise that you have in your health-care system. That is something that, as a government, we've taken very seriously.

When I came into the role, you know, we're all getting settled into our portfolios and learning what's been going on behind the curtains, some might say.

And when you're in opposition, you have very limited access to the information in the ways that you would like.

And I was pretty stunned—I was very stunned, actually—to realize that the previous government didn't prioritize collecting information or tracking data or measuring outcomes in a meaningful way. The talent is in the department. The talent—the desire to take that approach most definitely there. Previous government just didn't see any value in it, or I guess, perhaps, they were likely a little worried about what the information would tell them if they really dug in and authentically assessed the numbers and the impacts of the decisions they were making in health care.

We thought it really important and really valuable to establish a foundation of getting this information and getting this data and using it to inform the approaches that we're taking in health care. We set up a retention and recruitment office dedicated to an approach that we've never seen happen in our province before: bringing people together, streamlining the efforts to retain and recruit health-care expertise to lighten the load for regional health authorities and physician clinics and partners across the health-care system and do some of that work for them and with them to ensure that we can more consistently staff—and in targeted ways, staff our health-care system.

And very quickly, it became clear that there were real benefits to gathering that information and to segregating it and doing the work of establishing that evidence-based foundation. It certainly really helped us focus our efforts. It's helped us have really meaningful and transparent conversations with our partners. We provide that information to folks when they ask. And as a government, you know, we set this target of 1,000 new health-care workers in our first budget, and we surpassed that. Again, that's not to pat anybody on the back, but our—I'll pat our partners and our team, for all the work they've been doing, on the back, but as a government, we know there's much more work we have to do; there's many more health-care workers that we have to hire into the health-care system and retain.

But a really important part of that equation is nurses, right? We know, again, to address the mandatory overtime challenge that was exacerbated under the previous government, you have to staff the health-care system. And so we were able to share, not that long ago, when we announced 1,255 net-new health-care workers, that we had successfully recruited a net-new 481 nurses. To date, we know, actually, that we've

been able to successfully recruit over 600 net-new nurses to the front lines of our health-care system. We know we need many, many more than that, but we also know that we're moving in the right direction, and that's work that we'll continue.

I was at a new grad day event a few weeks ago. And two years ago I was there with the Premier (Mr. Kinew), and, of course, everybody, you know, in the room got—so they saw the Premier—I'm chopped liver when the Premier—you know, they see him; they freak—they're excited; they get to ask him questions, and he's just great. He just knows how to connect with people.

But there was about 200 new grads in the room that day. And when I went back to this event a few weeks ago, there were over 300 new grads in the room. We're moving in the right direction in terms of graduating nurses here. Well over 90 per cent of those nurses are staying right here in Manitoba.

I was at the nursing colleges—oh, my goodness—at the college—I was at the nursing school summit. They had this really wonderful academic summit a couple of weeks ago, and I was able to bring greetings. And they had people from all over the country coming here for this conversation in Manitoba. And a really amazing non-binary presenter from the United States was there. And you know, that's the environment we're creating where we're getting talent, nursing talent, from everywhere coming to Manitoba, and I definitely made a point of encouraging that presenter to perhaps consider moving to Manitoba and practising here. I hope that they're open to it.

But, again, you know, well over 600 net-new nurses to address those mandated overtime concerns, hundreds, thousands more that we need to make sure join our health-care system in the province.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: I see we're running very short on time here, so I will leave with one question that remains unanswered from earlier in the session.

I asked about the additional capacity that's required in the home-care system to reduce ER wait times in the WRHA. Still waiting for an answer to that question.

The Chairperson: Order, please.

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

ROOM 255
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:10)

The Chairperson (Rachelle Schott): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of Executive Council.

Does the honourable First Minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Sure. So it's a great honour to be able to bring forward Budget 2025 to serve the people of Manitoba. The investments in health care are significant and what we were elected on to deliver. And the advances towards working with people to help the affordability challenge are real and making a difference for people across Manitoba.

It was amazing to take office and to see the price of gas come down for that one glorious moment. It was at 99 cents on January 1, 2024. We brought inflation down at the same time.

Of course, went and checked the price of gas yesterday, \$1.19 at a lot of the places I drove by in my part of town, and it is good to see that we're making a difference for people—everyday people, the average person out there, the average Manitoban.

Later today, we'll be going to the public consultation regarding the reopening of the Victoria emergency room. This is one of our signature health commitments. I'm proud that many of my MLA colleagues are going to be there to talk to Manitobans about the specific ideas and features and services that they want to see at a reopened Victoria emergency room.

Now, we know that the Victoria emergency room was closed under the PCs. It was one of their signature cuts that they made to health care.

* (15:20)

It was a very bad decision, and people in south Winnipeg and surrounding communities like Niverville and La Salle were very, very happy to see us announce a commitment to reopen this emergency room, along with the two others at the Conc [*phonetic*] and Seven Oaks.

But, of course, it takes time to be able to staff up and build these ERs, so we're proceeding in a judicious and manageable fashion.

So the Vic is first, and then once we get the Vic ER up and running and we make sure that we're serving the

needs of people in south Winnipeg, concurrently reopening and expanding the ER at Eriksdale in the Interlake-Eastern health region, then we'll of course proceed with the ERs at the Conc [*phonetic*] and at Seven Oaks.

I also want to highlight the extraordinary uncertainty and risk that Donald Trump has presented to our Manitoba economy. Earlier today, I was watching with interest as the Prime Minister, Mark Carney, met with Donald Trump. Of course, Mark Carney received a mandate from Canadians to stand up to Donald Trump and to defend our interests as a country.

As the Premier of Manitoba, along with the other leaders of the provinces and territories, I look forward to meeting with Prime Minister Carney tomorrow to strategize about what the next steps are in terms of us ensuring that not only will we follow through on that commitment that we'll never be the 51st state, but also that we'll protect your jobs and we'll protect our economy here in Canada.

And when we're talking about the threat of Trump, we know that we need to mention that there's also tariffs coming from the People's Republic of China. And our ag producers here in Manitoba and across western Canada, as well as fishers in some of the coastal provinces and territories, have been experiencing a lot of challenges from that.

So we've been working hard in ensuring that the investments are there in terms of the business risk management programs and investments and diversification of trade, such as with the Gate Project here in Winnipeg to ensure that the ag industry will continue to be the backbone of our great economy for generations to come.

So the—lot of interesting things happening, a lot of exciting things happening, a lot of important projects moving forward, and Budget 2025 is the vehicle that is going to drive us as Manitobans to the next stop on our journey together toward building up this wonderful province into a place that we all love so much.

So very happy to be here with my colleagues from both sides of the aisle, as well as some of the staff who work with us closely on a day-to-day basis and in the beautiful environs of this room, which has not only premiers Pawley and Schreyer, but also Roblin, and really does kind of speak to some of the great projects that were built up in Manitoba over the years.

And now we're proud to take on that mantle and build up some more great projects here in Manitoba,

to put people to work, to defend our economy and to power our jobs going into the future.

To that, I'll say miigwech. Merci. Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: We thank the honourable First Minister for those comments.

Does the Leader of the Official Opposition have an opening statement?

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): It's good to be here for my first Committee of Supply and my new role of the Leader of the Official Opposition and Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, now nine days into the job—or 10 days into the job. It's an absolute honour for me to be here.

I've had the pleasure of travelling all across Manitoba from before my time in politics as a Blue Bomber, and then into politics and now here as the leader of this campaign.

It's time well spent and I heard from Manitobans their concerns about the economy, about the tariffs and the impact they're having on businesses and the impact they're having on their lives. Heard from Manitobans about real change, not just press releases and announcements and photo ops.

Manitobans are concerned about job losses, recession and the future of our province. They're concerned about crime in our communities that is currently at its highest level it's ever been. Neighbourhoods not only here in Winnipeg, in Brandon, Portage la Prairie, Dauphin, Winkler, Morden, Swan River and many more.

They're concerned about homelessness, the addiction crisis, the rising cost of housing and taxes under this NDP government, and the shortages of quality housing.

All of these things that I mentioned above were all promises made by this current government to fix.

Crime was supposed to be fixed within a hundred days of this Premier (Mr. Kinew) and his NDP government, and we have crime at record levels. Encampments were to be gone in 30 or 60 days with another press release and announcement and photo op, and now we hear just yesterday in the Chamber that the levels are higher than they've ever been. And the answer by this government—nothing. Attacks, misinformation, misleading Manitobans.

We've seen many concerns, I mean—[interjection]—and you can see here that the Premier is heckling me in committee. Like, this is embarrassing behaviour by

the Premier. It's disgusting; it's shameful that the Premier is allowed the opportunity to heckle me as I'm just simply re-stating my opening statement.

So it's appropriate now, given the situation we're in, we turn to the Committee of Supply and we get answers—hopefully get some answers—from this Premier and his staff, which I won't hold my breath for or high—have high hopes.

I welcome the Premier and his staff. Look forward to getting some answers. It's what we're elected to do here, is get answers. Anybody can go to question period in the last two days and see, I don't think there's one answer by this Premier or any of his ministers. Some of them actually don't even know what we're talking about. It's a simple question of a number. How much money have you invested here? No answer. What is your GDP growth target for the Premier? No answer. Simple numbers that you should have in a budget. I mean, that's what we're here for. [interjection]

And, again, honourable Chair, I'm getting heckling from members opposite, but it seems to be going unnoticed here as well.

Mr. Kinew: I just want to point out the Leader of the Official Opposition is reflecting on the Chair, which is against the rules.

The Chairperson: I'd just like to remind all members to not draw the Chair into debate.

Does the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition wish to continue?

Mr. Khan: I do. Thank you, honourable Chair. I apologize. I wasn't aware I was drawing you into debate. I was simply stating a comment that members opposite are heckling, but I will be mindful not to draw the Chair into debates.

Rural Manitoba crime rates are higher than Winnipeg's. Northern Manitoba is amongst the highest incidences of violent crime in our country. I speak to this because it's relevant to what we're here to talk about today, and that is whether Manitobans are getting value with taxpayer dollars and safety under this Premier and the NDP Cabinet.

We are here today to talk about the Premier's responsibilities as the president of the Executive Council, his role as Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs and International Relations and his role as Minister Responsible for Indigenous Reconciliation—all very important portfolios being carried out by Executive Council and the Office of the Premier.

So we will be asking some questions today about the makeup of his office to start, his staff, their responsibilities, how he's prioritizing time, and what he's doing to solve these challenges—all high-level, standard, basic questions that, in these committee processes, is standard. And we hope we can get some answers from the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and his office before we get down to some other questions.

Our economy, our manufacturers, our workers, and our farmers, exporters are all being attacked by Chinese and American tariffs. Our PC team has asked the Premier to work with us on team Manitoba approaching and addressing these tariffs ahead, and threats, and there's no willingness to work across partisan lines, to work for all Manitobans.

My colleague from Midland brought forward Bill 227 about removing interprovincial trade barriers. It's ready to go. It's already been introduced. The Premier says, yes, he will, but he won't, and he won't, and he will, and we're simply looking for an answer if he will support Bill 227, removing interprovincial trade barriers, before Canada Day.

We've asked to see a plan. No plan has been tabled by this Premier. So Manitobans are left wondering what is actually happening, what is the plan.

The Finance Minister issued a news release last week talking about rebates from WCB to businesses on tax deferrals to help those impacted by tariffs with liquidity. Tax deferrals is the key word here. I'm not sure if the Premier or anyone else on his side has owned a small business, and I'm sure the Premier will take this opportunity to attack members on this side and probably namely myself for being a small-business owner.

* (15:30)

Tax deferrals—the business still has to pay those. In a time of uncertainty and a time of hardship, it's simply a deferral on that.

We've asked the Premier for more concrete steps on how it will support small businesses, and there hasn't been an answer from this Premier. These WCB rebates would have happened regardless, so it's really a non-announcement by the Finance Minister.

Small businesses see this, Manitobans see the smoke and mirrors being portrayed before you, and over the time in committee, I—we on this side of the House will show that, that this Premier has no plan; this Premier is merely smoke and mirrors. He's not making life more affordable; he's not making life safer; he's not

making hospitals better. All of the things that were campaigned on are broken promises.

The Finance Minister has alluded to news releases that they want to reduce barriers in trade in Canada, and nothing's been done. Prime Minister Carney said he wants to have trade barriers in Canada removed by Canada Day. The premiers of Nova Scotia, PEI, New Brunswick, Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan have all started to take action to reduce trade barriers and improve labour mobility, and this Premier has stopped the bill before the House to remove them.

No real action. Lot of words today in the Chamber; no actions.

So I hope that the Premier will use his five minutes—like he will do for every single question and talk about absolutely nothing—to actually answer the questions. I encourage the Premier to earn his salary and the trust of all Manitobans. He should be supporting The Free Trade and Mobility Within Canada Act, the same act introduced by Nova Scotia and BC, to keep the momentum moving and grow Canada and Manitoba.

Lots of questions to be asked. On that, I will come to end of my closing remarks. I look forward to having a global discussion and getting some answers and some real information from the Premier.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

The Chairperson: We thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for those comments.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of line item 2.1(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 2.1.

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

Mr. Kinew: It gives me great pleasure to introduce you to Sarah Thiele, who is the clerk of the Executive Council, and to Mark Rosner, who is the Tories' worst nightmare.

The Chairperson: Given that the Estimates of Executive Council consist of only one resolution, the discussion will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Khan: More just clarifying if the First Minister could clarify: Is that the official job title of his staff that he introduced them as?

The Chairperson: Not a point of order, but would the First Minister like to respond?

Mr. Kinew: Yes, well, what I was going to say is that this is not a point of order, because there is no rule being cited nor any rule being broken. And, in fact, the Opposition Leader would be free to ask this question when debate opens following the non-point of order that he's raised.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

The floor is now open for debate.

An Honourable Member: On the same point of order.

The Chairperson: The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli, on the point of order.

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Yes, obviously, it's a point of order. We can't refer to people as the Tories' worst nightmare when we're trying to—when he's introducing his staff. It should be his proper title, not some made-up title.

The Chairperson: As previously mentioned, this is not a point of order.

And I'd also like to note that the Chair is not responsible for the quality or content of replies or questions.

* * *

The Chairperson: The floor is now open for debate.

Mr. Khan: Is time starting? Does the time start on that, honourable Chair?

And for those Manitobans watching can see that—the complete disregard for respect, the immaturity of this Premier (Mr. Kinew) to introduce his chief of staff by that title and then further to try to intimidate members here by shouting out the answer while we're trying to have a conversation. It's really shameless; disgusting, actually.

But, regardless, we will—let's put that aside and let's start off, like I said, with some normal questions. Let's start off eye level. Let's try to just paint the picture of what the office of the Premier looks like and then we can get back to some other questions.

But just to really start off with here, can the Premier tell us what his MLA and Premier's salary is when they are combined?

Mr. Kinew: All this information is—been tabled for the House and emailed to every MLA as part of the members' allowances booklet, or PDF, whether you're talking about that in electronic or in paper form. So I'll pause when copies of that document that's already been tabled are brought in, so I can table them again. It's all public information.

This is actually a question I get asked sometimes when I visit schools: how much do you get paid? So I say: about 200K. It's online; you can look it up yourself. You know, the kids typically do; they're able to do so.

Right now, we are currently not earning our full salary as ministers, though. We get a ministerial holdback because we inherited a significant deficit from Heather Stefanson's government as the PCs, but we are on a path to balance and I expect that all my colleagues will be able to get their ministerial holdback returned to them when we see the public accounts for the year, most likely around the time that the Q3 results are shared publicly.

When we came into government and we saw the Q3 results for the member opposite and Heather Stefanson, we were shocked to see the amount that their failed election pledges actually cost the people of Manitoba, and we've been trying to repair that damage at the same time we fix health care and make life more affordable here in the province.

I do want to take issue with some of the comments that the member opposite made to criticize the important steps that we're taking to help Manitoba businesses and industry right now. His predecessor, Brian Pallister, brought in tax deferrals in 2020 during the COVID pandemic, and every member of the PC team trumpeted this as an important step, an important way to help business.

* (15:40)

So of course you know that these questions, coming as they do next to the member for Interlake-Gimli, are obviously very partisan in nature. Tax deferrals were the best idea in the world at the time in 2020, but now that there's a New Democratic government with a mandate to help business, now they're the subject of critique.

So the member opposite, you know, take it up with me, but take it up with Brian Pallister. I'd note Brian Pallister, we saw, donated \$2,000 to the PC party last

year. I know the subject of donations is a hot topic in the PC caucus today, and from the scrums too, probably.

But, again, when you're calling to thank Brian Pallister, honourable Chair, or rather to my colleagues, I would say, you know, calling to thank a donor; probably gloss over the critique of his former economic policy, I would think.

And when you come to WCB premiums, Doug Ford issued a press release just a few weeks ago, highlighting how their equivalent of the WCB is returning money to business in that province as a measure to support industry during this period of uncertainty. So if the members opposite and the PC caucus want to criticize the actions of Doug Ford, by all means, let me know what your thoughts are. I'll be speaking to him tomorrow. Actually, he's texting me right now; I'll probably speak to him later this evening, and I can let him know what the PCs are thinking here in Manitoba. He's obviously a different brand of Conservative because he wins elections, but these members are, you know, still whatever it is that they're doing—choosing people with fewer votes and prioritizing non-donors to their party.

So, you know, these are some of the things that I could share with him, but you look at Doug Ford, you look at Tim Houston, a lot of the great people that I get a chance to work with, whether they're conservatives, whether they're progressives, we work together for the good of the country. And we put you, the people, first.

And when it comes to criticisms we usually reserve those for Donald Trump, you know. Criticize him. Of course, you know, he's a big boy. He's no stranger to criticizing people, as well, too. I definitely noticed some comments earlier today about one of the former federal ministers being made in the Oval Office, and so reached out to our counterpart there and just wished her well, as well, too. And I think it's important that we are able to work together with all levels of government.

So here's the salaries that I'll table; public document, publicly reported. Apparently, the tabling of this all fits into one grand design and scheme that the members opposite are working up here. But, again, any schoolchild can look this up on their phone, and I encourage Manitobans to know how much they're paying MLAs, who in some cases haven't showed up for work for the past six months.

Mr. Khan: Beyond embarrassing that this Premier (Mr. Kinew) spent five minutes to answer that question when it takes 30 seconds. It's \$200,000; it's a simple answer. That's all he has to say and move on instead of waiting time, but he's got his minions over here who want to laugh in support, because that's what—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

The Chairperson: The honourable First Minister, on a point of order.

Mr. Kinew: Yes. I'll confess at the outset that this is not a point of order; but I just want to put on the record that I object to calling the head of the civil service in Manitoba a minion, and I object to calling the head of the political staff of the government of Manitoba a minion.

And if the member opposite is serious about what he said in the House yesterday, I'd ask him to consider apologizing.

The Chairperson: So, as mentioned, that's not a point of order.

* * *

The Chairperson: Would you like to continue, honourable—so, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Khan: I was under the assumption from the Premier, making up titles and calling his chief of staff the PCs' worst enemy, we were in the habit of making up names here. So I apologize for that. But, you know, you follow the Premier's lead, and that's what he did, so we follow after that.

So if \$200,000 is the answer, that's all we looking for, not a five-minute preamble. So we'll get to the next question here, and Manitobans can see he'll waste another five minutes answering this question when he should have it at the tip of his fingers, or like he said, any child with a phone can find it, \$200,000.

How much has your office, Premier, spent last year on travel; how much did you expense last year; and what are you projected to expend this year on travel?

Mr. Kinew: I spent less than Brian Pallister and Heather Stefanson, who billed taxpayers to go to the Grey Cup, but I paid for it myself.

I just want to clarify if the member wants fiscal year or calendar year. He asked for last year—can provide an answer, but just want to make sure if he

wants January to January or if he wants April 1 to March 31.

Mr. Khan: I thank the Premier (Mr. Kinew) for actually answering that question quickly, and he is right. I will clarify that question: for the fiscal year, please, Premier.

* (15:50)

Mr. Kinew: I'm going to undertake to get an answer to that question for the member opposite with some important context that I don't have right now.

Budget for next year, though, basically be similar to this one, and the vast majority of the travel is for First Ministers' meetings, council of federation and Western Premier's Conference. This year, we're probably going to add some meetings with governors from the US as well, too.

Mr. Khan: I do want to recognize and I want to thank the Premier for his answer on that. It was five minutes, it was a concise, clear answer and I really appreciate that, so we can move on to the next one. And I look forward to the tabling or the providing of the expenses for the—for last year's expenses.

So it's interesting that the Premier also mentions that reference, and I wasn't going to go on this or ask for the reference, but then he mentioned himself. He felt like he needed to clarify the Bomber trip which is—I don't know why he brought it up, but, I mean, since he brought it up, I'll just ask him.

You know, mistakes happen. Staff person attended, they billed it through the department, I believe the premier's office—and maybe the Premier can clarify that—and then they realized there was a mistake and they reimbursed it. These mistakes happen; not the end of the world.

But I do understand that, and Premier's a Bomber fan; that's great, and all Manitobans are, as well, so I think it's great and exciting that the—participating in the Grey Cup.

What I would be remiss to ask though, on just this matter here, as he said he paid for it himself: Can the Premier provide proof of payment, where he has actually paid for this himself personally for this trip to the Bombers? And then we can put this matter to rest and move forward.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, this matter is with the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, so I will wait for him to come back. But I would say, you know—I wish what the

member opposite said was true, that everyone in Manitoba is a Bombers fan.

Unfortunately, I do travel some places in the West and I see some green jerseys from time to time, and so I always have good natured back-and-forth with whoever that is. But, you know, it's a big province; there's a wide range of opinions and views and teams that everybody is cheering for.

Even when we go to the Jets games right now, you know, we saw a couple of St. Louis jerseys there the other night, so no accounting for a hundred per cent. I know that's not really what the member was conveying, but as a sports fan I do want to just offer that observation.

Mr. Khan: It is a shame if someone lives in Manitoba and they're not a Bombers fan, I would say that much; but there are those few here and there.

I look forward to seeing that tabling by the Premier, and just to be clear that the question was can you provide a proof of payment—a personal proof of payment, that he paid for the tickets, or the travel, which is great if he did, and then we can put this matter to hand.

It is before the Ethics Commissioner, and we look forward to seeing that proof of payment so that this can—matter can go away.

On another question, when it comes to employment, I'll circle back to that. Can the Premier tell us who is employed currently in his Executive Council and the Premier's office, both political staff and senior civil servants? And can he please confirm the organizational chart in the supplemental Estimates, if the—sorry—if the 'organizational' chart in the supplemental Estimates is complete and up-to-date as of today.

Further to that, will the Premier provide the monetary increase from last year's budget to this year's budget, and if there is an increase—a projected increase for '26-27 for these positions listed above?

* (16:00)

Mr. Kinew: The amount that's paid to staff in Executive Council is consistent year over year. So all the staff listing, the organizational chart and the other information that the member is asking for is accurate as of April 1, 2025. And so the org chart that he's asking for and the listing and all that stuff is going to be disclosed in the Executive Council supplementary appropriation books that he's making reference to in his question. And I can confirm for the committee that all that information is accurate as of April 1.

I can go a step beyond April 1 and tell you that I think there have been two changes made since then, both on the civil service side, and these are just related to career advancement opportunities where people who were in a certain position in Executive Council have moved forward career-wise and are taking other positions in the civil service.

So you may see some changeover in terms of some of the names from April 1 to—2025 to April 1, 2026. But again, those are related to career advancement; that's not really any significant changing of roles or functions when we're talking about it from an HR perspective.

In terms of the monetary side of what the member was asking there, the only monetary increases that are happening for any of these positions, whether civil service or political, have to do with the scale that people are on. And so those are the typical scales that are available to everybody in the public service as set out by GMA, the manual that the folks way smarter than me use to operate the government.

And when we're talking about that, there was a funny situation when the PCs left office; actually, that I have to share with the members opposite, and their staff will enjoy this.

An Honourable Member: Don't think this will be funny.

Mr. Kinew: The—well, I find it very funny that the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) and his crew in government actually didn't do the paperwork properly for PC political staffers in the former government under Heather Stefanson to qualify for the public service pension. And this was brought to our attention when we took office. Again, the member opposite from Fort Whyte was part of that government as well, I'll say for the record.

And so this was brought to us by civil servants, because, obviously, there's a transition of many staff from the PC political staff complement leaving, and then we were hiring up the new government's political staff complement, and we were—you know, pointed out that the people leaving would not have access to a pension.

So we actually brought forward the necessary changes so that the former PC political staff of the last government would be able to qualify for their pensions.

So when we're talking about, like, partisanship and all that, yes, obviously there is a lot of partisanship

that goes on. But when it comes to people's pensions, like, that's one of the things we believe in as New Democrats; you know, that's your money, you earned it, it's money that you sort of gave up, it was forgone from taking home on your paycheque, and so you're entitled to it. So we didn't think it would be a good look to basically pay-play games with PC political staffers' pensions.

Obviously, former government, I'm sure, just made a—some sort of oversight type of error or whatever it was. But, anyways, we were fine with clearing that up and, you know, we kind of had a chuckle along the way from the perspective of, like, are we going to get a lot of political points for doing this? Are we going to get a lot of former PC political staffers being nice to us because we're doing the right thing—or not even the right thing, just doing the expected thing that I think that any Manitoban would expect us to do here? And we said: No, probably not, but we should do it anyways.

So just some context for members on the committee to keep in mind when we're talking about compensation for people in the political staff arena.

Mr. Khan: Thank you for the Premier (Mr. Kinew) for that. And there is a lot of partisanship that—and jibes by—that happen back and forth and serious questions asked that aren't easy to answer, and then there's the questions like the Premier answered there, and I thank you for that answer.

And if he—what he says—claim to be true, then I thank him for that, and I have no reason to doubt that it's not. So that is the right thing to do. And I'd like to believe that myself, as Leader of the Opposition, would also—faced in that situation would also do the same thing because that is the right thing to do.

On that note, this might be a longer question, so his staff might need to undertake this to provide it, and they can provide this at a later time if they like.

Can the Premier please list out what political staff work out of the Premier's office or within the purview of that office? For all political staff, can he please list their names spoken aloud or table it so that can be presented to this committee or—yes, committee here?

Thank you.

Mr. Kinew: Sorry, it was just a bifurcated question there, so I just want to ask for clarification which is, like—so the question is: Who works out of the Premier's office on the political staff side? Is that right? Am I understanding that right?

An Honourable Member: Correct.

Mr. Kinew: Okay.

An Honourable Member: Sorry, do I need to answer that?

The Chairperson: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Khan: Yes, that's correct, honourable Chair.

So what political staff work out of the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) office or within the purview of the Premier's office?

* (16:10)

Mr. Kinew: Just wanted to confirm a couple of details regarding who in exec is a civil servant, because we do have in our org chart, as members opposite will see when they review it, that you have civil servants who do support work for some people on the political staff side.

So with that in mind, all this information is going to be tabled in—it's going to be visible, I guess I should say to the members opposite when they get around to reviewing the lists and charts that are part of the exec book, but might as well just put the information on the record so that those members have the information at their disposal.

So the chief of staff is Mark Rosner, the deputy chief of staff is Rebecca Widdicombe. Then we have the principal secretary, Emily Coutts. Reporting to Emily, the director of strategic government communications is Lise Fenton, and our data manager—data person, Alicia Hill. Then, doing photos and digital management is Rachael King. Then we have correspondence writer, Hannah Drudge. Then we have outreach appointments for northern and western roles, which are Jason Gobeil—or I should do it in this order: Donelda Parenteau and Jason Gobeil, respectively.

We have our HR director, Larissa Ashdown. Oskâpêwis [*Elder's helper*], the special assistant to myself, is Samantha Martin-Bird. The office co-ordinator is Kelly Speak. And the EA on the political side is Jenelle Manitowabi. So those are the political staff who are working in the Premier's office under order-in-council, for lack of a, I guess, more fulsome declaration.

But like I said, this is all there publicly in the information that I said that's current as of April 1. It's current on the political side to today when we speak in the committee here. As I flagged earlier, there'll be some changes on the civil service side eventually.

But, again, congrats to folks who are moving forward in their careers, and it's just, kind of, straightforward advancement kind of stuff there. [*interjection*]

We're getting T-shirts made.

Mr. Khan: Thank the Premier for that answer.

I just want to go back because I was remiss. Sorry, I was thinking ahead to the next question—was, the Premier did commit to, I guess, waiting or tabling the ethics reports in regard to the Grey Cup travel expenses. I just want to confirm on the record that the Premier has committed to tabling and providing that proof of payment—personal proof of payment that—for the Grey Cup and what date that payment was done on personally, and who it was paid to.

The—or provide the proof of payment personally that he paid for the Grey Cup that he said numerous times on the record that he's done. He'll provide that proof of payment and when it was paid and who it was paid to.

Mr. Kinew: No. What I said is when the ethics—when the Conflict of Interest Commissioner brings this back I'll return to the issue.

Mr. Khan: So the Premier is not willing to provide proof of payment personally that he says he did for reimbursement of the Grey Cup on the tickets, on the flights, the date it was and the amount and who it was paid to. So I just want to clarify that the Premier is saying he will not provide that to Manitobans.

The Chairperson: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan), would you be able to repeat your question, please?

Mr. Khan: I can definitely repeat the question for the third time. Just saying that the Premier has now said he's not going to provide his proof of payment: not going to table the proof of payment that he says he paid for the Grey Cup travel, the date it was reimbursed or paid back and the amount.

Mr. Kinew: No, that's not true. What I said is that I'll return to this matter when the Conflict of Interest Commissioner provides his report.

Mr. Khan: So will the Premier commit at that point to provide and table a proof of payment for the Grey Cup travel, the date on which that payment was paid personally and the amount and who it was paid to?

Mr. Kinew: So I'll return to this issue when the Conflict of Interest Commissioner provides his report. What I will provide today is my personal guarantee that I paid for my own way to the Grey Cup.

Mr. Khan: I thank the Premier (Mr. Kinew) for his answer.

In regards to travel when it comes to the Premier's office, can the Premier please clarify if all the travel that the Premier takes, is it billed through his office, or does he bill that or expense it through other ministerial offices, or is it all through the Premier's office?

Mr. Kinew: Okay, so there's, I guess, two things to share with the member. So in terms of public disclosure, all of my information is reported publicly in the same place. So all the travel costs, it all comes out in the same place in terms of public disclosure.

But the second thing that I want to share with the minister, just so that there's clarity in terms of how that process happens: in his opening statement, he acknowledged that I have a few titles as minister. So in addition to being President of the Executive Council, I'm also the minister for intergov and Indigenous Reconciliation. So in terms of the mechanics of it, if I'm doing a trip in the Intergovernmental Affairs capacity, it might be booked through IGA.

If I'm travelling in a premierial capacity attending an event, for instance, as a, again, a ribbon-cutting type of event as Premier, then that would be booked through exec. But I guess what I'm saying is, regardless of the mechanics of how travel gets booked, whether it's through IGA or whether it's through the Premier's office, that is being disclosed publicly in the same place. So the number that gets posted online, and that the members opposite and the public have access to, it includes both of them.

That said, I gather when we travel with other ministers at the same time, they'll be reporting their information to their own departments because it's separate ministerial travel for those bookkeeping purposes.

So, hopefully, that's helpful.

Mr. Khan: That is helpful, thank you. So just to clarify again—I'm not looking to get you in an aha moment, but just to clarify—so yes, you do wear a lot of hats and that is a difficult task: Intergovernmental Affairs, Indigenous affairs and the Premier.

Has there been a time in the past, or incident, where the Premier has travelled and it would be an announcement or something to do with Agriculture or another ministerial department? Would you ever have expensed those travel expenses through that ministerial department, or would it have just gone through the Premier, Intergovernmental Affairs—which is,

I think, what he's saying, just to clarify. I think that's what he's saying—which is right?

Mr. Kinew: Yes, the answer to the first part of the question is no. I haven't taken a trip that was booked to another department.

* (16:20)

And then the answer to the second part of the question is yes. The member opposite is hearing the answer right in terms of what I meant previously that, regardless of how travel gets divided between Executive Council or IGA, it's still going to be disclosed publicly in the same place, and that number is going to be all-inclusive of those expenses. When we're talking about that structure, from what I understand, this is like GMA that we referred to earlier; this is just like, how we're supposed to conduct ourselves in office.

We did have a bit of a challenge trying to stand up a system that was not in existence under the previous government. There was no proactive disclosure. It was disclosure when the media asks about it kind of thing, which is kind of surprising to Manitobans. I remember reporters, you know, from the press gallery were asking about this at the time, and we said: Yes, no, we had to stand up a system to ensure that would—there would be regular, public, quarterly reporting for ministerial travel.

And at that time, I recall speaking not only to media about this but also members opposite. And so I went out and got some advice—not on the question of public disclosure; I think everyone is in agreement that public disclosure needs to happen. But—so fixing, I guess, the lack of attention to detail, in the most charitable explanation that existed under the former Progressive Conservative government; fixing that detail on the face of it, that made sense. Of course, we're going to do that just in the interests of transparency for Manitobans.

But I went out and talked to, I guess, some political experts, who won't name, but are people that would be recognizable to the general public in terms of having some knowledge in these matters. And I just solicited their opinions. Like, what do you think about all this stuff? And the answer that I heard back from them was—you know, and I'm summarizing, not verbatim here, but I'm summarizing both the sentiment, the tone and the message—what I heard back is: Look, these trips have value or they don't.

And so there's obviously a lot of headlines that get generated over, you know, travel. I remember when

this issue first arose, the comparison in the headline was comparing me to Brian Pallister. It was like, almost as much as Brian Pallister, or something like that.

So, obviously, there's some, whatever type of considerations going into the wording of that headline. But the reality that these, you know, sort of people with a lot of expertise in the world of government had was, if you are going to a first ministers' meeting to advance Manitoba's interests on a significant public policy issue, that trip has value or it does not. If you're going to thank the veterans in Normandy for liberating Europe, or to participate in that act of gratitude on behalf of Manitobans to keep that living memory alive for students in this province, then that trip has value or it does not. And if you're going to the Council of the Federation, so on so forth; I'm sure the members of the opposite understand this.

So these are questions that we're providing answers to today. I'm sure we'll be providing answers to them again in the future, because these are questions around transparency and disclosure, and Manitobans have a right to know this. But I do want to put the words on the record that the trips we take in government, as with, you know, governments across Canada, are trips that are valuable and serve a public interest.

And so when we talk about these issues, I think it's important for us to keep that on the record, because we're looking at trips over the past year. They are trips to try and engage with the Trump administration; to try and work with premiers across western Canada; to work with premiers from across every region of Canada; to work with governors in neighbouring states.

And so these are things that have a public interest. And I've made clear to folks on our team, we are to be very judicious and responsible with public resources; and when we travel, we need to make sure that we're balancing the public interest of attending something like a federal, provincial, territorial, Indigenous meeting with being here and responsive to the needs of our constituents, or the responsibilities in the Legislature, and at the same time keeping an eye on what the public good and what the public interest is.

So the trip to Normandy last year comes to mind as an example of something that's in the public interest. We're talking about the 80th anniversary of D-Day, and I think Manitobans took a lot of benefit from that anniversary, not only as a province, but also I think a sense of patriotism as well.

Mr. Khan: Thank the First Minister for that answer. And he is right: travelling to Normandy is a sense of

patriotism and pride in Manitoba, to remember our veterans, and it must have been an honour for him to attend that on behalf of Manitobans and represent.

There is a lot of other travel that happens within this building and ministerial roles, so a question, then. We were on such a good flow of answering—asking questions and taking a minute answering and back and forth, and I hope we can get back to that because none of these questions here are contentious questions. So just hopefully we can get back to that and not burn the five minutes.

There are some harder questions coming up, which the Premier (Mr. Kinew) can take his time on those. This is a simple one, procedure wise.

The previous PC government had started the process—he talks about it wasn't completed, but it has—it was started, and, you know, previous—prior to that 17 years of NDP, there was nothing, but we'll let that go.

Ministerial travel. Who approves ministerial travel, if the Premier can say? Is it Executive Council? Is it chief of staff? When you look at trips like New York, where minister takes the staff, is it—or Houston, where the minister took staff in accompaniment there. Or is it the PC's worst enemy that approves that staff?

Just curious as to who—or what the process is for ministerial travel. And—sorry, sorry and further to that—and what requirements or parameters around that ministerial travel?

Mr. Kinew: Okay, so we're going to provide more transparency and answers, and I want to contrast this with my predecessors.

With Brian Pallister, oh, man, it was a whole afternoon, five minutes at a time. And we're hearing about how a field near Portage la Prairie should count as a solar panel in the eyes of the federal government—you know.

And, well, yes, of course, the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) was there nodding his head the whole time for all those—however many years until the palace coup came for old Brian. And then he was the one left to hold the bag in the—room 204. But we had a good time there.

And then Heather Stefanson—we come to Estimates with Heather Stefanson, who says: I don't know; you can go ask the minister. I don't know; go ask the minister, for entire afternoons, right?

And I would be like, so what do you actually do as the premier if I just go ask the minister for everything?

Anyway, so sharp contrast, of course. Not necessarily in the partisan sense of contrast messaging, but just contrast to approach to the Estimates process for Exec Council.

So with that context—important context for the committee out of the way, I would say the answer to the member's question is this: There is a formal approval process that happens, but also there is a back and forth, a political consideration, public interest consideration and a dialogue between ministers in our government who are empowered to identify the things that they want to work on, but also need to ensure that there is alignment with our team and the various responsibilities that we have.

* (16:30)

So again, what does that mean in practice? There is a formal process where if a minister wants to go through—on a trip, and I'm—you know, I'm peeling back the curtains here so take the notes and hold us to this in the future whenever there's some trip that the opposition wants to focus on—but there is a formal process where ministers—and this is really about budgeting, so we're not seeing things that we used to see under the PCs, with just expenses not being disclosed until the media asks. So there's a formal process where, like, basically, the cost of the trip gets signed off on, the purpose of the trip gets signed off on.

But at the same time, while there is paperwork to cover this formal approval process, like, we're a team, right, and I've made clear to the folks around the Cabinet table as well as the caucus table that I'm going to steer; I'm not going to row. And when it comes to your departments and to the teams you run, I want you to steer and not row, which means set direction, ensure proper oversight, exercise all your strengths as a manager, but don't fall into the trap of micromanagement.

And what that means in the context of travel is that our ministers are empowered to come forward and say, this FPT is really important for me to attend.

A good example of that might be the recent flurry of federal-provincial trade meetings on internal trade in Manitoba and across Canada. And then the dialogue, the back and forth, the political public interest consideration that I'm talking about comes into effect when it's like: Well, yes, it is important for you to attend the FPT on internal trade; however, we have a confidence vote in the House during that team—that time. And so,

can you attend virtually? Can you attend through some other virtual means? Or can we just make it up at some future dates?

And so through that process, all those eventualities have been encountered so far. Sometimes ministers and our team collectively have decided to sit out certain opportunities. Other folks might attend on their behalf, for instance, the—I get invited to COP, the big climate conference, every year. I don't attend. I haven't so far. Perhaps in the future, I will. But we have had civil servants attend, because it fits in with the purview of the Environment and Climate Change department.

Similarly, we've had members say, yes, no, confidence vote or some other presence in question period. It's important, so I'll sit this meeting out.

On the other hand, at other times, we've said: No; you know what? This is important, so we all agree that you should attend the FPT and advance Manitoba's interests at that.

A notable example, I can share a specific one in my next answer if there's interest with the committee.

Mr. Khan: I'm going to start off with the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) opening comments. He referenced Brian and Heather talking at five minutes ad nauseum about fields or solar panels and not answering questions. I mean, the Premier—it's just been five minutes and just because he does it with a lovely smile and some great language and words and descriptions, and he's a good storyteller.

We need some answers. Like, there's no difference here between him and Brian and Heather. Might as well put them all together now, because he's still spending five minutes and not answering the question.

So the question was simple again. I understand there's—he says there's a formal process. Will the Premier be willing to table that formal process for the committee to see? The question was, who signs off on ministerial travel? Who is the final person that signs—no one's arguing the importance of travelling to an FPT or the importance of travel within the department. It's not the argument. The argument—the question is simply, what is the formal process? Will he table it? And who signs off on that final travel?

Mr. Kinew: It's unnecessary to table it because I've just described it in great detail for the members.

In terms of the formal sign-off, that comes from the Tories' worst nightmare, the chief of staff, and the clerk of the Executive Council.

But like I said, it's a group decision that is taken with respect for the agency and the empowerment that the ministers have to row and also steer their respective departments, but we also ensure that there is a balance of considerations for legislative responsibilities here in the House, for other responsibilities here in Manitoba.

So, here's a good example that I'd like to share with the committee is that, you know, some of the best storytellers I know are educators, and so this is a story about the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Schmidt).

And so we had an FPT for—you know, the minister is also the member for Rossmere (MLA Schmidt), and we're talking about the fact that at the time there was a fiscal cliff for the provision of child care in Manitoba. There was that deadline and we could see in the horizon where the cost-shared agreement with the federal government was going to come to an end.

This is still when Justin Trudeau was the Prime Minister—same Justin Trudeau who was in a photo with the member opposite in a selfie when the Prime Minister had his blackface controversy. There was a message of support shared by the member opposite.

And the Minister of Education went to the FPT and with Prime Minister Trudeau, I guess, coming to the end of his time in office and wanting to maybe conclude a few more items of business, our Minister of Education actively advocated for her ability to attend this FPT.

And so, okay, sure. If you're going to go to this FPT, can we try and address the fiscal cliff, the idea that, you know, \$10-a-day daycare in Manitoba might disappear a few years in the future if we don't come up with some renewed agreement.

So I'm very proud of the fact that the minister went to that FPT, put this item on the agenda, which at the time—it was Minister Sudds, I believe—her federal counterpart wasn't even trying to talk about at that meeting.

And, really, this example—an example of Manitoba playing a leadership role at the federal level. And from that agenda-setting presence at that FPT just a few months back, a flurry of negotiations followed, and not only was Manitoba the beneficiary, but many other provinces across the country were the beneficiaries of our Minister of Education's advocacy, and the fact that there was somebody willing to play ball on the federal side of the table there.

And, we concluded a new agreement, billions of dollars to be invested in child care alongside the federal government in the coming years here in Manitoba.

So, again, to the question about ministerial travel and these trips having value or they not having value, to me that's a trip that had a lot of value. A minister travelled to an FPT and she brought home the bag, and that bag had support for kids and families for many years to come in Manitoba, and I think that was an excellent example of advocacy on behalf of a minister.

Mr. Khan: Maybe the Premier (Mr. Kinew) heard me wrong. There was not a question of the value of ministers going on—we agreed that there is value, so I don't know why the Premier had to spend four minutes and just go over that when we agreed there is value in going.

It's clear the Premier, unfortunately, has resorted back to his old ways of kicking the puck down the—shooting the puck down the ice, I guess you could say, with the Jets.

So, let's try to reset again, honourable Premier, and maybe answer the question in not five minutes: maybe within a minute.

What is the vacancy rate within your department's Executive Council, intergovernmental and international relations and Indigenous Reconciliation? How many staff does each area employ? Do you have a target vacancy rate within those areas?

And, if he'd be willing to table that or provide that information today.

* (16:40)

The Chairperson: Before I acknowledge the First Minister, I'd like to take a moment to remind all honourable members that—on both sides—to address their questions through the Chair.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, so I'm going to undertake to provide some answers to the questions that have been posed here. I will say, in terms of public disclosure, all of this will be reflected in the Executive Council material that I was referring to earlier, in terms of the exec staff positions that the member is asking about.

And the way government is structured, Indigenous Reconciliation and intergovernmental affairs are both housed within the Finance department. And so the staff positions there will be reflected in the Finance Estimate books. So we'll provide some detail when I return with the undertaking about what those positions entail.

I can tell you that we have vacancies; I was looking at them recently in the Indigenous Reconciliation Secretariat. And it's an interesting balancing act, trying to repair the damage of years of PC government in Manitoba. Because on the one hand, you've got all these vacant positions, people you could hire to do really important work advancing reconciliation in Manitoba, with the example of the secretariat in mind; but on the flip side, we inherited this massive deficit and we have to be conscientious of every single decision that we make.

And so there is a robust process in place to ensure that, even in the areas under my purview, such as the Indigenous Reconciliation Secretariat or the civil servants who work in the IGA branch or in the Executive Council, that those things go through Treasury Board and, you know, a rigorous process of holding them up to the light and saying, yes, this sounds like a great hire, but can we afford to do this right now? As the Province of Manitoba, is this the most efficient use of resources right now? With the big priority on health and the economy, making it more affordable, should we devote those resources to those areas?

Again, billions of dollars more invested in the health-care system since we've taken office; significant, important, but also relevant that when we need to take a global view.

Again, the questions we get asked in a scrum—and I pointed this out to a member of the media not too long ago—we get the questions in the scrum of, like, oh, why didn't you fund this, or why didn't you fund that, or why didn't you do this and all that. But the answer is, like, well, that's not the way the issues come forward to us in government.

You know, when Heather Stefanson and the member opposite were there, it was just, like, yes to everything and no global view of the Province's finances and that's how you rack up—well, they decided to stand firm against a landfill search, but in that final six months, \$2 billion were racked up. They said yes to everything, except, of course, the compassionate, humanitarian thing to do.

And won't dwell on the PGL—Prairie Green Landfill—but do have to point that out before members get too vocal with their critique here in the commission.

So, yes, there's vacancies. We're trying to be very judicious about filling them because we like the civil service, too. Civil service breathed a sigh of relief, after the torturous years of overbearing Brian Pallister and an underperforming Heather Stefanson time in

office, to find people who were serious about the job and wanting to work collaboratively to make Manitoba a better place. And so I'm very, very mindful of the fact that not only the civil servants but also their labour organizations that represent them are saying we need to staff up, we need more help to do all this work that we're doing.

And the role that we have as overseers of government, as the elected officials representing the people of Manitoba, is to say: Yes, no, it all sounds good. We got to make sure that we're making the right investment decisions here. And the member opposite is waving his hands and trying to get attention, but one of the things that I noticed about coming into the Premier's office is that I learned from my predecessors.

Brian Pallister, I learned a lot from him. The vast majority of it was what not to do. But I would just encourage the member opposite to have some patience and keep his eyes and ears open, because there may be some things to learn along the way, too.

And so I'll just share those few words of encouragement to my colleague across the way.

Mr. Khan: Thank you to the Premier (Mr. Kinew) to that, and I was not sure if he was referring to myself or the member from Steinbach, so I caution—or, remind the member from Steinbach to keep his ears and eyes open so he can learn some things from the current Premier, and what not to do. So I thank that—I'll take that advice under serious advisement.

And I hope what he is saying what not to do is burn 5 minutes in committee when he can answer the question in a minute. I hope that is what he is referring to. I am assuming he learned that from maybe his mentor, Greg Selinger, but—or other mentors maybe, that he learned from. But I think it is clear what not to do is waste five minutes. I think he made a very good point of that, so I will learn that from the Premier not to waste five minutes here.

We will move on to another area: international relations. So, this Premier is committed to opening a new full trade office in Washington D.C last year. Can the Premier please provide the address of this trade office, the names of the staff hired at the office?

What is the budget for this office? What is the salary for the staff hired at the office? How much has been so—spent so far at this office? And, what does this Premier project will be spent this year, and projected for next year, in this office?

A lot of questions, thank you.

Mr. Kinew: A lot of questions, but it will take more of that patience on behalf of the member to get the answers, because, of course, we are going to roll things out when we do the big announcement of our big hire.

What will interest the members opposite: they may remember that at the state of the province address last year I made this announcement, and among the qualifications, somebody who is one of our best in Manitoba, somebody who can make the case to Americans to trade with Manitoba—it is good for the US and it is good for our province at the same time.

I also said that I wanted somebody who is a little 'Trumpy', and you would be amazed how many conservatives came out of the woodwork to apply for the job. I mean, some of the people that, sitting across the table I know are going to be asking for donations from, or asking for work from our government.

And they were, you know, willing to just talk up the MAGA cred, or the whatever goes into making somebody 'Trumpy', and yes, there wasn't a ton of partisanship on display there.

We were fielding calls from a lot of dyed-in-the-wool conservatives who were jumping at the chance to represent Manitoba in DC, and—in the United States of America. Which, when you think about it, it really does beg the question: Why, then, did the PCs close that office and end the presence of Manitoba in DC?

We used to have a voice for our province in the US. We saw this issue coming, we made an announcement with Gary Doer in the 2023 campaign, and we said, you know what, we need to work on the American relationship.

Whether it is Biden, or Trump, or some other president, this relationship is going to need a lot of work. We saw where the puck was going. Again, at the time, we didn't necessarily know what Wayne Gretzky's, you know, political affiliations would be, but we were still happy to use his metaphors and his quotes. Still are, to this day, I would say.

But yes, it really begs the question, you know, are we going to keep getting the accountability questions for fixing the damage of what the PCs did? Because, I mean, if that is the nature of the Estimates committee, and the member opposite wants to hector me about taking the time to explain our position on these issues, I would point out: What are we doing in the committee?

All this information is available online or in publicly disclosed documents. You are spending an afternoon of important government time asking us questions that are already available to people in Manitoba. So, again, you want to complain about time spent in the committee, where I am explaining in great detail to members, sure.

But take a look at the questions you are being fed by your staff team. All this information is on the public record, and will be provided to you in due course, so if we are looking at expediency here, let us get to the vote. Let's wrap it up, let's move on. But, if you want to take time here, then let's take time.

Let's hear about the closures of the ERs. Let's hear about the failures during the pandemic. Let's hear about the inability to not even have a strategy when it comes to the economy, but even to focus on one aspect of the economy, be it US relationships, agriculture, intellectual property; you know, there was just so many failures during the PC time in office.

* (16:50)

And I recognize that the member opposite is going to try and put a one Manitoba spin on the same old PC policies, but it just doesn't work. Like, you can't take progressive ideas and apply that message to regressive tactics. Like, it's not going to come off as authentic to the people of Manitoba.

So I guess, what am I saying, in a roundabout way? I'm offering political advice. But I'm also saying if we're going to spend this special time together, then let's enjoy the journey. Let's take time to stop and smell the roses. We can just be here tabling and undertaking documents all day long, but I'd much rather, you know, just explore together, what is it that makes Budget 2025 so amazing and magnificent?

And why is it that the PCs vote against more law enforcement and more health care and more affordability measures? Doesn't make sense to me, but, you know, I'm sure they'll have something in an email later on to send to their members who are still wondering why they voted for Wally and what happened to him and why he didn't win with more votes.

Mr. Khan: Oh, honourable Chair. Look, we're going on a journey here. It's great, the Premier (Mr. Kinew)—just answer the questions. You can talk, but—and he's talking, seems to have lightened the mood in here today, which is always nice.

These are just simple questions, though, so again, from what I hear, the Premier has said that when they

have this big announcement, they will be providing us with all of the information that we asked for. So I thank the Premier (Mr. Kinew) for committing to that.

Of the—where are the offices? I mean, he says it's on public record; I haven't seen anywhere this public address for the trade office in Washington, DC. I haven't seen the address publicly listed. Premier says it's listed publicly somewhere; I think he might want to fact-check that.

The names of staff hired, budget—man, these are real questions. I know he's having fun and enjoying this journey we are part of here. It is part of the process. This is part of the process, and if he doesn't have that yet, he can simply state: We don't have it yet and when it is ready, we will table it for you. Because Manitobans have a right to know that, and that's a simple answer.

Respectfully, he can just move on to the next point. He's choosing not to do that. It's unfortunate. He wants to make jokes and laugh.

So, Premier, I'll give you another—just another simple question, and if he doesn't have it, he can simply state he doesn't have it and he will provide it—table it at a later date, which is fine. I'm sure other premiers have done that in the past.

So the question is: Has the Premier hired any external advisers, consultants? If so, can he please provide the names, the roles and how much they are paid?

Mr. Kinew: Yes, Gary Doer is our adviser on US trade and he has insisted that we not pay him anything. So it's a non-monetary arrangement. And, holy cow, are we getting a good deal. We're talking about the best political mind that the province has ever known, and we're getting that for less than the \$1 that the former government was paying Sandy Riley to advise them on Hydro. And so that's a heck of a deal.

And so Mr. Doer has been very helpful in giving us a lay of the land in DC and helping to make connections. One of the great things about working with the former premier and former ambassador for Canada to the US is that when he walks into the room, you know, you got senators jumping out of their seats: Gary, remember the time we had that Coors Light in Montana, right? And so it's just a level of familiarity and relationship building that we're able to use as Manitobans and to advance the Province's interest, which is really, really great.

And, like I said, part of the genesis of this idea of working together and, you know, having Mr. Doer give us strategic advice but also help broker some conversations with influential people in America, was the understanding that the relationship with the US was going to be very, very important.

And so during the 2023 campaign where the members opposite were deciding to run against the landfill search or to run against parental rights or whatever their position was on the matter, we were saying: You know what, why don't we focus on the economy and the relationship with our most important trading partner?

Here we are in 2025 with President Trump in office. I think Manitobans made the right choice to elect a government that was focused on US trade and trying to safeguard our economic interests rather than resorting to wedge politics. I think that's something we can all agree on.

And when we're talking about advice, we're really lucky to get a lot of advice from folks who are not paid by the government. Other than hockey with the Winnipeg Jets, we probably get more free advice than anyone in Manitoba, and the members opposite who were in government probably remember their time as well, too. A lot of unsolicited advice, I'm sure, that they received over the years, too. Don't close the ER: you know, things like that.

But you know, we listen and we try to, I guess, make the most of the good advice that comes our way. Some of that comes in formal meetings. Some of that comes informally when you're bumping into somebody at a hockey rink or at an evening event or what have you, and sometimes it even comes from the members opposite.

You know, I have appreciated when members of the PC caucus have pulled me aside and said: Hey, there's this local issue and I wouldn't mind if you could look into it. And yes, we do our best to try and follow up on that. And I think there is a member's statement given by one of them this week actually related to one of those examples that comes to mind.

And so, hopefully, we can continue to listen to everybody. In the recent federal election, of course, you know, I took meetings with the federal leaders of the Conservatives, of the NDP, of the Liberals, for exactly that purpose. I want to hear advice from all sides of people who may have leadership roles at the federal level, and I want to advocate for Manitobans

with all people who have the opportunity to lead at the federal level.

And so, I might be a card-carrying member of the NDP and elected as an NDP MLA, but I'm not the Premier for New Democrats; I'm the Premier for all Manitobans. And I want to make sure that whether you vote Conservative or NDP or Liberal at the federal level, that you know you have a voice—including at the provincial level, too; those different ways that you vote—that we're going to take good advice seriously.

And to—what's the proof of that? Well, look at all the major Crown boards. We've kept Conservative appointees on all of them. And even though people typically get shown the door immediately, I thought it was important for institutional memory and continuity of operations. So when you look at the Hydro, you look at the MPI, you look at the MBL boards, you will find that we kept people who were appointed under the previous government that we thought had good ideas and good advice.

Because we want the good ideas to come forward, no matter who people donate to or who people vote for. Because we're one Manitoba.

Mr. Khan: Question, and that's how—the Premier (Mr. Kinew) mentions Gary Doer, and so the question is, are there any? Can he list them all?

We don't need to go through question by question. The question's simple: Can he list all or any others and list all of the outside external consultants hired, whether for zero dollars like Gary Doer, who donates his time; or for a fee by the Premier's office, Executive Council, to provide advice or do work for the Premier and Executive Council? That's names, roles and contractor salary paid to these people.

Will the Premier provide that list in its entirety?

Mr. Kinew: Yes, the answer is no to paid consultants brought in under exec.

We have, again, a great unpaid adviser in Gary Doer, who's helping us with the IGA side of things. The other consultants that our government has worked with would have been hired under a department. So, for instance, the report that MNP put into the financial disaster that was the dying days of the Heather Stefanson administration, that was contracted out—

The Chairperson: Order, please. Order. Order, please.

The hour being 5 o'clock, Committee rise.

CHAMBER JUSTICE

* (14:50)

The Chairperson (Tyler Blashko): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

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

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Honourable Chair, I'd like to start the committee this afternoon by thanking my critic, who I think is remaining as my critic.

There was some question yesterday. I know people were a little bit confused about some of the changes that were made, and maybe just in seating order, but I do appreciate that he's continuing in this role and hopefully we'll continue to have a good working relationship and continue to ensure that, ultimately, we're putting Manitobans first, even though we may disagree sometimes how we exactly go about that.

Honourable Chair, I'd like to begin today just by talking a little bit about some of the work that we've done over the past 18 months, really since we've taken government and since I've been in this role.

Really—as the member opposite knows, as Manitobans know—our primary focus has been on not only getting tough on the causes of crime, the root causes of crime over the long term—I, every single day, commend my colleagues, the Minister of Housing, Addictions, and Homelessness (Ms. Smith), the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), the Minister of Education, and the work that they do.

That long-term work of making our community a safer place by giving kids a meal in school, by making sure young moms have the resources that they need, by helping our most vulnerable who are on our streets find housing, find addictions treatment, and continue to support those in our society who need it most.

We know that's all going to make a difference. What we also know, though, is that after seven and a half years of neglect, of cuts, of disrespect, that it's important to ensure that we're getting tough on crime, as well.

And so that's why, within the Department of Justice, we've instituted a number of important initiatives, usually partnering with law enforcement or other existing

partners in this space, but also listening to the experts, listening to those on the front lines who have good ideas and can give us good advice.

And what that has equated to is a substantial increase in the budget for the Department of Justice. It's equated to additional resources being provided, as I said, in partnership with municipalities and with law enforcement. And really, what it's been about is acknowledging the concern that people have around public safety, and ensuring that we're taking steps in the here and now to ensure that they understand that their government stands with them and continues to make the kinds of changes that will make our community safer today.

So in that regard, we started off immediately by investing and committing to 24 new Winnipeg police officers to be deployed throughout our city for a community policing model that we know has seen results.

We, of course, started by initiating our retail theft initiative in the spring of last year, realized that we were getting some good results, heard initial reports from the WPS that we were getting good results, so we extended that through the summer months, into the fall and, of course, into the holiday season.

And what we saw was that we had made a major impact when it comes to retail theft. We know that there were, you know, anecdotal reports. Of course, the member opposite has heard these as well. He has heard from business owners who have said it's a different kind of policing model and it's a different way of approaching it. It's made a difference, and we're also seeing that in the statistics that we're seeing coming through.

We're also, of course, now adding these additional officers: 12 in the fall, 12 more in the spring. And we know that that's going to make a difference. That's really committing to that long-term commitment to the WPS.

We're also, of course, we moved very quickly on our five-point bail reform plan, which included \$3 million for 12 new WPS officers for—specifically for bail enforcement. Again, bringing that total altogether up to 36 provincially funded WPS officers. Again, this is in contrast to the previous government, who saw a net loss of 55 officers here in the city of Winnipeg. We know this will make a difference.

But we're also adding, again, following the National Police Federation's recommendations by adding additional money for data intelligence sharing, \$500,000

for bail supervision that's being done directly through the department.

All of this adds up, as I said, to a \$903-million increase to the Department of Justice—a 9.2 per cent increase. And that's really a huge number: \$76 million over last year, which was already record funding, including 28 per cent for law enforcement; now another 2 per cent; and going forward, that very specific commitment around an escalator that was so sorely missed under the previous government.

But we're not stopping there. We, of course, had the very successful home security rebate program, \$2 million that was flowed directly to Manitobans to help protect their own property, but, of course, the larger community, as well. We're now expanding that: \$10 million being directly supplied to businesses who are seeing repeat activity in their shops. That's security rebate; that's repairs. This is a kind of program that's going to make a big difference, and it's modelled after other provinces.

We've also gone further when it comes to areas like border security: a \$5-million investment on border security. This is—comes directly from the threat that Donald Trump has placed on our economy and on the sovereignty of Canada. But I think it also speaks to our government's focus on going after drug dealers and organized crime.

Of course, we know that any kind of interprovincial or international drug organized crime movement needs to be nipped in the bud, and so we're ready to work with the federal government. We've put our money on the table.

* (15:00)

We also know that there's an additional increase to our support for Manitoba First Nations Police Service—\$7 million—and an additional \$5.3 million for provincial policing. That's \$3.3 million for RCMP emergency response team, \$2 million for an operational communications centre. These are additional resources, again, in addition to the work that we did in Swan River. We're partnering with the City of Thompson. We partnered with the City of Brandon.

Of course, the member opposite's going to, I'm sure today, talk a lot about the actual real dollars that are being flowed to Brandon to make sure that we can support not only their work around the downtown but support law enforcement in general in Brandon.

First, \$11.9 million for First Nations and Inuit Policing Program. First Nation Safety Officer Program

has been incredibly successful; we're going to be expanding that. Two million dollars to continue our highly successful Security Rebate Program, as I mentioned, and additional money for surveillance equipment and enhanced money laundering tools that we'll be employing.

Now, this is a—I have to admit, honourable Chair, this is a very long list of work that we've been doing in our department, and I would probably—could take the rest of the afternoon just talking through this.

I think we're going to have—and I hear other members saying maybe we should just have leave, and maybe we could do that. But I do want to respect the process. I think I'll have an opportunity to touch on some of these items in our—in the afternoon and the questions that we get.

But I want to just maybe just end on this, and that is that, you know, we are very focused on, as I said, getting tough on crime. And we know that what that means in the here and now is support for our law enforcement. We've been steadfast in that commitment, and that has started right from the top, from the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and his specific commitments to law enforcement, even before being elected as Premier, but certainly has carried through in his time in office.

And he's done an incredible job of sending that message that we stand behind the boys and girls in blue and that we are supporting them, not just in those words but in real dollars and financial support.

They're doing good work. We know that with the support of the Province, unlike the previous government who froze—for seven and a half years—froze funding for law enforcement. You know, some would call that a cut. Some would call that defunding. I don't like using divisive language, but what I will say is, is that in real dollars, in real—in a real sense—this is showing the commitment of the provincial government.

We're going to continue to do that work. We are pedal to the metal on this. We're not going to stop, to make sure that Manitobans feel safer. But I believe that, through this concerted effort that we've taken over the last 18 months, that we're starting to make a difference, and we're going to continue to do that work.

And I hope that the member opposite will, you know, give kudos where they're due—not to me but to the law enforcement community that has done such a great job in partnering with us and, hey, maybe even the civil servants in the Department of Justice who are doing a heck of a good job every single day and

making sure that we're delivering on the commitments that we've made and on the priorities of Manitobans.

So I look forward to the afternoon, and I'm sure there'll be some spirited questions.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Appreciate the opportunity to put some words on the record here on the opening statement. And I'll absolutely agree and throw my voice behind the work that's being done by all of our partners in law enforcement and the public servants that make sure that the wheels of justice keep moving. Unfortunately, sometimes under this government, they get a flat tire and it has to be changed and, you know, maintenance done, and that's my job, to hold this government to account on this.

And I'll absolutely also agree that we have varying views on law enforcement, on justice initiatives and how it should be done. I know our government took a very strategic approach. Wasn't ad hoc; it wasn't thrown together in two minutes and tried to be sold for sound bites and clips.

But—and I can speak as a professional on the front lines of law enforcement during that seven and a half years that the PC government was in government—and the relationships that were built and the support that was offered, not only to myself as chief, but to Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police and by extension the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and to all of the members within the law enforcement services, justice, corrections, security and safety.

So, I would like to thank the previous ministers Heather Stefanson, Kelvin Goertzen, Cliff Cullen and Cameron Friesen, who were all—

The Chairperson: Order. I will just remind members we have to refer to other members by their constituency or their ministerial portfolio.

Mr. Balcaen: My apologies, I missed that. So Heather Stefanson, Cliff Cullen, Cameron Friesen and, of course, the MLA for Steinbach who served in that role.

Interesting. I'll explore some of these as we go along, and I'll touch on the many of these items that the minister spoke about today during his opening statement and particularly, you know, \$5 million

towards border security. I know that Manitoba Conservation is a big part of that, and they're already struggling with resources to maintain our conservation and all of the areas that they're charged with, but instead, this government has chosen to bring them to the border to secure the border rather than investing where that should be and into our wildlife and conservation.

So, again, thank you, honourable Chair, for the opportunity to have some opening remarks, and I look forward to moving into questions, and I hope that this year that we get more answers than political jargon as we move forward. Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the critic for—from the official opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 4.1a contained in the resolution 4.1.

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

Minister, if you'd like to introduce the staff who are joining you.

Mr. Wiebe: Sure, I'd love to. Thank you very much, honourable Chair.

With me, of course, is Deputy Minister Jeremy Akerstream, and of course, folks would know him. He's very well respected and doing a fantastic job as deputy minister within the department. Our assistant deputy minister, Owen Fergusson, is with us, as well.

And so we'd be happy to bring in other officials from the department as necessary if the critic can give us a bit of a heads-up. We—happy to do that. But of course, we thought Owen is so very capable that we will start off with him and we'll see where the afternoon goes. Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

If the critic would like to share which staff are joining him.

Mr. Balcaen: Joining me today is Mr. Shannon Martin. He is a researcher with the—with our team here and a former MLA, very knowledgeable in government processes, and look forward to this.

I would also like to note that I've had the opportunity to work with both the deputy minister and the

assist—or, associate deputy minister and very much respect the work that they do. Thank you.

The Chairperson: In accordance with subrule 77(15), during the consideration of a department—of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner with questions put on the resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

* (15:10)

Mr. Balcaen: I'm just wondering if the minister can confirm that the organizational chart that is embedded in the supplemental Estimates that was tabled yesterday is complete and up to date as of today.

Mr. Wiebe: I commend the member opposite for his eagle eye because he may have noticed that there is potentially a mistake, and I'm not sure the document that he has in front of him, but just checking back through our supplementary Estimates material that was in front of us—and again, I'm not sure what was printed—there has been a change.

The Assistant Deputy Minister for Courts is—has changed. It was Darcy Blackburn and it is now Charlotte Price. So I'm not sure if he wants to check his documents. Looks like he's making an alteration there, so that would be one of the changes that we would know.

Otherwise, with regards to the organizational structure of the department, there haven't been any changes with regards to the information that's been tabled.

Mr. Balcaen: What political staff work out of the minister's office or, if not directly in the minister's office, I'm wondering if he can provide also members that are within his purview.

Mr. Wiebe: I don't believe that the member opposite has a printed list of those individuals, so I'll make sure—or, I'll do my best to make sure that we are clear and precise in who is working in our office.

First, I'll mention the Director of Ministerial Affairs is Peyton Veitch; the—my special assistant is Kathleen Sutherland; the executive assistant, EA, is Acacia Weselake. And that covers the political staff that are working in my ministerial office. I believe that's what the member's asking but, of course, we have staff in our constituency office as well, and I'd be happy to put that on the record, too, if he'd like.

Mr. Balcaen: The second part of the question: Does this include all political staff under your purview?

The Chairperson: Just a gentle reminder that comments come through the Chair.

Mr. Wiebe: It's a good reminder.

Well, I would, I guess, just mention, then, my constituency assistant, who I—okay, I'm seeing the member opposite is shaking his head, so I think maybe that's not where he was going with that question.

So, no. To be clear, those are the political staff that work in my ministerial office.

Mr. Balcaen: I'll make sure questions come through the Chair in the future here.

I'm just wondering if the minister could provide for us a breakdown of the salaries that are provided, as well as what pay scale that they're on the for the political staff.

* (15:20)

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I apologize for the delay—through you, Chair, for the committee. I think maybe part of the issue that we're getting hung up on is with regards to the salary range.

Now, all of this information is available. These are OICs, orders-in-council, so these are publicly available documents. But if we are just looking to pull those together, that's going to take a little—just a little bit of time.

Just maybe a little bit of clarification: Is the member looking simply for the salaries? Again, those are publicly made—those are public—publicly available documents, and so we can certainly go on the website and pull those up for the member.

It might be a little bit trickier if he's talking about those salary ranges, but we can, again, we can—so I guess I'm just offering—through you, Chair, to the member opposite—if he would like us to try to pull those together and just take a few minutes to do that, or if he'd prefer that we just move on and get that information to him.

Mr. Balcaen: I am looking for the ranges that the individuals are in, and classifications, I guess, like what the individuals are classified as and what the ranges are in that classification, honourable Chair.

Mr. Wiebe: Once again, apologies to the committee. Just pulling this together and making sure that we've got this on the record.

So just to make sure that we're looking at the order-in-council, we'll begin with the order-in-council for Peyton Veitch, and this was dated September 25, 2024.

* (15:30)

Peyton Veitch is appointed to the position of Director of Ministerial Affairs with the classification of Senior Officer 3, with the salary range of \$106,000—sorry—\$106,935 to \$131,124 per year, and where applicable, a Long Service Step to \$133,697.

The starting salary is \$114,897; \$4,404.38 bi-weekly, effective September 9, 2024, with the terms and conditions as set out by the employment agreement.

Peyton Veitch is designated as being an employee within the meaning of the Civil Service Superannuation Act. The chief of staff is authorized to enter into an agreement—an employment agreement—with Peyton Veitch respecting terms and conditions of employment.

The appointment in paragraph 1 of order-in-council 389/2023 is revoked. The appointment in paragraph 1 of order-in-council 451/2023 is revoked.

And, just to be clear, to finish off the order-in-council, the authority is under the Public Services Act, which states: Appointment of political staff 59(1): the Lieutenant Governor in council may appoint persons for the purpose of (a) acting in confidential capacity to the Executive Council or a member of the Executive Council, or (b) providing special professional or technical expertise to the Executive Council or a member of the Executive Council.

Terms and conditions of employment 59(2): A person may be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council on terms and conditions including remuneration authorized by order of and prescribed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

And there is additional information for the Superannuation Act, but maybe I'll spare the member opposite that. He can certainly see the order-in-council. I think it's available on the Manitoba-Government of Manitoba website.

The next one is for the special assistant, Katie Sutherland.

The order reads: Katie—Kathleen Sutherland, apologies—Kathleen Sutherland is appointed to the position of Special Assistant to the Minister with the classification of Special Assistant to the Minister, SPM. The salary range of \$79,530 to \$97,421 per year, and where applicable, a Long Service Step to \$99,369.

The starting salary is eighty-four thousand, three hundred and thirty-four thousand—sorry, let me read that again—the starting salary is \$84,334, which is three hundred and—\$3,232.78 bi-weekly, effective November 27, 2024, with terms and conditions as set out in the employment agreement, et cetera, et cetera.

Finally, Acacia Weselake, who is—was originally appointed as the Correspondence Assistant within the—or, sorry—in the—within the president of the Executive Council's office.

Acacia Weselake is appointed to the position of Correspondence Assistant within the classification of Executive Assistant to the Minister, EXM, with a salary range of \$62,167 to \$74,253 per year and, where applicable, a Long Service Step to \$75,766.

The starting salary is \$62,167. That's \$2,383.08 bi-weekly, and it's effective October 18, 2023, with terms and conditions as set out in the employment agreement.

Again, that is an order-in-council which pertained to Ms. Weselake's appointment within the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) office. However, there are no changes to the salary range that have changed as part of the order-in-council.

And, hopefully, that answers the member's—member opposite's question.

Mr. Balcaen: Thank you for that explanation, and appreciate that, honourable Chair.

My next question is, I'm wondering if the minister has any staff that are on secondment at the present time.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, and I just want to make sure we're talking about the same thing here. So, for clarity, honourable Chair, just like to ask the member opposite if he could clarify: Does he mean political staff? Does he mean staff within the minister's office? Does he mean any staff within the department?

Of course, there's a lot of people that work in the Department of Justice, so that would take some undertaking, but if he could clarify, I'd be happy to get him that answer.

Mr. Balcaen: My question, I should've made it more pointed, is any political staff on secondment.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, that makes the question a lot easier, so I appreciate the clarification. No, there are no political staff that are currently on secondment in my office.

Mr. Balcaen: Keeping on the political staff theme, honourable Chair: Are there any vacancies, or is the minister anticipating any positions—adding any positions, or do they consider themselves fully staffed under the political staff?

Mr. Wiebe: No, we are fully staffed at the moment, and we are not anticipating any additional positions. The staffing complement, I believe, is set; and as I said earlier, we have, you know, a director of ministerial affairs, special assistant and also an executive assistant, who are all working in that capacity in my ministerial office.

Mr. Balcaen: Moving on, are there any additional political staff that work with the minister, such as communication staff, issues management or other support roles?

Mr. Wiebe: Maybe I'll just get some clarification. Is the member opposite looking for a list of names of those folks that work within Cabinet communications and various organizational groups within the support staff, or is he looking for—was he looking for names or is he looking for positions, is he looking for—maybe he can just clarify exactly what the information he's looking for is.

Mr. Balcaen: Yes, I'm looking for names of people that work in those areas and that report to the minister or do work for the minister.

* (15:40)

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I'll just maybe have to suggest—through you again, honourable Chair—that the question that's being asked is maybe outside of the purview of this Estimates process. We are here to, of course, delve into the details within the Department of Justice, and I've got a lot to talk about, about the important work that's being done in the Department of Justice.

With regard to the question that was asked, what the member opposite is essentially asking is a very long list of names, of positions, of individuals, who work collectively together to help inform the work that's done, not just in the Department of Justice but in every single department across government; because while I have a number of staff that work, you know, closely with us on any given day, that is not exclusive to just the staff that are with me each day.

They work collectively, so that would be within the Cabinet communications area; within our policy development area; within what we call issues management, or sort of the day-to-day structure of responding

to inquiries by media and by others. So—you know, and it extends from there.

And so it would be difficult for me to maybe put on the record every position within the structure that supports the communications that we do as a government, and the work of the Executive Council.

That being said, my understanding is that every single one of those positions is an order-in-council. So every one of those positions would be listed as a position that, again, we can find out the name of the individual, we can find out the salary range, all of that information would be—is made public and would be available to the member opposite.

If he's asking, though, specifically whether we only have, sort of, one individual who supports, for instance, the Department of Justice, you know, in each of those areas, I would say no. It is collective; it is a work together in each of those areas, and quite frankly these are staff people that do great work to ensure that we're—we have all the information in front of us.

And so, in addition to the work that's done within the department, and again, through the deputy's office, the important work that's done to inform us of the day-to-day operations within the department, we also have additional resources that, again, help us communicate to the media, et cetera.

So if I can gently suggest then—again through you, Chair—that it might be a better use of our time if the member opposite would find those OICs; he saw how long it took to get the three OICs just within our own office. If we were to pull up every single OIC, that might take a bit of—quite a bit of time.

And so I would say that the—hopefully the time could be used better just asking specific questions about the Department of Justice, or about the operations within my own office. I'm happy to answer those questions as well, and any substantive issues that he'd like more information about.

Mr. Balcaen: I appreciate that reply, understanding that this government has so many political staff that they can't even endeavour to name them all. However, I'll move on now to another area here.

I'm wondering if the minister can explain the staffing breakdown of the deputy minister's office as well as any vacancies at this time. And for clarity, I'm just looking for numbers; I'm not looking for names or positions or salaries or anything else, just the numbers and the vacancies.

Mr. Wiebe: So we've got the information here. Within the deputy minister's office, the deputy minister is, as I said, Jeremy Akerstream; the senior adviser within the deputy minister's office is Kim Prendergast; and then the administrative assistant to the deputy minister is Doreen Mohan [*phonetic*]. Also within the deputy minister's office, the executive assistant to the deputy minister is Danita Chartrand.

Mr. Balcaen: Just, I guess, for clarity, under the deputy minister falls the ADMs and then it cascades down from there.

So just wondering if the minister could let me know about the total number of positions under the Department of Justice and what the vacancy rate is.

* (15:50)

Mr. Wiebe: I think we have the information here. Of course, this is the information that's available in the Estimates book that was tabled for the member opposite.

Within Corporate and Strategic Services, there are currently 106 FTEs. Within the Crown Law division, there are 480.5 FTEs. Within Legislative Counsel, there are 34 FTEs. Within the Correctional Services, there are currently one—sorry, 1,857.35 FTEs. Within the Courts division, there are 655.2 FTEs. Within the Public Safety division, there are 220.8 FTEs, and the member opposite will note that that is a slight increase from the previous year, additional positions and additional investments being made.

The other question the member had was with regards to vacancy rates. Currently, the vacancy rate—so the—sorry, the current vacancies. Well, maybe I'll just start, honourable Chair, just to be clear where we're starting from. So as of April '23 to April of—February of '24, the vacancies were at 423.75. That's the number of vacancies that were—that, essentially, when we came into government, those were the—that was the numbers we were working with.

Currently, the current vacancies are at 375.29. So the member opposite will note that that is a significant decrease in the number of vacancies. However, you know, this continues to be a challenge; we're continuing to ensure that, within the department, we're addressing the vacancy rate issue that we were left with and continuing to improve the department.

Mr. Balcaen: Yes, with the vacancy rate that we have here, that's been noted by the minister, I'm just wondering, under his portfolio, is there a targeted vacancy rate for vacancy management in that area?

Mr. Wiebe: I appreciate the opportunity to talk a little bit more about the vacancies that we were, of course, left with. As I said, much higher vacancy rate within the department under the previous government.

But, to put a finer point on that, or, I guess, highlight some of the challenges that we walked into under the previous government, not only was the vacancy rate high, but the number of competitions that were being undertaken to fill those positions was low.

So there was really no plan in place. There was no foresight about how to address that very serious concern around vacancies.

What we're seeing now—and I have the number here in front of me for, again, the dates between April 1, 2024, and February 28, 2025; the number of competitions that we saw within that period of time was 469, and that is a much higher number than we saw under the previous government. At that point it was 221, and so we know that not only was the vacancy rate higher under the previous government, but also, unfortunately, there was no plan or no action being taken to address that very high vacancy rate.

We have undertaken a number of steps to ensure that we're getting the right people for the right jobs, and, quite frankly, it starts right at the top. It starts with the record investments that we're making in the Department of Justice, led by our Premier (Mr. Kinew), and with the direction of the people of Manitoba who have told us that they want to see public safety; they want to see the administration of justice done in a way that shows them confidence in—you know, in their communities.

That work that our fantastic employees are doing in the Department of Justice is being supported by this government, and that's why we're addressing the vacancy rate left to us by the previous government. We're bringing those—the vacancy rate down, and we're continuing to build up the department through this specific initiative when it comes to the number of competitions that we're running for these positions.

That being said, honourable Chair, I think the question was about targets and about, you know, where we want to be. Well, we want to continually improve, so I would say that there is no target other than a complete elimination of any vacancies whatsoever.

Of course, the member opposite understands that's not necessarily realistic, especially with a staffing complement as large as we have within the Department of Justice, but also the nature of some of the

work and, you know, the sort of mobility of some of the employees that we have.

That being said, we're continuing to bring that number down, and our focus is on bringing that number down to ensure that we have the right people in the right jobs and that we're filling those positions as quickly as possible.

Mr. Balcaen: Appreciate the opportunity, again, to get these clarifying questions answered.

Honourable Chair, 469 competitions over that is a huge number of competitions, so I am assuming people are fleeing the department and they're quite worried about what's happening under this minister's reign; but, you know, that's probably why so many competitions over that time, is to fill the vacancies that are being left by the staff that are fleeing.

But moving on. The provincial retail crime initiative continues to be a requirement. It—in order to have a safe and thriving retail community, it's critical for Manitoba's well-being, also for our economy at large, to make sure that it's thriving. And last year, a number of businesses specifically cited retail theft as the reason for their closure, or for their relocation.

My question is: Does the department track business closures due to retail theft and crime?

* (16:00)

Mr. Wiebe: I appreciate, I really do, that the member opposite is seeing the value of the retail theft initiative. And, you know, I think that's a change, because what I heard from him last year—despite, of course, as I said earlier in my opening statement, the anecdotal response from the business community and from law enforcement about the kind of work that they were doing.

Despite all of that, in—leading into the fall last year, we heard nothing but criticism from the member opposite about the initiative, and at that time, it seemed to be that he thought that this was not a worthwhile endeavour or initiative by government and law enforcement.

I guess that's because he's still getting advice from the former Justice minister, who never took any action when it comes to retail theft, just sat on his hands, that this problem, of course, of shoplifting and retail theft and retail crime had been growing year after year after year after year under the previous government, and they took no action whatsoever.

And, of course, as a candidate who supported Heather Stefanson—again, another failed Justice minister, the member opposite will note—he, you know, I guess he took his marching orders and he said: Well, okay, that's—I guess I've got to be against this, despite the overwhelming evidence from, as I said, anecdotal evidence from business owners, from the community, from the public and then also from the WPS.

It seems to me now he's turning over a new leaf. He's maybe taking a different approach, and that would be good, because I hope that he is paying very close attention to the kind of information that we're getting, continuing to get, from law enforcement.

What we heard—put these numbers on the record, I think, in the past. But the total arrests under the retail crime initiative: 981. The total engagements with business and community members: 8,462. Recovered merchandise: we're talking about \$122,000 in recovered merchandise from law enforcement through the retail crime initiative. The number of tickets that were issued as Provincial Offences Act tickets: 224.

These are significant numbers, and what this shows us is that, of course, now the data is starting to show that the increased enforcement is starting to make—you know, have an impact on the numbers that we're seeing. It's made a difference.

But, again, I'll just go back to that response from the business community. They're saying thank you. They're saying thank you that we're starting to see a government that will act and that will start to take this stuff seriously. They—we've got endorsements, of course, from the Retail Council of Canada. We know that the work that we did through our Security Rebate Program was utilized by business, but now we're supercharging that; we're building on what we rolled out before, and we're building on that program to a point where businesses are going to be able to access that specific—through our specific stream.

These are the kinds of initiatives that businesses have told us are going to make a real difference.

And again, we can talk about the anecdotal—you know, we can have a political discussion about whether the member opposite now believes that this is a good idea or whether he still thinks it's a bad idea. We can—again, he can believe the anecdotal evidence, the reports in the newspapers and the reports in the media of the effectiveness of this program.

Heck, I'd encourage him to just sit down with one of the officers, as I have done, who are actually patrolling the streets, who are saying, this makes a big

difference—I'm not just responding; I'm not just being reactive to the crime that we're seeing, but I'm being proactive, and I'm working with businesses, and I'm listening to those shop owners. I'm understanding their dynamics about what's happening on the streets, and now I'm bringing that into the places where people are shopping.

Again, he can discount all of that or he can trust all of that. What I do know is that the facts are going to catch up with him and, ultimately, he's going to have to acknowledge that this is working, that the numbers that we're seeing here are real, and they're making a big difference.

Now, you know, to his question about the number of businesses that open or close in the province of Manitoba, I would suggest that might be a question that he can ask in the Department of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation—I think I got that right. I did better than the Speaker did earlier. I know I shouldn't reflect on the Speaker's work, but I know it's a challenge for all of us to make sure we get all of that acronym right.

But there may be further information he can glean about how many businesses are opening. And, of course, our economy is starting to recover from the dark days of the PC government. But he can potentially get that information there.

What we're focused on is safety in our community.

Mr. Balcaen: Again, the question was not about arrests; it wasn't about what's been recovered and the work of the Winnipeg Police Service who, I'll put on record, does fantastic work. All of our police services across Manitoba do absolutely fantastic work.

But I was wondering about the tracking of business closures. And I know he's referring to another area of his government; however, you know, if it helps, 7-Eleven talked about, or indicated, that they're closing at least a dozen stores here because of retail crime and retail theft.

So I'm just wondering, do we have an idea of how many have closed due to retail theft or the retail crime?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I appreciate the question. And I'm not sure if he's asking specifically about one business or another and, you know, again, there's probably a number of businesses that over the, as I said, dark days of the PC government probably saw Manitoba as not a friendly place for business.

But more importantly, I think that there was, certainly, a climate of—I don't know; I could characterize it

as disrespect. I think would—I'd probably go that far but, at the very least, a lack of listening or responding to concerns.

Now, I've been very clear about that. When it comes to our department, we can talk about all the challenges—the roadblocks that were put up under the previous government for business in Manitoba. We saw our economy struggle because of those—the lack of support and investments.

* (16:10)

But if we're talking specifically about the Department of Justice, what I think the member opposite—and again, earlier, he seemed to concede the fact that this is an important initiative, that business has been responsive to this, that they see the value in this and that we're continuing, not just resting on our laurels, not just saying a five hundred thousand—sorry, a \$2-million security rebate program was good enough. We've now expanded it to include a specific stream for businesses, you know, asked for, quite frankly, for years under the previous government. They didn't respond or react in any way. We have Restaurants Canada coming out, restaurants Manitoba, who's been, again, calling for this for years and now says that they're very pleased with this.

The Retail Council of Canada is a very strong partner of ours. They help to bring together business and retailers and a number of folks in the—in our retail summit that we had. I think, in fact, the member opposite, I think, was there at the retail summit. I think he stuck around for a beverage afterwards, in fact. He's nodding his head. He stuck around, and he had that drink. So that's great because I think what he heard from business owners there was a lack—just a real frustration under the previous government that this—the crime rates were going up every single year—every year—under the previous government; they went up and up and up, specifically.

And he's stroking his chin now. The numbers don't lie, honourable Speaker. And I'm surprised he doesn't know this. He was in law enforcement. He knows the rates were going up specifically when he was chief of police. So this isn't that, you know. We're not—again, this isn't some kind of like, political discussion and the facts don't lie. This is as clear as day. The crime rate was going up under the previous government.

Now, of course, we could argue, well, they buried their head in the sand when it came to the addictions crisis. They buried their hands when they—heads when

it came to the homelessness situation, the housing crisis, the situation with our child-welfare system, the education system that was cut year over year.

I mean, we can go through the—sort of the litany of reasons why, but the fact that the crime rate was increasing and specifically shoplifting, specifically issues for retailers, of violence that people in retail and in restaurants and in other businesses were facing—no action whatsoever. Never once did the members opposite lift a finger.

So we come in, and we've brought in our retail crime initiative. As I said, total arrests: 781; total engagements: 8,275; recovered merchandise, huge: \$100,000. Between November 1 and December 28, WPS officers engaged with 187 retailers, arrested 200 individuals and recovered \$56,000, just in that period, of stolen property. This is just a snapshot.

Now, the member opposite's going to hear more about the good work that's being done by WPS, by law enforcement across the province. But just to highlight this specific initiative, we saw a real improvement for retailers, a reaction from government, a support posture rather than one of closed doors and fingers in ears.

We are taking action as a government. This is a big challenge that's been left to us. We're, you know, eyes wide open on that fact. But we're going to continue to take these steps, and we believe that by taking these steps, we're going to see results. We're going to see results because of the work of whole of government, but specifically in the Department of Justice, additional funding and additional programs that support law enforcement are going to make a difference.

And the member opposite can now just say he supports this initiative. Maybe he says he wants more of it. You know, we can talk about that.

Mr. Balcaen: Five minutes exactly to answer a question that is, no, I don't track that data, which, you know—and I'm not surprised that the minister or his department doesn't track that data with all of the closings of stores and retail outlets within the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) own riding.

And, of course, they don't want to track that data and all the negativity that's coming from that lack of retail crime response that's happened since this government has been governing.

And, you know, a year and a half, almost two years now, the number of businesses that have closed in Fort Rouge and across Winnipeg is actually

alarming. So my question, honourable Chair, is if this minister does not know the number of closures, how can he measure the results or actually take the necessary actions that are required if he doesn't do a data-driven approach?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I appreciate the question from the member opposite, honourable Chair.

It sounds to me like potentially he has some data about the number of businesses in the province of Manitoba that have opened in the past 18 months versus the number of businesses that have closed in the last 18 months.

And if he has that information—again, I think that might be information that's tracked through the department of B-M-J-T-C-G-B-M-J-T-J-C. And if he has that data already, then he can certainly share it with the Estimates process, with the committee here today, and he can certainly put that on the record.

What I—what we've been focused on is listening to businesses, listening to retailers and listening to, again, restaurants and a number of folks who have seen the deterioration under the past seven and a half years of the Heather Stefanson government. We saw things get worse; we saw crime rates go up. And by tracking that information and seeing that, I mean, we hear it every single day when—you know, members opposite, they heard it too. We brought this up when we were in opposition, that the members opposite were doing nothing.

But what we wanted to focus on was how could we take that data, how could we use that information that we saw, as those crime rates were going up, and help leverage the work that was already being done by law enforcement in the city of Winnipeg and the city of Brandon and the city of Thompson and across the province.

So what we did is we listened to law enforcement. We didn't dictate how they, you know, deployed resources or where they were using the resources. We trust the experts. We trust the information that they have, and we enabled them to then go out and do that kind of policing that, again, I think—I'd hope the member opposite would see the value in the kind of work that's proactive and that's rather than being reactive, that's listening to retailers and working directly with them.

Do we know it's working? Well, we do because we see—we're starting to see the information come back. We hear it anecdotally. We even hear it from—you know, the member opposite had mentioned 7-Eleven.

Well, 7-Eleven wrote a letter to us supporting our retail crime initiative. Like, they see the value in this.

Now, do, you know, is—has everything, you know, have we gotten it all right? No, we're continuing to work on this. This is why we're continuing to move our feet when it comes to additional resources, supporting law enforcement and supporting those initiatives. But we're continuing to ensure that the high rate of retail crime that was present for seven and a half years and getting worse every single year, that it was being addressed through these kinds of initiatives.

What we're starting to see, honourable Chair, is we're starting to see some progress and some additional, again, anecdotal but also the information that's coming through. I'm hoping that that'll be made available to the member opposite soon; you know, information is being gathered and tracked every single day.

And we're going to continue to listen to retailers. We've done that. Of course, we have good advice coming to us every single day. We're going to continue to listen to retailers. And we know that this is going to make a difference if we listen to businesses and we listen to their specific concerns.

When it goes—comes to the member opposite, if he's got some information that he wants to share with the committee, I would really appreciate that he does that. I would suggest that, you know, the member could talk to the minister. Well, I guess the Estimates process—maybe he's in another room; I'm not actually sure who's answering questions right now, but he could certainly talk to that minister. He can ask those questions when that minister is made available.

But what he's probably going to find is that minister is laser focused as well on supporting businesses. He knows that we're continuing to work in our department, under the Department of Justice, but we're going to do that in collaboration with other departments to ensure that we're creating a solid business atmosphere here in the province of Manitoba.

* (16:20)

And, you know, when it comes to, again, that support for law enforcement, that's going to be always our starting point and it's going to be our end point. We trust the work that the law enforcement is doing and we make sure we're making sure that we're supporting them.

Again, in real terms, 28 per cent increase last year; 2 per cent escalator going forward. That's making a real difference. But going a step further with the

WPS: 12 officers last year, 12 new officers this year, and 12 more for bail. Again, these are real investments never done under the previous government—55 net officers lost under the previous government. It's his record, and, you know, he should answer for it here today.

Mr. Balcaen: Yes, a lot of this information is available, public data, on closures and on new starts and everything else. And, you know, I'm surprised that the minister would ask me to provide that information when earlier he mentioned that he has tens of thousands of political staff at his fingertips that—so many that he couldn't even name them all—that could easily do this research instead of relying on my time and efforts that I put forward looking at this research.

So—and I'm used to this sort of ask, honourable Chair. You know, it's been a common thread from this government to rely on the previous PC government to answer their questions and to make sure that they're aware of what is happening across the landscape in Manitoba.

So moving forward a little bit on the retail crime, I'm wondering if the minister could answer for us, specifically on the funding that he provided the Winnipeg Police Service, how much funds were given to the Winnipeg Police Service and were these funds used prior to the end of that fiscal year?

MLA Jennifer Chen, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Wiebe: I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question.

What I'm hoping to do is to be able to give the information that I have in front of me to him. This will be the bulk of the money that's flowed, but, you know, as we're pulling this together I'm recognizing that there is a number of different baskets of—or, maybe not the right term, but different initiatives that we fund independent of the overall basket funding that's provided to WPS, to law enforcement across the province, but in this case the municipality of—or the City of Winnipeg and the specific money that's flowed for law enforcement.

So the total public safety basket funding for WPS in Budget 2024 was \$24.2 million. And that is an increase of \$500,000 more this year.

Of course, last year it was a major increase, 28 per cent increase last year. So that number, of course, jumped quite a bit.

This is the, as I said, the basket funding that's provided to law enforcement; but, of course, the member

opposite knows that we've earmarked \$3 million for 12 new officers who are coming in June and \$3 million for the fall, around bail—the bail initiative.

** (16:30)*

He also knows that the retail crime initiative total was \$1.94 million, so that's additional, on top of the funding that was for that specific project. And that the increase in Budget 2024 was \$5.3 million, so very significant increase that was implemented for—in that budget year.

All this to say, as I said, 28 per cent increase last year's budget; 2 per cent this year; additional money for these individual initiatives.

What this adds up to is a real—as I said, in real dollar terms—a commitment to law enforcement that is unprecedented, had never been seen before, I would say, under any government, but for sure was never seen under the previous Heather Stefanson PC government, because we know during that time, law enforcement was told they were getting zeroes; they were getting freezes. And that's not just the city of Winnipeg; it was all law enforcement.

But, I mean, I would suggest that, in the city of Winnipeg, it was a significant challenge for them to— you know, growing population, a growing city—again, increasing crime rates under the previous government. They did nothing; they sat on their hands and they refused to even have a basic escalator built in. And so what that left us with was year over year of freezes and flat funding commitments that left us in a hole and left us without proper resources for law enforcement.

So, again, I don't use the divisive language that the member opposite does, but if you want to actually talk about what defunding the police actually looks like, you could point to Heather Stefanson and the PC government because that's—that was the approach that they took. But we've taken a different approach; we've made the commitment in—of course, in our campaign commitments, in the mandate letter, in the work that I do every single day with law enforcement.

I'm very clear about our unwavering support for the work that they do in protecting our communities, and we want to continue to support them, but we do that not just in those words, not just in one-off slogans or in divisive language that the members opposite do. We actually do it in dollars-and-cents terms, and this is the representation of it. He sees the information directly in front him—front of him.

Now, his other question was whether the money is completely—is flowed to the WPS and whether they use that money. Well, I guess he could talk to them about exactly some of the details with regards to the—how they use that money. What I would say is, yes, that money has flowed out of our department and is fully spent, and we know that it's going to the benefit of all Manitobans to make communities safer.

Mr. Balcaen: Well, thank you, honourable Chair, and welcome to the Chair.

Hearing about defund the police, just, you know, talking about this government, I've actually had the opportunity to speak with all of my colleagues that I presently sit with in this PC caucus, and every single one of them supported the police.

And I specifically said: Did any of you walk in marches or go into protests about defunding the police? And I can say that nobody on the PC side did that. And I'm not too sure if the member opposite has canvassed his caucus, but I'm not convinced that they could say the same thing.

So talking about defunding the police is really just a little bit of political rhetoric coming from this minister and actually, quite honestly, hypocrisy when we talk about that. So I did get in that five minutes a response, the answer I was looking for: \$1.94 million to the Winnipeg Police Service.

So again—regarding retail crime. So again, if I look at those numbers, retail crime is not just a Winnipeg-specific issue and I think we can all agree on that. There are 12 recognized police services in Manitoba, not including CNCP police, and, lastly, the third largest, Manitoba police—or Manitoba First Nations Police Service is also included in that.

So what is being offered, or what was offered, to these police services, or are they just left to fend for themselves when it comes to finances for retail crime?

The Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I think the member's—the member opposite's question, I think, clearly highlights and puts on full display for the people of Manitoba exactly what his priorities are.

Because, you know, as he's continuing to talk about this divisive rhetoric, this divisive language—and, I mean, he's got a new leader now who is thanking Trump, who is questioning The Human Rights Code

in Manitoba as his first priority. I mean, these are the kinds of things that just really highlight the kind of division that his party is just—is synonymous with now, by this point.

But I think, again, it highlights exactly the kinds of positions that the member opposite is bringing to this Legislature. He talks out of one side of his mouth, he says, well, I checked with everybody and everyone said they were in support of police.

Did he ask the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen)? Did he say, well, member for Steinbach, why did you freeze and cut police over the years that you were Justice minister?

Did—when Heather Stefanson was in this place, did he say, Heather Stefanson, while I was out working as a Brandon police officer, you cut my funding. Did he ask her that? I mean, I think that the silence speaks volumes, honourable Chair. The silence speaks volumes, because it is just political theatre; it's show.

If we want to talk about actual support, we can look at the numbers, and we can see that the support that we've given not only to the WPS but throughout this province is real. These are real dollars, and it shows a real commitment for law enforcement in the province of Manitoba.

I mean, let's just talk about the city of Brandon, and member opposite is very well aware of the cuts that he saw under Heather Stefanson; he knows exactly what those cuts were, and he can either come clean about that or he can continue to try to change the channel and use divisive rhetoric.

We can talk about \$100,000 that was flowed to the city of Brandon for a downtown safety initiative. We can talk about the additional funding—\$85,000 for their initiative in Brandon, their retail crime initiative. Seventy arrests, \$10,000 in property that was recovered for the people of Brandon.

But it doesn't stop there. Where does it go? It goes to the city of Thompson, you know, our crime suppression unit. We of course announced that in the budget, but the work started much before that, because we sent—we spent \$50,000 supporting the City of Thompson and their downtown strategy around safety.

Honourable Chair, \$250,000 for the crime suppression unit. We went out to Swan River, supported their GIS. This work is happening everywhere in the province. It is continuing to go across this province.

Support RCMP, support local police, support the WPS, support the BPS, and the kind of rhetoric that he continues to bring to this Chamber, I—you know, I thought maybe there was going to be a change in tone.

And I don't know why I thought that, because again the member from Fort Whyte was the face of the anti-trans campaign during the election; that was his, you know, his big issue that he wanted to bring: hey, let's put in jeopardy the safety of trans kids—that's what he hung his political hat on in the last election.

* (16:40)

He also, of course, went on record saying thank you, Trump. Thank you, Trump, he says, multiple times. Thank you, Donald Trump, for your tariffs.

I—the member opposite's laughing. I don't think the people who come to this building and take a picture in front of that Canadian flag would—you know, I don't think that they thought it was a laughing matter when the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) said thank you, to Donald Trump, for your tariffs.

So he's an expert in divisive language. But I did think—because he comes in here, he says, new tone, new day, different attitude. Well, then he can do that. I would appreciate that he'd come in here and he'd set the member for Brandon straight—Brandon West straight. Because he can maybe call to, you know, little bit of decorum on the member to say, stop using divisive language; we're past that.

Manitobans want to see unity. They believe in one—the message of one Manitoba, and they want to see when we say we're going to do something, that we actually do it. The numbers that we're talking about here show very clearly our government's commitment, and the member opposite has no leg to stand on because he joined a government that, for seven and a half years, froze and cut police funding across the province.

Mr. Balcaen: You know, the minister is right on one thing there: I did join a government that certainly supports law enforcement and, certainly, was there for law enforcement and wasn't advocating for the defunding of police at that time.

But you know what? Those are in the past, and maybe the honourable minister's government has learned from those mistakes, and, you know, I'm hoping that that's—that has certainly happened.

So all of that, five minutes, and I got the one answer I was looking for: \$85,000 to Brandon Police Service on retail crime; \$1.94 million to the Winnipeg Police Service.

But outside of Brandon and Winnipeg, the other 10 municipal police services: I'm just wondering what the dollar figure is for—specifically for retail crime initiative. Not any of the other initiatives that the minister brought forward and what he's funded and what actually hasn't come to fruition, although they've done a lot of announcements.

How many dollars have gone to those other municipal agencies such as, but not limited to: Altona, Winkler, Morden, Springfield—I'll expand it to the RCMP, Manitoba First Nations, Victoria Beach, Ste. Anne, the RM of Cornwallis, just to name some.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

Mr. Wiebe: You know, I think the member opposite—I mean, first let's address what he first said. I mean, it couldn't be more clear that the kind of support that we're talking about for law enforcement is real. It's not just words; it's not just slogans that he wants to spout off in the House; it's actual results.

And I guess he gets that from his new leader. You know, he wants to defend the record of Heather Stefanson, and I think we've seen where that's led us in this province: worsening crime rates overall, not just in the city of Winnipeg but across this province. That's his record, and he—and so he can use the kind of divisive rhetoric that we've heard from Donald Trump and others. But I think if we're talking about real results and real commitment what we're seeing here is exactly that.

And so while I've talked a lot about that 30 per cent increase over two years now to law enforcement in their basket funding, it is important to note—and he's touched on an important issue here—that we are listening to municipalities, listening to local law enforcement across the province in a way that was just never done under the previous government. We've travelled to—you know, across this province. We've made sure that we're listening.

You know, he scoffs at the crime suppression unit in Thompson or he thinks that the GIS isn't a good idea. I think he should go up to the town of Swan River, and he should have a conversation with the folks in Swan Valley about whether they think more law enforcement—he calls it a pittance or what he

makes fun of. Manitobans don't need more funding—that's what he said—no more funding announcements. Why do they just get—keep getting funding announcements from this other—this government?

I mean, it just boggles the mind that we're listening to local law enforcement, listening to communities, investing in those projects, and yet he scoffs at them, he makes fun of them, and he thinks—he belittles the people who have done the work to bring this to government and now we're supporting that.

But to answer his specific question, because he's bringing up there is law enforcement, good initiatives that are being undertaken across this province. And so, you know, I don't want to diminish or in any way undersell the work that's being done across many law enforcement agencies in this province. And so that's why we have our joint forces project funding, which is \$970,000 that's been flowed.

Let's just look at some of the projects that they've undertaken: project outburst, with the WPS; Project Gauge; Project Blockade, which was a Brandon Police Service initiative; \$11,000 flowed to that project. In the city of Winkler, the Winkler Police Service; Project Recoil, \$27,517 flowed to support that initiative. In Morden, \$3,727. In Altona, \$746.

Let's go down the list. In Morden, \$49,000 for initiatives and additional projects that they've listed there. The initiative out of Brandon, which we funded to the tune of \$3,500. The list goes on and on, honourable Speaker—honourable Chair. Project puma [*phonetic*] in Winkler Police Service.

I mean, is he aware of these additional initiatives that are being brought to this strategic joint forces project initiative, and does he understand that these are making a real difference in public safety? Honourable Chair, \$974,110 that's been flowed to these additional initiatives. That's on top of the basket funding, which has increased now significantly in the province: 28 per cent in Budget 2024 with a guaranteed escalator; and Budget 2025, another 2 per cent. Overall funding in '23-24 was \$43,000,614. It's now, in Budget 2025, \$58,493,000.

* (16:50)

This is a huge increase and a real commitment to law enforcement. It's not just words, like the member opposite just continues to want to put on the record. He wants to divide Manitobans and make them think that there's some kind of division, maybe in his own

caucus, or maybe in his own mind. What he knows is, is that under the previous government, there were cuts to law enforcement, and now, today, we're showing record funding increases.

He needs to answer for that. He needs to say: Is that defunding the police? Does he believe that that's defunding the police? Less money, is that defunding the police? It's a simple question.

Mr. Balcaen: Moving on to a different topic here, because not once did I hear of those numbers that this was for retail crime.

Police are engaged in projects all the time and, you know, specifically the question was about retail crime. So outside of Brandon and Winnipeg, that number is zero.

So moving to this next question, very sensitive for a number of people in the community, but earlier this year James Hilton was involved in a motor vehicle crash and, as a result, the life of Kellie Verwey was taken. And, of course, the entire community of Portage la Prairie and all of Manitoba was deeply concerned with what happened here. And I know collectively our hearts go out to the family, and very difficult.

But I've just very recently heard from the community that this individual, who had a lengthy criminal history and had been in breach of his orders, was released from custody, and I'm just wondering, under the minister's watch, if he can confirm this for the community or alleviate this concern as to whether or not Mr. Hilton—Mr. James Hilton—has been released from custody.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, first of all, honourable Chair, we—it just gives us another opportunity to express the condolences as the member opposite has said, from all members of this House, you know, just devastating.

Not just to the community, but I think to every Manitoban. Kellie Verwey's death was an absolute tragedy, and we're deeply saddened by it. And I think the action that we took as a Legislature collectively, I think, spoke to that concern.

I—you know, I feel very privileged that I was able to join with the Premier (Mr. Kinew) in a meeting with the family to hear directly their concerns and—maybe this is a topic that we can pick up on the other side of the day, just because we have officials that we'd like to bring in, but I believe there's a protocol to bring them in to answer the member's question more fully when we do have an opportunity.

But maybe I'll just say at this point that it's an absolute tragedy, one that the Premier took very dear to his heart and used, you know, that experience of that heartbreak to bring all premiers together, to call for bail reform at the federal level.

The Chairperson: Order.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise and call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

The Deputy Speaker (Tyler Blashko): The hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 6, 2025

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