



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

Wednesday, May 7, 2025

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

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

Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Honourable Speaker, I'm tabling a revised Estimates sequence to be in effect for today only.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**Emergency Preparedness Week**

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): It is my pleasure to rise today to proclaim this week, May 4 to 10, 2025, as Emergency Preparedness Week. This year's national theme is be prepared and know your risks.

I encourage all Manitobans to stay informed, be prepared and take action.

Manitoba's Emergency Management Organization is responsible for helping to lead our province to be safer, more prepared and resilient in the face of

emergencies and disasters, which are deepening and increasing with the climate crisis.

Emergency Management Organization encourages Manitobans to take three simple steps to become better prepared to face a range of potential emergencies: (1) know the risks; (2) make a plan and; (3) build an emergency kit.

The EMO website has been recently rebuilt to have a significant amount of up-to-date information so Manitobans can take these three steps. I encourage everyone to learn from it; for example, how to build an emergency plan and an emergency kit, as described on the new website at gov.mb.ca/emo.

Just this week, we've witnessed the importance of knowing risks and preparing. With most of the province under a moderate fire danger, wildfires have taken hold near The Pas/OCN, Fairford First Nation, Peguis First Nation and a few smaller fires in other parts of southern Manitoba.

EMO is working with local authorities and emergency management partners to ensure the safety of residents.

Wildfires are a concern this year and we do encourage Manitobans to be prepared. I also want take a moment to remind Winnipeggers that the City has imposed a ban on all fires and fireworks due to dry conditions, and this ban is in effect until May 19 at 6 p.m.

EMO will also be issuing an emergency alert test message today at 1:55 p.m. This is a proactive practice to test the National Public Alerting System.

Together we can work collaboratively to lessen the impact of potential emergencies, ensuring that we're prepared to protect our neighbours, our communities and ourselves.

The safety of our communities is the shared responsibility of each and every one of us. Manitoba must strive to be resilient to hazards, emergencies and disasters that may come our way.

The week offers the perfect opportunity to celebrate this work and reflect on the steps we can all take as individuals to do our part in being prepared for an emergency. And as always, the NDP Manitoba

government is here to support our citizens in every way that we can.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Today I rise to recognize Emergency Preparedness Week, a national awareness initiative that encourages each of us to take simple, proactive steps to ensure that Manitobans are ready to protect themselves, their families and their communities in the face of emergencies.

This year's theme is: Be Prepared. Know Your Risks.

And this is something that is near to me. During my time on municipal council, I was the liaison to our local fire department; and, unfortunately, in 2012, my community witnessed the largest demonstration of mutual-aid efforts in Manitoba's history. We were thankful as a community that the messages from EMO and emergency preparedness through the Province prepared our community, along with the neighbouring municipalities and communities from across our entire province, to come to help and rescue those that were in need.

This message is extremely meaningful here in Manitoba, where we experience a range of seasonal and environmental challenges, from spring floods and wildfires to extreme cold and winter storms.

Understanding the specific risks in our region is the first step in staying safe. Emergency preparedness is not just about planning for the worst; it's about building confidence and resilience together.

Preparedness isn't only a responsibility for individuals and families. Workplaces, schools and community organizations also play a vital role. By practicing evacuation procedures, keeping emergency supplies on hand and making sure everyone knows what to do, we help ensure that our communities can respond effectively and recover more quickly.

Being prepared is a theme that the NDP government should listen carefully to. This spring's wildfires and accompanying fire bans, including in the city of Winnipeg, should serve as a reminder that situations evolve quickly. Being prepared also means properly funding emergency services, which the NDP are failing miserably.

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, in response to the NDP's cuts to EMO stated, quote: Emergency preparedness measures for First Nations in Manitoba already fall short of acceptable. To cut emergency funding in half and an operating budget by

15 and a half per cent is an extremely dangerous and ill-advised decision that has serious implications for—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

The Speaker: Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: Leave has been denied.

* (13:40)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Heritage Park Children's Programs

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Honourable Speaker, today I am pleased to rise to recognize the outstanding contributions of the Heritage Park Children's Programs staff, led by Executive Director Debbie Love and Assistant Director Lori Ellis.

Since 1986, the Heritage Park team has been providing the highest level of care to the children of Assiniboia. Initially only responsible for 26 school-aged children, staff now also care for preschool and infant children, as well as expectant and new mothers. Based out of four unique sites, the team supports close to 1,000 families across west Winnipeg.

Both of my children spent several years with the Heritage Spark *[phonetic]* staff, and our family developed deep and long-lasting relationships with the educators. Their level of care and compassion was continually on display and provided constant reassurance that my children were being well cared for and supported.

Through their intentionality, creativity and remarkable relationship-building, the Heritage Park team helps families to develop self-confident, respectful and responsible citizens. They provide opportunities for children to build their social skills, explore their interests, practise basic math and literacy and engage in hands-on and play-based learning. This eases children's transition to grade school by preparing and empowering them to learn in the classroom setting.

Staff members also support mothers, equipping them with the skills they need as they transition into parenthood. They host regular sessions to help parents connect with one another and provide critical information related to health, nutrition and caring for babies.

The Heritage Park team is indispensable. Through their ongoing and relentless service, they have ensured that families in west Winnipeg continue to thrive.

Today we recognize and congratulate each member of that team for their contribution. Debbie Love and Lori Ellis have joined us in the gallery this afternoon. Please join me in thanking them, along with the rest of their team, for their tireless work that has touched the lives of countless families and the broader community.

Selkirk Lift Bridge Replacement

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): The Selkirk Lift Bridge connects citizens from the RM of St. Andrews, the city of Selkirk and the RM of St. Clements together. It is one of the three bridges in the area that brings the triple-S community together for education, work and commerce.

Built in 1935 at a cost of \$250,000, it has served the area extremely well for the last 90 years.

Under the previous PC government, it was scheduled to be upgraded in 2022. However, the announcement from the federal government that the Lockport bridge would undergo extensive rehab that same year, the project needed to be delayed. Originally, the work on the Lockport bridge was to take less than one year. It took considerably longer, only opening in September of 2023.

The Selkirk bridge, with its narrow lanes and rotting deck, desperately require replacing. Vehicles travelling over it often have their mirrors struck, especially when pulling a trailer. You can visually see small indents of the deck surface slowing sinking toward the river.

When I asked the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation when we could see a new design on the bridge, I was assured that the design consultation would take place within a year. Well, that year has passed and I cannot get any answers from this minister.

In fact, I requested a meeting to follow up on this and several other projects that we spoke of during our only meeting last year and have been waiting for months for a meeting or even a response. I personally asked the minister to please give me a date to discuss this and other matters originally raised in our only meeting that was previously granted, and I was told to wait for a response from her department.

Why does this minister think the voices of the residents of St. Andrews, St. Clements and the city of Selkirk do not matter?

Khalsa Diwan Gurdwara Expansion Project

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): On a much brighter note, I rise today to recognize the remarkable achievement of the Khalsa Diwan gurdwara and their congregation on the completion of a transformative expansion project. This project has completely renewed a cornerstone of the Sikh community in Rossmere.

The Khalsa Diwan gurdwara expansion project was far more than simple renovations; it was a comprehensive revitalization including a new HVAC system, fresh drywall and paint and a renovation of existing spaces to meet the needs of the congregation. After more than four decades since its last major renovation, this project was timely and essential for the Sikh community in Rossmere.

The inspiring vision of this project became a reality thanks to the extraordinary generosity of the community. Countless volunteers dedicated their time and energy, and their unwavering commitment and profound selflessness were the driving forces behind the accomplishment of this project.

The gurdwara has a beautiful new kitchen and a main hall, providing vital spaces for gathering and service. The addition of a gleaming—sorry, several gleaming new gold domes on top of the gurdwara has not only enhanced its spiritual significance but also has gifted our Rossmere community with a stunning new landmark that radiates beauty and pride.

This project was joyfully celebrated a few weeks ago on Vaisakhi. Many of our team were there in attendance, and the celebration served as both a profound spiritual observance and a vibrant testament to our community's strength and unity.

Honourable Speaker, it is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge some of the instrumental community members who poured their hearts into bringing this project to life: Sukhjot Bhandal, Sital Kang, Davinder Thind and Baldev Gill. Their leadership and dedication are truly inspiring.

I also want to recognize the late Kewal Singh Chohan whose vision laid the foundation for this remarkable achievement. Though he is no longer with us, his presence is deeply felt within the gurdwara and throughout our whole Rossmere community.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Waskada Grain Elevator Fire

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): Honourable Speaker, yesterday, Turtle Mountain lost another piece of the past on the prairie landscape when Waskada grain elevator went up in flames.

A wooden grain elevator in the village was destroyed by fire early Tuesday morning. It was an icon and a part of our community, said long-time resident Margaret Austin-Temple. When people come home, they saw it and when they knew when they were approaching Waskada. I can see it from a long way out, so that will be all missed, according to Margaret.

The elevator was built in 1961 to replace the elevator in the community that was destroyed by fire earlier that year. The saving grace yesterday was that the winds were light, which kept the fires from spreading to other buildings in the community.

Approximately 50 firefighters from the fire departments in Waskada, Pierson, Melita and Deloraine responded to the blaze. I would like to thank all the fire department personnel, the local officials, of their contributions to fighting the fire and saving additional property and keeping residents safe.

At the peak in 1920, Manitoba was home to more than 700 wood grain elevators, more than—the number of these getting smaller as they are disappearing due to fire, demolition and disrepair. The Manitoba Historical Society has stated that the number of wooden elevators after Tuesday's fire, the number stands at 115; around 60 of those are still in use.

Growing up near Inglis, Manitoba, I remember when all four elevators were in use in hauling grain with my father. Now the community is now home to the Inglis Grain Elevators national historical site, where all four elevators were restored.

Honourable Speaker, the landscape in the community of Waskada will never be the same after such devastating event yesterday. I was sad—it was a sad day yesterday for the people of Brenda-Waskada after losing their iconic wooden grain elevator.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Winnipeg Sikaran Arnis Academy

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Winnipeg Sikaran Arnis Academy, WSAA, is a family-owned and operated martial arts school that is located in Tyndall Park and has been serving our community for 21 years.

The school was founded by husband and wife, Kuya Redentor Igne, a seventh-degree black belt, and my Ate Kelly Legaspi, a fifth-degree black belt.

Now, over the years, they have been dedicated to promoting two ancient Filipino martial arts: Sikaran and Arnis, while upholding the four pillars of their teaching: honour, excellence, respect and discipline. Further, the academy has nurtured its members, many of whom are children and youth residing in Tyndall Park, to develop self-confidence, discipline and a strong sense of identity.

WSAA offers a positive and active environment for the community. Their performances energize crowds at festivals, events and community gatherings, and they are the first martial arts school in Manitoba to have the honour of participating in the Calgary Stampede Parade.

In addition to this, last year a team of four black belt members of WSAA represented and competed for Manitoba at the WKC Canadian national team tryouts in Ottawa and made history by winning Manitoba's first-ever national gold medal in this category. These same four athletes went on to compete at the world championships in Portugal. They faced top teams from Mexico, Guatemala and the United States, proudly winning the first-ever open team Kata world gold medal for Canada, all while bringing home world titles in their own individual divisions.

* (13:50)

I ask for leave for these individuals' names to be added into Hansard.

In closing, Honourable Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me in cheering for them, some who have joined us here today as they leave next week as members of Team Manitoba to compete once again at the WKC Canadian National Team tryouts in Gatineau, Quebec.

Thank you.

Ben Clarke, Malcolm Edwards, Lee Angela Igne, Lourdes Lynn Igne, Red Jr. Igne, Maria "Kelly" Legaspi, Jayzelle Policarpio

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Prior to oral questions, there are some guests in the gallery I'd like to introduce. We have seated in the public gallery from Woodlawn School, 63 grade 3 to 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.

ORAL QUESTIONS**Manitoba Nurses
Government Record**

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, Darlene Jackson, the president of Manitoba Nurses Union, didn't hold back her words on this Premier today.

From a public interview, and I quote: You made a ton of promises; it's time to take responsibility. You can't, in a campaign, make empty promises and not fulfill them. You've let the public down and you've let nurses down, and I think that is a shame. End quote.

When will the Premier fulfill his many campaign promises to Manitoba nurses?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Well, Honourable Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to just thank our Minister of Health for all the heavy lifting that they're doing to repair the health-care system after years of cuts under the former PC government, a government that that member was a part of.

Now there's a lot of work for us to do to repair that damage and to get health care to the place where it needs to be to serve you, the people of Manitoba. And I want to say thank you also to nurses, who keep showing up day after day alongside allied health-care professionals, physicians, health-care aides and support staff to treat you, the patients of Manitoba.

On behalf of the Province of Manitoba, thank you.

We've hired 600 net-new nurses since we've taken office. We've opened up new emergency rooms. We've hired more than a hundred institutional safety officers. Are we there yet? No, we're not. We're working together. We're on the way to fixing the PC cuts and giving you the health care that you deserve.

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

Mr. Khan: Honourable Speaker and Manitobans, you can see it right there. This Premier does not have the courtesy to even acknowledge the comments made by Darlene Jackson.

This NDP government is failing. They are fundamentally failing to understand how to govern. A press release and a photo op does not solve the solution—solve the problem. You know what does? Not getting a D- which is what the Health Minister scored according to Darlene Jackson. And I quote: At best, a D-. End quote. This Health Minister got a failing grade.

Will the Premier stand today and fire his Health Minister for getting a D-?

Mr. Kinew: Absolutely not.

I give the Health Minister an A+, because everywhere that I go in Manitoba—because everywhere I go in Manitoba, whether I'm talking to a nurse, a patient, somebody who's worried about their kids, their grandparents, they say we have the best Health Minister in the entire country, a beautiful country.

We're speaking about Fs. I'll table this editorial from the Winnipeg Free Press giving the member opposite an F on his first week here in the House.

But while he contorts himself into positions trying to justify the past, PC promises, PC election ads, PC closures of emergency rooms, I will say this: we are working hard each and every day. Have we delivered on health care a hundred per cent? We're on the way.

Honourable Speaker, 600 net-new nurses, new emergency rooms in the works, including in south Winnipeg, and an end to the betrayals of the front lines that we saw under the PCs.

The only complaint that the PCs have with us when it comes to health—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

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

Mr. Khan: Only the NDP would think a D- is a passing grade, Honourable Speaker.

Hundreds of nurses gathered today on the steps of the Legislature to send a message to the NDP—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —and this Premier.

They've had enough of this Premier's empty promises, and they're angry, Honourable Speaker. MNU president Darlene Jackson gave this Health Minister a D-. And they say this Premier has no plan.

When will the Premier show his plan to Manitoba nurses?

Mr. Kinew: Well, only the PCs would think that the leadership candidate that got fewer votes actually won that contest.

But when it comes to repairing the damage that they caused during their time in government, led by the closures authorized by the member sitting to his

right, and signed off at the Cabinet table by the member opposite, what I would say was this: We shared the plan in the election. That's how we received a mandate from you, the people of Manitoba.

Step 1 was staffing up the health-care system. We need more staffing, but we've already delivered 600 new nurses to the front lines.

Step 2 is ensuring work-life balance. We're working on safety. We've hired new ISOs.

Step 3 was reopening emergency rooms closed under their time in office. We had the public consultations on the Victoria ER last night.

We are delivering. This is going to take years to fix. Why? Because of the extraordinary damage that the PCs caused.

How do we overcome great challenges in this province? It's by working together—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Violence at Thompson Hospital Request for Safety Measures

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, health care is a serious matter, and what does this Premier do? He stands up and makes a joke and his caucus laughs at it. If that isn't the definition of a toxic leader, I don't know what is.

Throughout Manitoba, health-care workers are experiencing aggression and violence—[*interjection*]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —like never before. After a man with a gun fired through a window in the Thompson hospital over Christmas, workers are calling the new measures, and I quote: a band-aid solution.

Four months later, this minister only acted after a nurse went to media and expressed their concerns.

How many other documented safety concerns are being suppressed by this Premier and this NDP government?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Every single Manitoban deserves to be safe when you go to work. And you deserve to be safe so that you come home at the end of your shift. And we're making progress to ensure that workplaces are safer for nurses, for allied health professionals, for physicians, for support staff and,

importantly, for you, the patient, when you show up to a hospital.

We've hired more than 100 institutional safety officers. The PCs never hired a single one.

We're also ensuring that First Nation safety officers will be deployed to hospitals, including the TGH facility that the member opposite is raising the issue of.

Again, he wants to play partisan politics here. The only explanation he should offer is why is his only criticism saying that we need to fix the PC cuts faster.

When it comes to building up this province, we're building emergency rooms; we're building the next generation of health-care workers, and we're building a brighter future for you, the great people of this province.

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

Mr. Khan: Honourable Speaker, we're talking about safe workplace—safety at work. And I'll quote the member from Fort Garry: He is a dysfunctional and toxic leader. He does not take criticism well.

Honourable Speaker, that is a dysfunctional workplace. That is not a safe workplace under this Premier.

The Thompson nervous—nurses—[*interjection*]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —have requested panic buttons. The government is aware of this request and has yet, over a month, failed to act.

Can the Premier confirm whether this simple request has been actioned, yes or no?

Mr. Kinew: Yes, we're taking steps across the entire province. It's surprising that a former minister of the Crown doesn't understand that his government didn't hire a single institutional safety officer. We've been in government for 18 months and already our Minister of Health has hired more than 100. We're also working with First Nations governments to ensure that their FNSOs can be deployed to keep you, the people of Manitoba, safe in hospital facilities.

You want contrast messaging? Here's the greatest contrast of all: We're working with all communities, including Indigenous ones, on making everyone in Manitoba safer. Think about the ads they ran in the last connection—or the last election, rather, and make the connection for yourself.

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

Mr. Khan: Honourable Speaker, it's a shame the Premier keeps bringing up misinformation and facts that are not relevant on this question.

* (14:00)

The question is simple: did this Health Minister and Premier install a panic button? The answer is no. They did not. No answers, no actions by this NDP and this Premier. A common theme by this NDP government to dodge, deflect and deceive Manitobans. A listening government would listen to front-line staff and fulfill the simple ask of installing a panic button.

Why is this Premier refusing to provide a simple, requested safety measure like a panic button, for health-care workers?

Mr. Kinew: You know, I'm very proud to come to work every single day to serve you, the people of Manitoba, and to work alongside my colleagues who listen to you, the people of Manitoba.

And so we've listened to nurses, who said that they want a fairer deal, that they want safety at work. They want more help on the front lines, and they want more safe facilities to be able to work in. We are making progress on every single one of the asks that they've brought forward from the front lines.

When we're talking about the members opposite, that didn't last very long, did it? Remember on day one, those heady days of old, when the member opposite said there wasn't going to be any breaches of decorum or personal attacks? I'll leave him to acknowledge the words that he's putting on the record here.

What we're focused on is you, the great people of Manitoba. Health care is what we received a mandate on to fix. We're reopening emergency rooms the PCs closed. We've hired 600 more nurses after years of them firing nurses in the province, and we're repairing health care for you, the people of the most Canadian province in the best country in the world.

Emerson Personal-Care-Home-Bed Vacancies Understaffing and Closure Concerns

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): There are beds sitting vacant at the Emerson care home while families are torn apart when loved ones are sent to care homes in other communities, or staged in hospitals.

Will the minister give these beloved seniors their placement in the Emerson care home today?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): We've been meeting with local community, we've been meeting with leadership to make sure that our government is adding capacity across the province, but certainly in that region.

And the member opposite would do best, I think, in this House to stand in his place and apologize to his own constituents for being a part of a PC caucus that cut health care for seven and a half years. That member has still not acknowledged that part of the reason why personal-care-home beds in rural Manitoba were closed was because the PCs closed them and cut services.

So I'm hoping that member will do the right thing, stand up in this House, acknowledge that he has contributed himself to the damage in health care that our government is doing the work of fixing.

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

Mr. Guenter: This minister needs to listen to the nurses who have been very clear, and also to Darlene Jackson's scathing review.

How many care home beds in Manitoba are vacant today as a result of NDP understaffing?

MLA Asagwara: The PCs closed over 200 personal-care-home beds in their time in office. We had a net loss of over 216-'17 personal-care-home beds, despite his promise to bring 1,200 net-new beds on line.

In fact, Honourable Speaker, our government has been doing the work of cleaning up the mess and damage that that member opposite created in our health-care system, including personal-care-home beds.

I'm happy to announce in the House today that we have reopened 45 per cent of the beds closed by the PCs in personal-care beds across this province. We know it's not enough. We know there's more work to do, but our—we're committed to doing that work for all Manitobans.

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

Mr. Guenter: Well, that minister got lost on the way to truth town. The community of Emerson is concerned—

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

I would very strongly caution the member to be more careful in the words he uses. That's dangerously close to being unparliamentary and not acceptable.

Mr. Guenter: The community of Emerson is concerned that this minister is failing to place seniors in the

Emerson care home and filling those eight empty suites that currently exist there.

Does the minister, does this NDP government, intend to close the Emerson care home?

MLA Asagwara: Our government recognizes that we need more capacity in this province, which is why our wonderful colleague from Radisson introduced Bill 216, which ensures that emergency room services can't be closed across rural Manitoba without a plebiscite being—happening first and foremost.

On that side of the House, members in that caucus didn't care. They just closed emergency rooms; they cut PCH beds; they fired hundreds of nurses, and that member opposite, for seven and a half years, applauded every single step of the way.

We're fixing the damage that they've done to health care, and we're doing it in conjunction with leaders across rural Manitoba. I look forward to speaking to the reeve of the community he represents to see how we can continue to work together.

Nurses in Manitoba Request to End Mandatory Overtime

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Hundreds of nurses gathered on the steps of the Manitoba Legislature this afternoon to send a message to this NDP government that they are sick and tired of the countless empty promises they've made during the campaign and failed to fulfill. One of those promises was to end mandatory overtime.

When will this minister keep their promise to Manitoba nurses and end mandatory overtime?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, it wasn't that long ago that the member for Roblin was advising Heather Stefanson on how to force members of our workforce to work more overtime. Wasn't that long ago that the Leader of the Opposition was encouraging Heather Stefanson to fire more nurses so that they'd be forced to work more overtime.

The member opposite, the one who asked the question and the one to her right, want to privatize health care. They want to drive nurses into the private sector. Honourable Speaker, what is going on on that side of the House?

Over here on this side, I know what's going on. We're investing in making health care better, hiring net-new hundreds of nurses and fixing the damage that that member did.

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

Mrs. Cook: This was their promise. They campaigned on it during the election, and when in opposition, they introduced, multiple times, a bill to end mandatory overtime.

So they should be able to answer the question: When will this NDP government end mandatory overtime for nurses?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, I was outside Leg. grounds today talking to nurses directly, having conversations with them, meeting them where they're at, listening to their voices.

Did the member opposite bother to spend any time going out talking to nurses and apologizing for her role in the state of our health-care system? I don't think she did that.

We know our government has much more work to do. We've hired a net-new 600 nurses. We've reduced overtime at Health Sciences Centre—or, Shared Health—the Health Sciences Centre by 45 per cent. We know that there's much more work to do.

But on that side of the House, we all know, they know, that we're dealing with the consequences of their callous cuts to health care. Has she apologized to nurses? She could have done so today.

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

Mrs. Cook: I was at the rally outside and I heard the Manitoba Nurses Union loud and clear. They've had enough of this NDP government's endless empty promises and failure to follow through. They're frustrated, they're burned out, and they're exhausted.

So when will this minister keep their promise to Manitoba nurses and end mandatory overtime? When?

MLA Asagwara: We've hired a net-new 600 nurses. We have over 100 institutional safety officers keeping nurses safer on their jobs. And we made sure that nurses had a fair deal, a deal that MNU recommended to their members, a historic agreement.

In contrast, members opposite fired hundreds of nurses. Members opposite refused to hire even a single ISO. And members opposite treated nurses with contempt and disrespect for seven and a half long years.

We are doing the work of fixing the damage done by members opposite. On this side of the House, we'll keep listening to nurses and working with them every

single day to make health care better, no matter where they work in our great province.

**Swan Valley School Division Funding Concerns
Inquiry into Loss of Staff and Music Program**

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Honourable Speaker, we, on the PC team, absolutely hold education as a top priority. Recent information out of the Swan Valley School Division paints a troubling picture for their students.

Can the minister confirm that approximately 40 educational assistants have been fired effective June 2025?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): We can tell just how much the PC caucus values and prioritizes education by the seat that, you know, my critic occupies in the second row there.

* (14:10)

I do appreciate a question on education. The fact of the matter is, Honourable Speaker, it's unfortunate that we have heard from our federal partners at the federal government that they are making significant changes to the funding that is offered through Jordan's Principle. Those changes made by the federal government are having impacts here in our education system here in Manitoba.

I'm happy to share with the House that our department is working very closely with the school division that the member opposite mentioned and all school divisions to make sure that the supports that the students require are there for them to have.

On this side of the House we have—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Speaker, according to the NDP, they don't even put education in their top five. So according to the Education Minister's logic, the Education Minister should be sitting in the hallway.

We on our side of the House, Honourable Speaker, value music and the arts as an important component of a child's education. From simple enjoyment—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —to understanding tempo to playing.
[interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: Can the minister confirm that Swan Valley School Division—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) will come to order.

Mr. Ewasko: Would you like me to start over?

Can the minister confirm that Swan Valley School Division has eliminated music programming for students at two elementary schools and have reduced in many others across the division, Honourable Speaker?

MLA Schmidt: The fact of the matter is, after seven and a half years of a government under the leadership of Brian Pallister and Heather Stefanson after him failed to fund school divisions right across this province, froze educational funding, there were fewer teachers in Manitoba under the leadership of that member when he was the minister of Education.

Thankfully, now Manitobans have an NDP government; a government that understands education, a government that funds education.

Honourable Speaker, over the last two years, we have increased funding to school divisions by over \$170 million, which has seen more educators entering our system. Last year alone, 630 net-new educators—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Speaker, the minister should be embarrassed, should be ashamed of herself that she doesn't stand in this House and answer a simple question.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: MGEU staff representatives have said that Swan Valley School Division has fired 18 permanent employees and cut term positions for 22 employees within seven schools in the school division.

Can the minister assure parents that their children's education will not be impacted due to her education funding cuts?

MLA Schmidt: I have a question for the member opposite. I wonder, as I've updated the House, the issues that we're seeing across Manitoba right now

when it comes to the funding of educational assistants that are funded through Jordan's Principle are a result of policy changes at the federal level. I wonder if the member opposite, in his time as minister or in his time as critic, has ever bothered to reach out to the federal government and see what we can do to make sure that students here are supported.

On this side of the House we will not pick fights with school divisions. We will not put misinformation on the record. The member opposite should be ashamed of his record on education, Honourable Speaker: cuts, freezes; where they cut, we will build.

911 Emergency Medical Services Reliability Concerns for Rural Manitoba

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Honourable Speaker, on this side of the House, we believe in equity. Manitobans are very concerned about—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Johnson: —the long-term viability of 911 services in rural Manitoba. Every link in the chain needs to be strong to ensure that first responders get where they are needed as quickly as possible.

Can the minister assure Manitobans that 911 services are equitable across Manitoba?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, our government is doing a tremendous amount of work, working with Shared Health and partners across the province, to ensure that emergency response services are as strong as they can possibly be, in contrast with previous failed, callous, cold PC administration—cut services across the province, particularly in rural Manitoba. We saw a net loss, just as one example, of 90 paramedics.

On this side of the House, we are doing the opposite. We are working directly with municipalities to make sure that they have faster emergency response services in place. We know there's much more work to do, but I think we all know in this House, there's so much work to do because on that side of the House, they spent seven and a half years cutting health care, cutting services and hurting Manitobans.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Johnson: Obviously, with a half a dozen ministers getting up to answer that question, they don't even know who is responsible.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Johnson: Recently, a man in the RM of Fisher experienced a medical emergency. His wife and family were unable to contact 911. They tried nearly 20 times. Tragically, he passed away.

Let me be clear: this was no failing of—staff incompetency, nor procedures. The call simply did not get to 911. Rural Manitobans are not being treated equal.

Honourable Speaker, can the minister share how many 911 calls are not getting through in rural Manitoba?

Hon. Mike Moroz (Minister of Innovation and New Technology): I want to thank the member opposite for that important question.

As the Minister of Health and seniors rightly pointed out a moment ago, we are working very closely with communities, with health-care providers and with the federal government, of course, which has some responsibility in this area, to make sure that we improve the system as rapidly as we possibly can.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Johnson: Honourable Speaker, communities are not responsible for ensuring 911 is running properly; it is this government.

In April 2024, a provincial spokesman indicated that an EMS review was under way and could be expected in the coming months. In August of 2024, after another incident, they repeated the same message. Now almost a year later, and another tragedy, still no report.

So I ask the minister: Where is the report?

MLA Moroz: Again, I want to thank the member for the important question.

We're very concerned about this issue, and as I just identified for the member opposite, it is, of course, at least partially federally organized. It's under the jurisdiction of the CRTC. We're working diligently with the federal government and with communities and with health-care providers to improve the system as quickly as possible.

Violence and Assault Against Manitoba Nurses Workplace Safety and Addiction Treatment Services

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I've spoken with nurses with the MNU who have been verbally threatened, physically assaulted and left in tears after

their shifts, not because they don't care, but because they care so deeply in a system that isn't caring for them.

They're working longer hours, facing more violence and dealing with complex mental health and addictions issues without the tools or staffing to manage safely. This is not sustainable.

So without pointing fingers and placing blame, what concrete steps is this government taking to address the serious decline in morale and workplace safety among Manitoba's nurses?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, it was really great to be out on the Leg. steps talking with nurses, some of which I've met with personally previously, some of which are looking forward to—we're looking forward to meeting with them in the coming days and weeks.

I want to reassure that member and all nurses that we take the safety and security of their workplaces very, very seriously. Now, part of addressing safety in workplaces is having more people on the front lines. We've got a net-new over 600 nurses on the front lines. We have over 100 institutional safety officers at sites across the province. At one site alone, the introduction of ISOs has resulted in a 40 per cent reduction in violent incidents.

We know there's much more work to do; we are committed to doing that work and ensuring that, no matter where you work as a nurse in this province, you are safe and secure and that patients are safe and secure, as well.

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

MLA Lamoureux: Honourable Speaker, people experiencing addictions are falling through the cracks because they have nowhere else to go but emergency rooms. Nurses, already stretched thin, are being left to respond to medical needs, mental health crises and addiction-related trauma without the training, resources or security to do so safely. This is hurting both patients and staff.

* (14:20)

This question came directly from nurses outside here today: When will this government invest in accessible, community-based addictions services so nurses aren't left as the default safety net for a broken system?

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): I want to thank that member for that question. It gives me an opportunity just to outline some of the things that our government is doing around Your Way Home. So we're investing to ensure that folks that are not housed or getting the supports that they need—the wrap-around supports that are giving them mental health supports, addiction supports.

We also invested in digital RAAM services so that some folks can get supports no matter where they're at. We invested in the first Indigenous-led RAAM clinic, which has reduced the wait time for folks to get into treatment. Under the previous government, seven out of 10 people were being turned away at those RAAM clinics.

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

MLA Lamoureux: Honourable Speaker, we were told today at the MNU rally that members of the government were specifically not invited to speak because last year when they spoke, they made promises that they could not keep. We cannot keep asking nurses to risk their well-being or people in crisis to wait for care that doesn't come.

Will the Premier acknowledge the growing crisis at the intersection of addictions, nursing and public safety, and will he commit to immediate co-ordinated investment to restore safety and trust in our health-care system?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Yes, and this has been the primary focus of our government since taking office. The fact that we have a registered psychiatric nurse with experience on the front lines working with somebody with lived experience, working with many people across our entire team who have the expertise necessary to co-ordinate a multi-year comprehensive plan to tackle the root causes and the community manifestations of these problems is exactly the approach that we're taking.

I appreciate the fact that the member is bringing forward these issues, because they were ignored under the previous government. They avert their eyes the same way that they did the people that they drove by on Main Street every year that they were in government. This is going to take years to fix. This is not merely the fault of one previous government. This is the fault of hundreds of—150 years of previous governments. We are tackling intergenerational problems with an intersectional approach.

What does that mean in plain language? We're getting people out of tents and into homes. We're getting people out of emergency rooms into recovery centres, and we're getting—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Winnipeg Police Service Annual Report Crime Statistics for Manitoba

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): Honourable Speaker, under the previous feckless government, funding to law enforcement was frozen year after year after year after year after year after year—I'm glad because I'm running out of fingers—that ended at seven years, and crime was still skyrocketing across Manitoba as they made those cuts.

You know, our government took a different approach. We're investing in record amounts in law enforcement in Budget 2024 and then breaking that record in Budget 2025 with 30 per cent more funding than any budgets under the PC government.

Can the Minister of Justice please tell this House about some of the early returns on that investment?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Thank you to the member for the question.

Manitobans know that we've invested record amounts in law enforcement here in Winnipeg because, under the previous government, we saw crime rates skyrocketing year after year. The Winnipeg Police Service now has released their 2024 crime stats, and we're starting to see that the needle is moving in the right direction.

Overall crime decreased for the second year in a row. Violent crime saw its first meaningful decline in a decade. Violent youth crime is down. The crime severity index is also down, Honourable Speaker. We're seeing more police hit the streets; we're seeing more crimes being solved for the second year in a row. We've accomplished a lot, but we know that there's a lot more to do.

I want to thank the Winnipeg Police Service for their work, for their dedication to the public, and to—and I commit to them to working with them every single day to make our city and our province a safer place.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

US Tariffs on Film Industry Job Loss Concerns

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): Honourable Speaker, this side of the House supports the film industry here in our province. Manitobans' half-a-billion-dollar film industry is under threat, faced by potential 100 per cent tariffs.

Will the minister tell Manitobans how many jobs are at risk?

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I thank the member for the question. This is a very important topic that's top of mind for many of us.

Manitobans are proud of our world-class film and production sector. Over the past year, Manitoba saw an all-time high of \$440 million in film production in 2024. We've helped draw millions of dollars into our local economy from international investors.

That's why it's incredibly concerning that the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) thanked Donald Trump for the tariffs. The member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) is willing to put our provincial economy at risk for his own gain, and that's something that we can't stand for on this side of the House.

Mr. Perchotte: Honourable Speaker, as I said, the PC caucus supports the film industry in our province. However, the current NDP government has cut funding for direct flights between Los Angeles and Winnipeg, risking this half-a-billion-dollar industry.

How many jobs are the NDP okay with putting at risk in regards to their decisions?

MLA Kennedy: Honourable Speaker, there was no cuts. Let's be clear: There is no renewal; there's no cuts.

The film industry is incredibly important to our local economy, our provincial economy, and we recognize that. I certainly do as minister.

We, with regards to myself, have reached out to the film industry to ensure our government is working collaboratively with our partners. That is absolutely my job as minister responsible.

We have a very resilient local production industry, but we know that uncertainty happens. So we'll be monitoring the system closely, and we're going to continue to work with folks in the film industry to make sure that we protect and grow this vital part of our economy together.

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

Mr. Perchotte: Honourable Speaker, nearly half-a-billion-dollar industry put at risk. Yes, there has been cuts.

WestJet alone had their funding cut for direct flights between Los Angeles and Winnipeg, totally—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Perchotte: —cut under this government.

When—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Perchotte: —will they stand up and protect this industry?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I want to take a moment to say that our minister's doing a great job. Those answers were great, much better than any PC Sports, Culture, Heritage, Tourism minister, for the record.

And I only rise to provide an update for the House to say that I raised this exact issue with the Prime Minister today, alongside the premiers of British Columbia and New Brunswick.

When we see a threat from Donald Trump, we cannot thank him even if it's in a lighthearted way on a local podcast. We need to stand firm and protect jobs in our province.

When it comes to the relationship with the United States, they're our neighbour; it's going to be an important relationship.

We're working with the Prime Minister, working with the other provinces and territories. We have to protect industries across the board but—including those that generate intellectual property: the film industry, software, technology, manufacturing, ag industries that hold intellectual property, will be the key for us to continue building wealth for generations to come.

We have to stand together as Canadians to celebrate these job creators.

Geothermal Energy—Home Conversion Program Status of Government Funding Commitment

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Honourable Speaker, it's a sad state of affairs when the Premier's signature environmental policy was to make it cheaper to pollute with the gas tax holiday.

But this Premier also promised his government would fully cover the cost of 500 homes to convert to geothermal energy. He highlighted it in the Throne Speech; then, nothing. No money in Budget 2024; no homes converted in 2024. No money in Budget 2025, and there will be no homes converted in 2025.

Halfway through the 'manidate', all mentions of this promise have died off. It's the environmental policy that will not be named.

Why has this Premier broken his promise on geothermal homes?

Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Manitoba has been an energy powerhouse for generations, thanks to NDP governments time and time again.

We're so proud to be standing up more wind energy, and we're going to be standing up that geothermal program where we're going to reach 5,000 new geothermal heat pumps.

We're doing that work with Efficiency Manitoba. We're doing that work with Manitoba Hydro. We're going to get it done.

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

* (14:30)

Mr. Wasyliv: This Premier committed to fully funding these 5,000 homes over four years. It cost Manitoba \$31.5 million per year for each of the four years. That would be 1,250 homes a year. They even promised 1,000 jobs.

Now, two budgets later, no money set aside, no houses converted, no new jobs, and if the Province were to catch up in Budget 2026, they'd have to spend \$100 million and commit to 3,750 homes in one year. That will not happen.

Will the Premier now admit he has no intention of keeping that promise?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I want to take this opportunity to thank our Minister of Environment and Climate Change (MLA Moyes) for the great job he's doing, particularly when it comes to Efficiency Manitoba.

Manitoba Hydro is certainly our Crown jewel, but Efficiency Manitoba will be the vehicle that drives us towards a low-carbon future. We'll use that for the geothermal installs that are be-asking about, but also to free up 200 megawatts of power through demand-side management.

Also being freed up today: the last PC question. They always sit down. They can't sustain a simple QP. They got to get out of the way because they ran out of topics. It seems like their new leader is actually the second coming of the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko).

But when it comes to the projects that unite Manitobans rather than dividing us, we know the greatest nation-building project of all is the Winnipeg Jets bringing the cup back to Canada.

Go, Jets, go. Go, Jets, go. Go, Jets, go—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

And the time for question period has also expired.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

PETITIONS

Death of Jordyn Reimer—Judicial Review Request

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

On May 1, 2022, Jordyn Reimer, 24 years of age, was killed by an impaired driver while she was acting as a designated driver.

(2) There are two people legally culpable for her death: the impaired driver and the accomplice. The driver was charged, but the second criminal, the accomplice, has not been held accountable.

(3) A concerned citizen took the keys from the impaired driver earlier in the evening to ensure he could not drive impaired. The accomplice retrieved the keys from the citizen under false pretenses and knowingly provided the impaired driver with access to the vehicle.

(4) The Winnipeg Police Service, WPS, investigation provided adequate evidence to meet the charging standards and recommended charges to be laid against the accomplice. The Crown prosecutors declined to prosecute the accomplice.

(5) The family of Jordyn Reimer has called for the prosecution of the accomplice and that the decision to not prosecute be reviewed independently.

(6) As recently as 2022, there is precedent to refer criminal files of decisions to not proceed with prosecution to extra-provincial departments of justice for

review. This was done with the Peter Nygård file, which ultimately led to a reversal in the decision to not prosecute, and charges were laid.

(7) An out-of-province review is supported by MADD Canada, MADD Manitoba and by Manitobans.

(8) The family has exhausted every avenue within the existing system, and, in the absence of a prescribed process when a disagreement exists on charging standards, the only option is to request an independent out-of-province review.

(9) In December of 2024, the WPS reported an alarming number of impaired drivers in the holiday Check Stop program. Extending criminal culpability beyond the driver to those who engage in overt actions to facilitate impaired driving will save lives.

(10) Manitobans deserve to have confidence in the provincial government and justice system to make decisions that achieve true justice for victims and their families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to order an out-of-province review to—of the prosecutor's decision to not prosecute the accomplice in the death of Jordyn Reimer.

Honourable Speaker, this petition was signed by Cheryl Chipman, Tracy Benard, Dale Candy and many, many other fine Manitobans.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition:

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) On May 1, 2022, Jordyn Reimer, 24 years of age, was killed by an impaired driver while she was acting as a designated driver.

(2) There are two people legally culpable for her death: the impaired driver and the accomplice. The driver was charged, but the second criminal, the accomplice, has not been held accountable.

(3) A concerned citizen took the keys from the impaired driver earlier in the evening to ensure he could not drive impaired. The accomplice retrieved the keys from the citizen under false pretenses and knowingly provided the impaired driver with access to the vehicle.

(4) The Winnipeg Police Service investigation provided adequate evidence to meet the charging standard and recommended charges to be laid against

the accomplice. The Crown prosecutor declined to prosecute the accomplice.

(5) The family of Jordyn Reimer has called for the prosecution of the accomplice and that the decision to not prosecute be reviewed independently.

(6) As recently as 2022, there is precedent to refer criminal files of decisions to not proceed with the prosecution to extra-provincial departments of justice for review. This was done with the Peter Nygård file, which ultimately led to a reversal in the decision to not prosecute, and charges were laid.

(7) An out-of-province review is supported by MADD Canada, MADD Manitobans and by Manitobans.

(8) The family has exhausted every avenue within the existing system, and, in the absence of a prescribed process when a disagreement exists on charging standards, the only option is to request an independent out-of-province review.

(9) In December of 2024, the WPS reported an alarming number of impaired drivers in the holiday Check Stop program. Extending criminal culpability beyond the driver to those who engage in overt actions to facilitate impaired driving will save lives.

(10) Manitobans deserve to have confidence in the provincial government and justice systems to make decisions that achieve true justice for victims and their families.

* (14:40)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to order an out-of-province review of the prosecutor's decision to not prosecute the accomplice in the death of Jordyn Reimer.

This is signed by Jennifer Martin, Jason Martin, Shane Martin and many, many more Manitobans.

Thank you.

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) On May 1, 2022, Jordyn Reimer, 24 years of age, was killed by an impaired driver while she was acting as a designated driver.

(2) There are two people legally culpable for her death: the impaired driver and the accomplice. The driver was charged, but the second criminal, the accomplice, has not been held accountable.

(3) A concerned citizen took the keys from the impaired driver earlier in the evening to ensure he could not drive impaired. The accomplice retrieved the keys from this citizen under false pretenses and knowingly provided the impaired driver with access to the vehicle.

(4) The Winnipeg Police Service's investigation provided adequate evidence to meet the charging standard and recommended charges be laid against the accomplice. The Crown prosecutors declined to prosecute the accomplice.

(5) The family of Jordyn Reimer has called for the prosecution of the accomplice and that the decision to not prosecute be reviewed independently.

(6) As recently as 2022, there is a precedent to refer criminal files of decisions to not proceed with prosecution to extra-provincial departments of justice for review. This was done with the Peter Nygård file, which ultimately led to a reversal in the decision to not prosecute, and charges were laid.

(7) An out-of-province review is supported by MADD Canada, MADD Manitoba and by Manitobans.

(8) The family has exhausted every avenue within the existing system, and, in the absence of the prescribed process when a disagreement exists on charging standards, the only option is to request an independent out-of-province review.

(9) In December of 2024, the WPS reported an alarming number of impaired drivers in the holiday Check Stop program. Extending criminal culpability beyond the driver to those who engage in overt actions to facilitate impaired driving will save lives.

(10) Manitobans deserve to have confidence in the provincial government and justice system to make decisions that achieve true justice for victims and their families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to re-order an out-of-province review of the prosecutor's decision to not prosecute the accomplice in the death of Jordyn Reimer.

This petition has been signed by Cassandra Roberts, Jesse Philip Chemerika and Eric Roberts and many, many, many more Manitobans.

Thank you.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) On May 1, 2022, Jordyn Reimer, 24 years of age, was killed by an impaired driver while she was acting as a designated driver.

(2) There are two people legally culpable for her death: the impaired driver and the accomplice. The driver was charged, but the second criminal, the accomplice, has not been held accountable.

(3) A concerned citizen took the keys from the impaired driver earlier in the evening to ensure he could not drive the impaired. The accomplice retrieved the keys from the citizen under false pretenses and knowingly provided the impaired driver with access to the vehicle.

(4) The Winnipeg Police Service's, WPS, investigation provided adequate evidence to meet the charging standard and recommended charges be laid against the accomplice. The Crown prosecutors declined to prosecute the accomplice.

(5) The family of Jordyn Reimer has called for the prosecution of the accomplice and that the decision to not prosecute be reviewed independently.

(6) As recently as 2022, there is a precedent to refer criminal files of decisions to not proceed with prosecution to an extra-provincial departments of justice for review. This was done with the Peter Nygård file, which ultimately led to a reversal in decision to not prosecute, and charges were laid.

(7) An out-of-province review is supported by MADD Canada, MADD Manitoba and by Manitobans.

(8) The family has exhausted every avenue within the existing system. In the absence of a prescribed process when a disagreement exists on charging standards, the only option is to request an independent out-of-province review.

(9) In December of 2024, the WPS reported an alarming number of impaired drivers in the holiday Check Stop program. Extending criminal culpability beyond the driver to those who engage in overt actions to facilitate impaired driving will save lives.

(10) Manitobans deserve to have confidence in the provincial government and justice systems to make decisions that achieve true justice for victims and their families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to order an out-of-province review of the prosecutor's decision not to prosecute the accomplice in the death of Jordyn Reimer.

This petition has been signed by Nicole Tetlock, Sara Walker, Matthew Morehouse and many other Manitobans.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) On May 1, 2022, Jordyn Reimer, 24 years of age, was killed by an impaired driver while she was acting as a designated driver.

(2) There are two people legally culpable of her death: the impaired driver and the accomplice. The driver was charged, but the second criminal, the accomplice, has not been held accountable.

(3) A concerned citizen took the keys from the impaired driver earlier in the evening to ensure he could not drive impaired. The accomplice retrieved the keys from the citizen under false pretenses and knowingly provided the impaired driver with access to the vehicle.

(4) The Winnipeg Police Service's investigation provided adequate evidence to meet the charging standard and recommended charges be laid against the accomplice. The Crown prosecutors declined to prosecute the accomplice.

(5) The family of Jordyn Reimer has called for the prosecution of the accomplice and the decision to not prosecute be reviewed independently.

(6) As recently as 2022, there is a precedent to refer criminal cases—criminal files of decisions to not proceed with prosecution to extra-provincial departments of justice for review. This was done with the Peter Nygård file, which ultimately led to a reversal in the decision to not prosecute, and charges were laid.

(7) An out-of-province review is supported by MADD Canada, MADD Manitoba and by Manitobans.

(8) The family has exhausted every avenue within the existing system, and, in the absence of a prescribed process when a disagreement exists on charging standards, the only option is to request an independent out-of-province review.

* (14:50)

(9) In December 2024, the WPS reported an alarming number of impaired drivers in the holiday Check Stop program. Extending criminal culpability beyond the driver to those who engage in overt actions to facilitate impaired driving will save lives.

(10) Manitobans deserve to have confidence in the provincial government and justice systems to make decisions that achieve true justice for victims and their families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to order an out-of-province review of the prosecutor's decision to not prosecute the accomplice in the death of Jordyn Reimer.

This is signed by Kristine Galapon, Arlene Lacson, Maenard Lacson and many other Manitobans.

The Speaker: No further petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Honourable Speaker, can you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply for the consideration of departmental Estimates.

The Speaker: As announced, we will now dissolve the House into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair—honourable Deputy Speaker.

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 resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Can the minister tell us how many nurses have left private agencies and are now employed in the public system in the last fiscal year, and where they were hired and into what kinds of positions?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): While we look for clarity on those questions, I do want to talk about something I shared yesterday.

So the member—the critic asked questions about the provincial float travel nurse—float pool. And I did share yesterday that we have 300—approximately 300 nurses in that float pool, that these are nurses for the most part who have left the private sector and have returned to the public health-care sector by way of the float pool. And the increase is about 117 per cent, which is—it's massive; it really is.

So under our government, we've seen a 117 per cent increase of nurses entering the float pool and providing care across our province in different sites.

* (15:10)

The total hours were over 127,000 total hours worked. I believe the total shifts were 10,200 and an odd number around there—10,200 shifts that had been covered as a result. Those are significant stats, but they're not enough. We recognize that we want more nurses. We want more nurses to join the float pool and to work the front lines of our health-care system in the public sector.

That's part of the reason why our government, working with Manitoba Nurses Union, has made the decision to not cap the number of nurses who join the float pool. We want to make sure that all nurses who want to join that way of practising are able to do so, and we also have invested a significant amount of resource into really strengthening the staffing side of the float pool so that we can process applications more quickly and engage nurses more consistently.

Now we know that there's much more work to do on this front. The float pool—there's still a lot of opportunity with the float pool to improve the process so that nurses really have a seamless experience when they bring their applications forward and then join the public sector again and are working on the front lines, and that work is being done.

I've requested for Shared Health and the folks who are managing the float pool to provide me with their recommendations and a request to further enhance the float pool and I look forward to seeing that and supporting that.

And I want to be really clear: when nurses have brought forward ideas or concerns about the float pool, when MNU has done so, we've reacted and responded very quickly. This is a priority for us, making sure we're strengthening the public system and sub-public health sector.

I do think it's important that, in an era, in a time which I don't think any of us could have imagined we'd be in right now, where we see President Donald Trump attacking our nation's sovereignty, imposing these tariffs that are really, really detrimental to our economy as Canadians, certainly here in Manitoba, and directly impact the health-care system, it is so important that we are all united in championing universal health care, championing a public—a strong public health-care system, and not doing what we've seen some folks choose to do.

The Leader of the Opposition, I mentioned yesterday, thanked Donald Trump for tariffs. Mind-blowing. Pretty jaw-dropping approach to take. And, you know, as the Health Minister, I take really seriously our responsibility to enhance public health care, to respect and honour the Canada Health Act and to do what we can to protect Manitoba jobs, including in the health-care sector.

So we're going to keep doing that, and I will continue and our government will continue to focus on bringing Manitobans and Canadians together under this united message of being proud to be Canadian, being proud to be Manitoban, celebrating that while we have an imperfect universal health-care system, we have a system that puts people first.

And I've had the opportunity in my life, thankfully, to travel and, you know, to be in other places where they don't have universal health care, including in the United States, and seeing that one diagnosis can bankrupt an entire family. And we believe that everyone deserves to access health care and that the right to access health care shouldn't be based on the size of your bank account.

So we'll continue to protect those values and do work to strengthen public health care, including through the float pool.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: I assume we're still waiting for an answer to the question, so I'll just proceed with my next question, and I'll add some clarity to the minister's comments there.

The Leader of the Opposition never thanked Donald Trump for tariffs. That's nonsense being spewed by the NDP, and it's one of those things that they think if they repeat it enough times it will become the truth. But the reason it's not catching on is because it's patently ridiculous.

But the minister talks about tariffs, so I'd like to ask what steps the minister or the department have taken to protect Manitoba's health-care system from the impact of tariffs. For example, what impact will tariffs have on the cost of medications and health-care supplies, and what contingency plans are in place to mitigate the impact on Manitoba's health-care system?

MLA Asagwara: I'm going to just read a direct quote from the Leader of the Opposition, the MLA for Fort Whyte: Trump wants a win, and I think this—and I think one of his clear wins, and a lot of Canadians' wins, was a change in federal government. He wanted JT gone, and thank God he's gone. So much of an influence—so how much of an influence did the 25 per cent tariff threat have on that? I would say a lot, and I would say thank you. I would say thank you, he's gone now. End quote.

Those are the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition on Donald Trump and the tariffs. Those aren't my words. Those are the words I've directly quoted from the MLA for Fort Whyte.

I'd like to talk a bit about what the critic has raised, and that is the very real threat that our economy does face as a result of Donald Trump's attack on our economy by way of these tariffs. That's a very real threat that we're facing, and our government has brought forward a strong '25-26 budget that is prepared to respond.

I do—I also want to highlight the fact that there's another narrative that the Leader of the Opposition has brought forward that the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook), the critic, seems to also support. This is this language of privatizing health care.

You know, I heard—and I've heard this many times—MNU, Manitoba Nurses Union nurses say very clearly that they want a strong public health-care system, which is why it's so concerning that the Leader of the Opposition, leader of the PCs, wants to privatize health care.

The critic started her questions today asking about nurses returning to the public sector from the private sector, and yet their caucus seems to want to privatize health care. So, you know, I think Manitobans—I hope—are paying close attention to this.

Our government has been very clear: we believe in a strong public health-care system, so much so that when we came into office, the previous government—just for folks who may not be aware—had been fined \$350,000 by the federal government for violating the Canada Health Act.

Our government made it a priority to make very clear, and my first call with the former federal Health Minister, Mark Holland, we talked about this fine, and I reassured him that our government was committed to respecting the Canada Health Act and working in partnership with all levels of government who are willing to strengthen public health care in Manitoba for Manitobans.

And our government worked very hard, and we actually saw that \$350,000 fine that was levied against the former PC administration returned to Manitobans, returned to our province so that we could reinvest those dollars in strengthening health care.

We take our responsibility to strengthen and protect public health care very seriously. Recognizing that there are many different aspects of health care and partnerships, be it with physician clinics and other partners, some private clinics as an example, where we do partner to strengthen public health care.

And so our government focuses on what's the best for patients; what's the best for Manitobans; how do we work with all levels of government, partners, stakeholders across our province, across departments, in order to make sure that we're making the right investments for Manitobans in the right ways at the right times. And that's an approach we're going to continue to take.

To answer the member's prior question, out of the 300—approximately 300 nurses who have joined the float pool, the 117 per cent increase to the float pool numbers under our government—68 per cent, so about just over 200 of those nurses—have returned from the private sector to the public sector in this float pool, which is a substantial percentage. We're really happy to see that, but again, we've been very intentional about not capping the number of nurses who can join. We are going to, as a government, we're going to continue to add the resources and capacity necessary

to ensure that any and all nurses who want to join the float pool are able to do so.

And because this is something that is evolving and is a novel idea here in Manitoba, we recognize that there may be some bumps along the way that we have to work out. But we're committed as a government to making sure that we address any concerns should they arise, and keep moving the float pool in the right direction.

And I want to thank all the nurses who have signed up, put their names forward and are part of the float pool team.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: You know, it's really a shame that the political discourse in our country, and more specifically in our province, has just degenerated into this contest over who loves Canada more, who hates Trump more. But that seems to be the level that the minister wants to operate at, so I'll play.

* (15:20)

Why did their government launch a Trump-style attack website using Trump-style tactics at taxpayer expense? Why does the minister think that that's an acceptable use of taxpayer dollars?

The Chairperson: For all members, as we are in Estimates, so please ask the questions relevant to the Estimates and not out of scope of the Estimates.

So I would request the member to please ask another question.

Mrs. Cook: Fair enough. We'll save that one for QP.

I'll instead turn my line of questioning—oh—

The Chairperson: Member for Red River North.

Point of Order

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North): Point of order, honourable Chair, just on clarity to the Chair's response to my colleague's question.

In listening to the answers provided by the minister, there was a number of answers provided with the reference of the new Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) being a Trump fan and also quotes that were not tabled but were repeated here at table.

So I question the Chair's comments to my colleague regarding her asking the question with respect to that, after it's already been talked about by the minister.

The Chairperson: Thank you for the comments, member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton).

I notice the minister did talk about Leader of Opposition, but the minister did bring their remarks back to the Estimates so this is not a point of order.

Thank you.

And also, I would request all members to stay relevant to the Estimates.

* * *

Mrs. Cook: Again, I would be encouraged by your intervention, honourable Chair, and hope that that will result in actually getting some answers to the questions that we're asking.

I did ask a question about steps that the minister or the department have taken to protect Manitoba's health-care system from tariffs, from the potential impact on things like the cost of medications and on health-care supplies and what contingency plans have been put in place to mitigate the impact on both the health-care system and on the impact to taxpayers.

So I'll return again to that question and hope that the minister has an answer.

MLA Asagwara: I appreciate the question from the member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook). It is a really important question. You know, we're in an unprecedented time right now, and jurisdictions have had to mobilize very quickly and find new ways of approaching things in order to ensure that we are prioritizing our Canadian economy, local economy.

And I think folks will remember that very recently—well, I guess not so recently anymore—a few months ago, our government made an announcement about buying local: buying local, supporting local and buying Canadian.

And that's a sentiment that, I have to say, it doesn't matter where I go, people are united in that front. You go to the grocery store, you go to the pharmacy, people are looking closely at labels, shelves; and they're doing what they can within their capacity to support Canadian.

And that's really wonderful. I see people still maintaining that elbows-up mentality, and I think we'll continue to see that from Manitobans and from Canadians; it's really important. And so, as a government, we, like jurisdictions across the country, have been working very, very hard to take steps to protect our health-care system, to equip our health-care system to be a part of our economy in a responsible way.

I know that other ministers are working very hard and doing the same—Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn), I know, is working very, very hard. We know that food and agriculture has a direct connection to health and health outcomes of our communities, no matter where you live.

And it's been really wonderful to see my colleagues, ministerial colleagues working so hard and fighting for Manitobans and for Canadians, and, you know, it's really a unified front not only here, but across the country.

I've had really good conversations with other health ministers in other jurisdictions. You know, there's an openness, generally, in terms of how do we work together to make health care in our respective provinces or territories better for the people that we represent. But certainly now, folks are really reaching out and making sure that we are, as much as we can, be aligned, and to learn from one another in terms of the strategies and approaches that we're taking.

Our government recognized in the '25-26 budget, I mentioned before, that we would have to be prepared to respond to any tariff threats, the imposition of these harmful tariffs. And we've been working very hard across departments—certainly, Health has a big role in this—to actively do the work of securing new sources of supplies for health care.

So new sourcing strategies, developing new sourcing strategies is a big part of this work. Finding new procurement opportunities is a big part of this work, and fundamentally prioritizing Canadian wherever we can, and outside of Canada, not the US, in order to meet Manitobans' needs, is an important part of that.

All of that being said, I want to be very, very clear that our top priority is the health care and well-being of Manitobans. We are always going to put the health and well-being and the outcomes of Manitobans first and foremost. And we've been able to do this work of sourcing new supply chains, companies, whatever it is that we need to adjust in terms of health care, while keeping the outcomes, the health outcomes of Manitobans at the heart of that work.

*(15:30)

We're also actively working with the pCPA to identify non-US pharmaceutical supplies, and, you know, to engage in listing them in our new agreements. So the pCPA is a really important fundamental organization in our country. I actually had the opportunity to meet and listen to the experts at the pCPA, the folks who were on that board, and hear what they

have to say and share a little bit about what we're doing in Manitoba. So I want to thank the pCPA for the work they're doing.

And, ultimately, it's a united front, really, across the provinces and territories to address this threat in the most responsible ways. And here in Manitoba, we're doing the necessary work, recognizing that it's not a short-term effort. This is going to be a long-term effort that we're committed to doing, with Manitobans being put first.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: I think a lot of that was really nice words, but it didn't actually answer the question substantively.

I think what Manitobans want to be assured of is that the government has done an analysis of what impact tariffs could have on our drug supply, for example, or on medical supplies that we need in our hospitals and personal-care homes. They want to be assured that we're not going to be dealing with shortages or an inability to import what we can't get here at home.

And I think Manitobans also want to know what the cost impact of that is going to be if it does come to pass.

So I guess I'll just rephrase my question: Has the department done any analysis of these factors of the impact that tariffs could have on the drug supply, on the supply of medical devices and other supplies that are needed in our health-care system, and what is that impact going to be?

MLA Asagwara: While the department pulls up some of that information for me, I want to just add a little bit of my thoughts to this—bit more detail.

The critic is asking really important questions. You know, this is an issue—again, it's a generational challenge that we're facing right now. We've not seen a kind of—a breakdown in nation-to-nation relations like we're seeing now because a sitting US President has attacked our sovereignty in this way and has taken this sort of position and approach. But here we are.

And in Manitoba, we recognize that we must be prepared to respond and, again, protect Manitoba jobs, protect our health-care system. I'm sure the member, the critic, can appreciate the complexity of this work and the amount of work and effort that goes into an analysis of that nature.

I want to thank the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) for his department's efforts on this front. And, you

know, our departments and our teams work very closely together, making sure that the way we do health care in Manitoba is certainly much more fiscally responsible than the previous administration's approach was, and we've been able to see the benefits of that partnership and that collaboration across government departments.

You know, we have folks in our own department who have stood up new infrastructure in the last couple of years to really strengthen the way that we, as a government, approach finances in health, and to also support other regions, other regional health authorities, to have strength in terms of their fiscal approach.

And I just want to—I want to really highlight that it takes a tremendous amount of work, expertise and effort to do that kind of outreach, and that kind of work is really also rooted in relationships.

And folks in our department, on the finance side in Health, are doing an outstanding job, not only building that capacity and developing new processes that are helping our government function better, but to also go out beyond government, build those relationships with regional health authorities and our partners and offer support to those folks so that they can have more fiscal capacity and sustainability and be more responsible and accountable.

And to me, that—it's really—it's been something that's been certainly a challenge. It's been, again, a lot of effort, but our team has really risen to that challenge and has supported other regions in being able to do the same. And so this work that we've undertaken in terms of, you know, responding to the tariffs and what it means for health care is not just solely the government of Manitoba, right?

The reality of it is that we have to reach out to regional health authorities and our partners and also ensure that folks are aligned with this buy Canadian approach, with this new reality we're in where we will always put Manitoba patients first and put their health outcomes first and foremost, but also look at ways that we can find new supply streams, procurement methods, relationships that will allow for us to support our local economy, build new relationships and partnerships with other suppliers from other countries—not the United States—while also ensuring that our health-care system remains innovative, responsive and is meeting the needs of Manitobans and Canadians.

So there's a lot of work that's happening on that front, and making sure that we are communicating to every regional health authority that this work is

happening, folks are participating and being consistent; that's part of it. Certainly, understanding, like, where does the opportunity reside, right. Are we looking at the pharmaceutical space? Are we looking at the technology space? Is it digital? Is it building? Is it materials, you know, health?

So much of it is, you know, what people think of automatically when they think of health. They think of maybe BP cuffs and code carts and DPIN machines and things like that, but it's also structures; it's like literal, physical structures that are being built and developed. So there's a lot to consider, and all of that work has been happening furiously again across departments and with partners at the table as well.

So I hope that provides a bit more clarity for the critic, and I look forward to providing a bit more information when I have it available.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: I appreciate that answer because I think it is a really important question, and I think it's one that's top of mind for a lot of Manitobans.

I want to shift my questions to a topic that the minister will know is important to me, breast cancer screening. And the minister promised to lower the breast cancer screening age for Manitobans to age 45 by the end of 2025.

But I noticed in the Supplement to the Estimates, on page 37, where this topic is discussed, that there is no mention of that. So I just wonder if it is still the minister's intention to lower the breast cancer screening age to 45 by the end of this year.

* (15:40)

MLA Asagwara: I just want to offer a bit more information because I do think it's important. The critic asked—was asking questions about the tariff impacts and the work that's being done, and I'd like to provide a bit more clarity on that, just because I do think it's important.

So I mentioned the pCPA previously, and so just for everyone's awareness, the pCPA and Health Canada are responsible for drug importation and pricing analysis. Think folks, maybe generally, are aware of that. But that's the work that they do, so those are their responsibilities.

And I want to reassure the critic and other folks that provinces and territories, with support from Canada, are actively engaged in assessing the impacts developing—and developing mitigation strategies. So

that work is intensive; the work is happening and it's happening at the appropriate levels.

As I mentioned earlier, you know, the complexities of the reality that we're facing right now are huge. Doesn't mean they're not doable, right. This is work that is important to be done and done the right way and, certainly, it's work that is achievable when you're working truly in partnership and collaboration and across jurisdictions and in all levels of government, which is what we're doing and is—that's what's happening right now, which is a wonderful, united effort.

And, you know, in Health, we want to make sure that we're doing our part. This is a Health concern; it's a Health issue and Health challenge in a very real way, but it certainly affects every sector, every system in all of our provinces and territories.

I recently was able to engage in a conversation with the Canadian Medical Association, and it was wonderful to participate in that conversation with Dr. Reimer; the health minister in Ontario was there; Mr. Furey was there from out east, which was great. And it was moderated by André Picard. It was a really good conversation.

It was wonderful to hear the perspective of folks, what they're doing in their respective jurisdictions and to also understand what the CMA's position is in this, and I think a lot of folks recognize that there's a unique opportunity that we have right now to find innovative ways to not only address this immediate threat and concern but to strengthen our own local economies and help infrastructure for generations to come.

And so as much as this is a real challenge and threat, we are also choosing to see this as an opportunity that we cannot waste. We've got to maximize this and make sure we do what we can to benefit Manitobans.

Budget '25 is, as the critic I'm sure is aware, positioned us to respond, as I've stated before. We essentially provided, you know, two budgets, making sure that there's a tariff-ready budget and a situation if we don't face that reality. So our government understands the seriousness of the situation and made sure we were prepared to respond. If there are more questions on that from the critic, I certainly encourage her to have her colleague pose those questions in Finance Estimates, where some of those questions would be better answered.

The last thing that I'll note is that all provinces and territories have agreed to undertake this work through the pCPA, in regards to medications, et cetera, that the

member asked about, to ensure consistency and a common beneficial approach. All jurisdictions honouring and respecting the role of the pCPA is very, very important. We've seen, in our province, some challenges that can arise if that's not the case; it is really good to see jurisdictions are working through the pCPA in this process, and we're hoping for a unified and streamlined and consistent outcome as a result of that.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you. I just want to reiterate my follow—well, not a follow-up question, my next question.

While I appreciate the additional comments from the minister, the question was about breast cancer screening and whether the minister still intends to lower the breast cancer screening age for Manitobans to age 45 by the end of 2025, as previously promised.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the critic for that question. Breast health and women's health and those who need access to this health care is a huge priority for our government—huge priority for our government.

You know, I had a conversation—I participated in a town hall just last night in regards to re-establishing not only the Victoria emergency department, but the Mature Women's Centre. And we know that the previous Mature Women's Centre was able to support women and those who need that care with things like breast health. That was a really invaluable service in that way and unfortunately it was closed, it was cut by the previous administration.

We're bringing that back. I heard from a number of women last night who were very emotional—understandably emotional—talking about mature women's health care and how they're thrilled to see a dedicated effort to women's health. And they fundamentally understand the importance and the value of it, but the feeling of having women's health care—their health care—devalued and dismantled for years and the consequences of that.

There was a woman I spoke to last night who talked about the fact that this isn't just about her, that this is about her daughter growing up and being able to access the kind of health care that she deserves and to feel respected in accessing that health care.

And that really struck me. That really, really—it struck me. I thought about it for the rest of the night, actually, that, you know, decisions that we choose to make in regard to women's health care can have generational positive or negative impacts.

And our government is focused on making decisions and investments in health care for women that have positive generational impacts. And, certainly, doing the work around breast health and breast cancer screening is part of that conversation.

So I'm just going to—the critic referenced page 37 in the Estimates book, so I'm just going to read from there and talk a bit about what our government is doing in the '25-26 budget.

So our key initiatives are expanding breast cancer screening capacity with a focus on increasing access for the BIPOC, which is, for those who may not know, Black, Indigenous and people of colour populations who are currently being screened at a disproportionately lower rate.

When people talk about DEI—a lot of folks try to really sort of misrepresent what DEI is; this is a good example of what DEI is. It's recognizing that BIPOC communities, Black, Indigenous and people of colour—racialized folks—are disproportionately disadvantaged from being able to access essential life-saving health care for a whole host of reasons, and that if you are not intentional about reaching those communities, their health outcomes are damaged and worse as a result.

And our government recognizes that, for too long—for far too long—there are communities that have not been brought into these conversations and have not been prioritized in terms of health-care investments and health-care approaches.

Our government's doing things differently. We want to make sure that BIPOC communities, that folks who are marginalized, have access to this life-saving, essential health care. And so we're working with our partners like CancerCare in order to take the important steps that will close those inequities, close those health-care gaps and improve outcomes for all Manitobans.

When you improve health-care access and services for marginalized groups, you're actually doing the work that benefits everybody else. And we understand that.

And so, in our '25-26 budget, we're going to increase focus on breast cancer screening for BIPOC Manitobans, and that's going to support our objective to expand screening for women and those who need it aged 50 to 74.

Our department's going to fund the expansion of screening diagnostic infrastructure and staffing to address the inequities in access for women between the ages of 50 and 74, including mobile services,

mobile breast cancer screening, which was cut multiple times by the previous government. We're investing and strengthening that. And community outreach to the identified populations—going out, meeting people where they're at in communities—to make sure they have the information, awareness and access.

* (15:50)

Our target in '25-26 is to improve Manitoba's 59 per cent screening participation rate to at least 70 per cent by the end of the '25-26 fiscal year. I'm really happy to share, actually, that in '24-25, through our efforts and partnerships, we were able to increase our screening rate, not quite at the 70 per cent that we were hoping to get to but to 66 per cent. So the work we're doing with our partners is already improving the rate of women who need to get screened who previously were not getting screened here in our province.

We know there's much more work to do.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: I thank the minister for the answer, but it's disappointing to learn that it is no longer the minister's intention to lower the breast cancer screening age to 45 by the end of this year.

I think that Manitobans will be disappointed to learn that today, particularly because Manitoba is one of the last provinces to do so. Within the last year, year and a half, most other Canadian provinces have moved in that direction. And certainly, moving in that direction would benefit BIPOC Manitobans because there's an increased incidence of breast cancer in younger women in BIPOC populations. I know the minister's aware of this.

I think that the many advocates who have come to the Legislature to talk about this issue, who've been vocal with the media, were certainly led to believe that the Province was moving on this issue, and certainly believed the minister when they publicly told media just last fall, that the—by the end of 2025, the screening age would be 45. This is a disappointing development and positions Manitoba women behind those of other Canadian provinces.

So I wonder if the minister could just clarify: How many screening mammograms are currently happening in Manitoba?

MLA Asagwara: I'm not sure about anyone else—I was sitting very confused, listening to the critic's response to my answer. Nowhere did I say that the breast cancer screening age wouldn't be lowered. I was just sharing the other information that I thought was really

important and relevant, including that here in Manitoba, our government is working very hard to make sure that underserved, marginalized communities who have historically not been able to access breast cancer screening, and have worse health-care outcomes as a result, are able to do so.

We're working very hard to make sure that Black, Indigenous and people of colour, women between the ages of 50 and 74, hit that target screening rate of 70 per cent. That's our goal in our '25-26 budget. Historically, that number was under 60 per cent. I'm not thrilled that we're not at the target yet, but I am happy to share we're moving in the right direction. In our first budget, that working with our partners, from listening to women, we were able to bring that screening rate up from 59 per cent to 66 per cent. We're getting closer to that 70 per cent target, and quite frankly, I'd like to see us get beyond that.

I thought that was a really important thing to share and to put on the record, that the work that we're doing with our partners matters, and that we are listening to women, particularly those who have been marginalized and not a part of the conversation for far too long.

But I also want to make clear that these efforts are part of a multi-year approach. We know that this expansion of breast cancer screening needs to happen, and we need to increase access for all those who need it. And so it's a joint effort between our department and CancerCare as stated on page 37 of the Estimates book. It will help ensure that breast cancer screening is expanded to women between the ages of 40 and 49 by the end of '26-27, meaning that, in that journey, yes, the screening age for breast cancer will be lowered to 45 as we've previously stated and committed to by the end of this year.

So I want to reassure the member. Again, I'm not quite sure why she thought differently; I didn't state otherwise. It's implied in this Estimates book on page 37 that that is the case. We are lowering the breast cancer screening age to 45, and we are going to lower the breast cancer screening age to 40 as we stated previously and as we've committed to Manitobans.

We are also doing the work of making sure that those folks who have historically not been able to access screening in marginalized communities will be able to do so, and we've set some targets in regard to that as well.

So it's a pretty comprehensive approach. I wanted to use the time to share that with Manitobans and with the critic because I do think that it matters. It's one

thing to talk about setting these targets; it's another thing to elaborate on how you're going to get it done and who you're going to prioritize in this work being completed.

So I want to thank our partners at CancerCare. I want to thank, in particular, Dr. Turner, who's been wonderful to meet with and is a leader in this space. I want to thank the advocates, the women and Manitobans who have reached out to me directly and have shared their personal stories. We're listening and we're lowering the breast screening age for you this year, and we're going to keep moving forward and lowering it to 40, moving beyond that.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: I thank the minister for that clarity. In their first answer they talked around the issue and actually never specifically stated that, when that was the direct question that I put, and that's why I inferred the answer that I did because the minister's answer was so unclear.

And, in fact, the supplement to the Estimates does not imply anything at all. It only states explicitly that it'll be lowered to 40 to 49 by the end of '26-27. It doesn't say anything about this year or the age of 45. And '24-25 is the fiscal year we're in. One could be forgiven for thinking that it would make it into the supplement for the Estimates of this fiscal year.

So I'd like to ask: How much additional capacity for screening mammograms will be required in order to achieve this target?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the critic for that question. I appreciate her commentary on why she assumed that maybe something had changed. I would encourage her to not assume.

* (16:00)

Our government is committed to following through on our commitments to Manitobans, in particular, women in this province who for years watched as their health care was cut and dismantled, watched as women's health care was deprioritized, devalued for years under the previous PC government.

Women deserve better. It's fundamentally important that we invest in research, in technology, in innovation and in essential health care for women, and at the heart of all of that is listening to women. And our government listens to women when it comes to everything, but certainly their health-care needs. And it's

been really wonderful, the conversations I've had more recently with women in this province, different parts of this province, talking about their health-care needs, what they would like to see, what matters to them. Certainly, breast health is a big part of that conversation for many folks.

I think most of us have been affected, impacted in some way, shape or form by cancer, and, you know, I think about people in my own life who have been affected by breast cancer, and what their journeys and their stories mean to me in how we do this work.

You know, I'm grateful to be in an opportunity with our government where we can sit down and engage in these really important conversations with Manitoba women and those who need this care and take action on their behalf. We recognize that so many years women's health care was cut and mistreated is going to require a lot of years of repairing and work and investment to not only fix but really strengthen and have it be in a place where Manitoba can be a beacon for other jurisdictions in terms of how we treat women's health care. And we're taking steps in the right direction while recognizing there's much more work for us to do.

So I talked, in my previous response, a bit about the work we've done to improve the access to breast cancer screening for marginalized communities and that we're moving the needle in the right ways and the targets that we've set for ourselves, who we're working with. We're also working with local, smaller organizations than CancerCare. But I want to talk a bit about what our budget '25-26 is going to do in this space. We are going to increase screening. So we're going to be able to take screening from 45,500 screens in '24-25 to over 65,000 in '25-26. Our government is investing in a 44 per cent increase in breast cancer screening for women in this province with our '25-26 budget because we know that this area of health care is so important.

This budget '25-26 also includes more screening for marginalized communities. It means that over 15,000–15,600 breast cancer screens will be completed and available for self-referred Manitobans, right? So we are lowering the breast cancer screening age, and for those who are self-referred, we're going to have an opportunity to have almost 16,000 screens done. That's a substantial increase.

We're also ensuring that because we're lowering the breast screening age to 45 that in the first few months of the new calendar year, which is the few remaining months of the budget year, we're going to

be able to have 4,000 Manitobans get access to screening who are 45 years of age.

So our government takes this very seriously. We're making very real investments where we saw divestment years prior.

Mobile breast cancer screening is a way that reaches many, many Manitobans in rural communities, northern communities. Mobile breast cancer screening was cut for multiple years by the previous government. We're doing the opposite. We're investing in making it stronger, better and more accessible because we know that Manitobans can get care in that essential way. And we're going to make sure that we continue to do more work so that more Manitoba women benefit from this screening and have better health-care outcomes as a result.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: As part of this, of course, we know increasing screening capacity is going to require increasing the health-care workforce. So I'm just wondering if the minister could provide the current number of mammography technologists in Manitoba. How many have been hired since the minister became the minister and how many more we need in order to increase screening capacity?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

MLA Asagwara: That's a really, really great question by the critic. I'm going to—we're working on getting some more clarity around those numbers.

The—I'm not a hundred per cent clear. I think the number was either 13.6 or 12.6, somewhere in there, in terms of the amount of mammographers that we would need by '26-27 in order to meet those lowering-the-age targets. So we're going to get clarity on that.

What I can say is that our government has worked with our partners across the health-care system and post-secondary institutions to reach out to students, to learners—health-care learners, before they graduate, to make them aware of the opportunities to advance their learning and training and job opportunities in our province.

So in anticipation of lowering the breast cancer screening age, recognizing that we would need more human resource capacity, we started doing the work of planning, right? We started doing the work of recruiting, informing and retaining folks proactively.

We recently had a graduating class of—I believe it was 26 technologists being trained in the province,

and we reached out—normally, you know, our government is—establishes new practice, or the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and I send out to learners a letter, letting them know that there's a job right here in their home province for them when they graduate. We've seen that be very successful. It's a great way to let folks know.

I didn't receive a letter like that when I was going to be a new grad; would've been nice to. Certainly, we know that folks were not getting that letter under the previous administration, but we felt it really important to reach out, as a government, to say there's a job for you in your province should you want one, and we would love for you to stay right here.

And so we took it a bit—took it a step further in terms of the graduates and the new grads who would be responsible for, you know, technologist roles in our province, and we said, we know that we're going to need more mammographers; that requires additional training beyond your initial studies. And so we reached out proactively and asked if folks would be interested.

We provided them an opportunity to access mammography training right away and said that we would love for you to choose this path. These are the goals that we have. We know that women in this province need more access to screening, and we're really happy to see that folks had an interest in that. And just by making that effort, making folks aware of the opportunity and engaging them proactively, we saw some uptake there.

And so we're taking unique approaches in order to ensure that we have the staffing that we need to meet the needs of Manitoba women and those who need this care.

There's more work to be done on this front. Certainly, you know, across the country there's a shortage of health-care workers. Here in Manitoba, we were late to getting into that effort in terms of recruitment and retention and being innovative in that approach, but our government has stood up a retention and recruitment office, a dedicated office to health-care human resource, and we're seeing the benefits of that.

We have physicians, we have allied health-care expertise, who are all working with our office—nursing expertise, working with our office in order to ensure that we're moving staffing in the right direction. So the critic is correct. More staff, more resources, is necessary in order to support lowering the breast cancer

screening ages, and our government is doing that work with our partners to meet those needs.

Recognizing, again, there's more work to be done and that 70 per cent target for screening that we want to achieve, which is recommended by the national—the Canadian Cancer Society—we're only going to be able to do that by working with our partners, by having more health-care human resource capacity and being creative about how we do that.

The last thing that I'll mention is there's an organization I met with—I've met with a couple of times named SERC—really wonderful organization that does a ton of really wonderful outreach to women in our communities.

And they have a couple of folks there who do outreach specifically in newcomer communities. And I want to thank them for being willing to meet with us and being open to using their relationships, their structure, as a way that we can engage women-in-health conversations that meet the needs of newcomer communities.

It's important that we recognize that it's—health care and screening and education awareness isn't a one size fits all. We have to be able to be creative about how we reach people and make sure they have the tools they need to make the best and most informed health-care decisions.

* (16:10)

And so, you know, we've been in government now for about a year and a half—just over that; we hope to have many years ahead of us to do this work. But building positive relationships is a big part of how we get this work done, and so we're going to commit to continuing to do that collectively.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you, and I hope that the numbers that I asked for will be forthcoming here this afternoon about the number of technologists that we currently have, how many have been hired and how many more we need in order to meet the screening target.

And I'm going to ask one more question on this topic. And the minister talked about the need to increase screening uptake, which, yes, is very important. But, you know, last year, the minister intervened to stop a campaign that was going forward that would have increased screening uptake. It was eye-catching. I personally did not find it offensive.

So I just wonder—I have a couple of questions. What exactly is the minister or the department doing to increase screening uptake, and do all of these campaigns need to be approved by the minister personally before they're allowed to go ahead?

MLA Asagwara: Can I just ask the critic to repeat the question really quickly, if you don't mind. I just want to make sure I have the right information.

Mrs. Cook: I had reiterated my question about the number of mammography technologists in place, including the number that have been hired under the minister's tenure and the number that we think we need in order to increase screening capacity.

And then I had shifted to talk about breast cancer screening uptake and asked what specific steps are being taken to achieve that.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

MLA Asagwara: So I appreciate the question from the member. She heard, in my previous response, that we are seeing an improvement in the percentage of women who are being screened, which is important. So the national target, as identified by the Canadian Cancer Society, is 70 per cent. We are moving towards that.

We've improved, as of our '24-25 budget, and we want to get to that target and, quite frankly, surpass it. And in order to do that, we do need greater human resource capacity, and so the number I referenced previously—the 13-point-something percentage—that number, 13.7 FTEs, is actually related to—only related to lowering the age to 40 to 49.

But when we think about the fact that our government isn't just committed to lowering the screening age—our government, you know, could have said, we're going to lower the breast screening age—breast cancer screening age and left it at that.

But we said no, we need to improve the percentage of women and those who need this care who are actually getting screened. That—if you only lower the screening age and you do nothing to make sure that more women have access to the information and the opportunity to be screened, you are probably only going to result in privileging people who already have privilege in accessing those services.

Of course, we want all women and those who need this care to receive it. What we need to be mindful of is that we don't, as an unintended consequence, push out—not only the conversation, but the opportunity and the access—those women who are already

further removed from the opportunity and the chance to be screened.

And so we have made it a priority to ensure that marginalized women—BIPOC: Black, Indigenous and people of colour—that we have an intentional approach to making sure that we are reaching them, we are speaking to them, we are working with our partners so that they have greater access to breast cancer screening, education and information. That is fundamentally important, and that requires a sustained effort and investment and a teamwork-based approach, which is what our government is doing.

As a result of that, we need substantial staffing resources dedicated to this. And we're investing in that. In order to reach that target of screening 70 per cent of the population, we need about 15 additional FTEs: seven—or, almost eight additional FTEs, in terms of lowering the breast cancer screening age to 45. We're looking at a—over 20—it's a total of 23 additional FTEs that we are actively filling and hiring into. And we have been able to recruit folks into doing this work.

There's a number of folks that we need in order to make sure that we're meeting the needs of Manitobans. So these efforts, again, are not being done in isolation. We're working directly with CancerCare Manitoba and other local organizations in order to do this work the right way, in a meaningful way. And we're listening to Manitoba women.

There was a woman at the town hall last night who spoke really well and asked us very directly if the Mature Women's Centre is going to be representative. Are we going to have people there who look like the communities that they serve?

I thought that was such a great question. Such an important question, and it came from someone who was involved with the Mature Women's Centre before it was cut and closed by the previous government. She's excited, of course, for this to be re-established, but she wanted to make clear to our government that equity matters; that ensuring that all women from diverse communities have the ability to access this incredible care.

And I made very clear to her that that is the approach our government is taking. We want all women in this province to have improved access to breast health services and we're committed to working with partners in order to move us in a better direction.

* (16:20)

And so I want thank, again, those folks who are working with our government on this front, and we're going to do the work alongside CancerCare and our partners to retain, to train and recruit folks in order to do this work in the right ways.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: I want to shift back to a question that I asked yesterday. I'm just reviewing the Hansard here from yesterday's Estimates, and I asked the minister a couple of times about something that was announced last week with the ER wait time reduction strategy. And nowhere in the strategy was there a actual target for how much the government intends to reduce ER wait times by.

But later in the media scrum following the news conference, the minister said that they planned to lower ER wait times by one hour. But it wasn't clear if that was one hour in the city of Winnipeg. Is that one hour in rural Manitoba, is it one hour in Brandon, is it all of the above? And one hour from what?

Actually, no, I'll correct myself. I believe the one hour from what was clarified, but it's not clear where that target came from or what it applies to. So I'd just like to once again ask the minister to provide that clarification.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

MLA Asagwara: I just—I apologize to the critic. I neglected to answer another part of her question previously in regards to how are we going to reach people, advertising, how are we going to communicate.

I do think it's really important that, when we look at advertising and promotions and things like that, there may be some things that get the member's attention or my attention or your attention, that absolutely do not make any sense, or resonate or land for other people. And that's fair. We're all different, right?

But I think it's also important to think about the fact that there are a number of folks who still yet are not being screened, folks who are community members who, perhaps, English is not their first language, perhaps they are newcomers, perhaps the things that may land or resonate very quickly or easily for myself or the member opposite don't for other folks. And it's really important that, when we put out campaigns or communications, that we do our best to be inclusive.

And I know that the word 'inclusion'—inclusion is something that, you know, people have been talking about DEI in interesting ways in the States lately. But certainly here in Manitoba, we recognize the value and

importance of inclusion, and taking approaches that include as many people as possible in participating.

And so we do think it's really important to work with local organizations who understand the communities that are not currently being screened, who have historically not been reached by ad campaigns. And we listen to them, we work with them to produce, or have materials produced, that are able to reach those folks.

We want for folks who are taking the bus with their kids and who see an ad campaign to see it and connect with it right away. That could be the moment that a woman in our communities thinks to herself: you know what, this is the time. I need to go and make sure I get screened for breast cancer. We want for as many people as possible when they see a communication to feel connected to that, and to feel welcomed into a conversation that is directly about their own health.

And so there's more work to be done on that front. Certainly I think that government has a role to play. I do think that one of the most important roles that government can play is setting the tone. When a government makes a decision to cut and close services, to damage the health care that disproportionately serves women, in particular BIPOC women are those who need that care, that government is sending a very clear message about whose health care matters.

Our government is taking the approach that we will talk about women's health care, we will talk about menopause and hormone replacement therapy, we will talk about menstruation and periods and reproductive health care. We will talk about all of these things because it is health care, and it matters.

And we will not only talk about it, we will invest in it. We will build relationships. We will staff the services that provide care to meet those particular needs. We will listen to experts locally. We will sit down and have conversations. We'll bring forward legislation to enhance and protect that care and those essential, fundamental freedoms and human rights that women and Manitobans hold near and dear. And as a government, we will do that unapologetically.

For too many years, Manitobans had a government in place that took a different approach that was very harmful. And now, especially now, in the political climate that we're in, it's important—it's incumbent on governments to make very clear where they stand.

And our government and myself as a Health Minister have been very clear. We stand with women,

we stand on the side of women's health care and science, and we are going to make investments that strengthen that, and we're going to listen to women to make sure that their voices are heard and fundamentally a part of how health-care decisions are made in Manitoba.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: So for the record, that's the fourth time I've asked about the ER wait-times reduction target and not received an answer from the minister.

And we've been down this road before. I think the minister put the same words on the record the last time we were in Estimates and I—again, I have no problem talking about abortion, birth control, women's body parts, periods. I'll talk about all those things. I'll talk about those things all day. But that wasn't what the question was about.

And it also is a little bit rich coming from a minister who's dodging the fact that, you know, what I put in one of my last questions was that this minister personally cancelled a campaign to improve breast cancer screening rates because the campaign used the names of birds in a tongue-in-cheek way and the minister found this personally offensive so they cancelled that campaign.

So I've asked now, twice, and the question was: What is the minister doing to increase screen uptake?

So I've put a few questions on the record now. The minister can take their pick and answer whichever one of those they'd like.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

MLA Asagwara: I—unlike, maybe, the critic—I love birds, think they're beautiful. I love when the season changes and you can hear them first thing in the morning. But I don't know a whole lot about the—I know geese, blue jays, some ducks, eagles, but unlike some of my near and dear friends, some of which work in this building, I'm not a birder. I couldn't look at a poster or a campaign with any particular bird and make the association between a particular bird and a message, necessarily.

And I think that some of the concerns that were brought forward, actually from folks, from Manitobans, from women who found that particular campaign—some folks did find it very offensive; I heard that plainly from a number of Manitobans. But some other folks also found it very confusing. They actually didn't understand it at all, which I think is also a big concern.

The member, the critic, has talked about—and she acknowledges that there are marginalized communities who are not being reached and that needs to improve. When I hear from Manitobans that—from some folks that a campaign is offensive, that concerns me. When I hear from other folks that they simply don't understand what it's saying, what it means at all and that the message around breast cancer screening is not remotely getting through to them as a result, I think that's a problem we have to be willing to acknowledge. And it's okay to say that we have to do better; it's okay to say that we can do better. I think Manitobans deserve that.

And our government has been working very hard, and as a result—you know, under the previous government we knew that the uptake for breast cancer screening for particular communities was low and that we weren't reaching the target, the national target of 70 per cent. Our government, in our first budget, was able to bring that up close to 70, but not there yet. We know there's much more work to do and we take that very seriously. And so we're committed to doing that work.

I actually have answered the member's question in terms of how we're going to do it. Of course, there's going to be communication and ad campaigns encouraging folks to access the information, that we're working directly with CancerCare Manitoba and other organizations to make sure that the information is more widely and broadly distributed, that it's more accessible in way—by the way of language and visuals and even locations in terms of where the information is being made available.

And we're adding the staffing; we're adding the people so that we have more resources to do this work, to reach more people. That is so important. It's so important that you have as many people as possible doing this work, doing the outreach in communities to meet the needs of Manitobans who previously were not involved.

And I want to say I do know that the member and critic has no problem talking about reproductive health care, periods, menstruation, menopause, mature women's health, abortion. But unfortunately, I think that member also knows there are folks on her team who cannot.

* (16:30)

For years, Manitoba had a PC government with Health ministers who would not talk about reproductive health care, couldn't talk about menstruation, refused to even acknowledge abortion. And as a

result, those Health ministers weren't responsible for those files. They moved it under the Families Minister.

And I know this because I was a front-line nurse. I know this because I served as a part of organizations that deliver primary health care, abortion care, reproductive health care, and they couldn't reach out to the Health Minister because the Health Minister wouldn't talk about those important, essential health-care topics. If that doesn't send a clear message to Manitobans about whose health care and what health care matters, I don't know what does.

When I became the Health Minister, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) did not sit me down and say: You know what you're not going to talk about, Minister? Abortion. Absolutely not, that would be ridiculous. As the Health Minister, women's health care, reproductive health care, abortion care—which is essential, protected, human rights health care—those are all issues we're very proud to talk about and invest in making better for Manitobans, recognizing there's more work to do.

So, you know, I think it's important to be clear about the fact that the critic's ability to talk about things—sure, great. It'd be wonderful to know that every single member in her caucus also supports that, and is able to talk about that. I know that there are members in her caucus who were former ministers of Health who went to anti-choice rallies. That's concerning. It's worrisome. It's troublesome.

So when we're talking about breast health, I want to be very clear that we're committed to making the necessary investments and we are making the necessary—

The Chairperson: Minister's time has expired.

Mrs. Cook: I think the minister's, again, straying very far from the topic at hand; and as much as I have enjoyed our exchange here this afternoon, I am going to cede the floor to our colleague from Tyndall Park until 5 o'clock.

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I would just like to begin by thanking my colleague from Roblin for the opportunity to ask some questions here this afternoon, scheduling some time, as well as the minister and the departmental staff for being here and answering all of our questions.

The first question I have is about the Seven Oaks hospital. It's something the minister knows I have raised on multiple occasions. I often hear from my constituents about how under-utilized the Seven Oaks hospital is currently being used for.

We know that the population in the North End continues to grow—all of the areas. Our population has really skyrocketed over the last couple of years. We know that the need is there, and often—again, these are concerns I'm hearing directly from my constituents—the North End does feel that they are neglected, not just under NDP government but previous governments as well.

But what are the plans, specifically, for Seven Oaks hospital? Is the ER in fact going to be reopened? Are there plans to make changes within the next fiscal year? Just something that I can bring back and share with my constituents.

The Chairperson: Thank you, member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux).

MLA Asagwara: It's good to see our colleague from Tyndall Park here. I really appreciate that question. She's such a strong voice for her community and I really appreciate that. Those are really important questions.

I had at the opportunity early in our administration to be at Seven Oaks and visit with different teams there, and I know that many of my colleagues have learned more about the programs there at Seven Oaks, really quite frankly groundbreaking services that they provide there, particular programs.

And it was great to hear from them directly, so what I can tell you is that we, very early on, when we rolled out seven-day-a-week discharge, Seven Oaks was included in that. So they were provided additional staffing capacity for allied health to help with flow, but fundamentally to help with patient care. So previously, you—they wouldn't have had seven-day-a-week allied health care professional capacity, and they have that now.

We weren't prescriptive, I just want to be clear about that. We weren't prescriptive, not even region to region, site to site; we didn't take that approach. We allocated those resources and said folks could design what they needed based on their site needs.

What I've heard from some folks is that it took a little longer than others to identify, is that going to be more physiotherapy and social work, or is it going to be, you know, recreational services and something else. It depended on really what the site decided their needs were.

And so I can't speak with clarity as to what Seven Oaks chose to do in terms of how they utilized those new resources, but I can assure you that they were allocated those resources to do with what they needed,

and also recognizing that for some sites that changes over time, right. So perhaps they had a vision at the outset and then decided to pivot to see greater impacts.

Another area that we're going to be, sooner than later, enhancing at Seven Oaks is primary care. So we've been able to do that through extended hours primary-care clinics, Minor Injury and Illness Clinic at Misericordia hospital, the extended hours primary-care clinics at the Grace and Concordia. And, you know, we recognize the growth in that part of the city and recognize the importance of making sure that more people have access to enhanced primary care. And so we're looking at that for that area as well.

I'm not sure how familiar the member for Tyndall Park is in regards to what we've been doing in terms of that primary-care space, but the way that we've structured it has allowed for us to maximize the existing resources in terms of diagnostics and the structures that are already available. You know, we've been able to have primary-care providers who are willing and wanting to go there and practise in the evenings, weekends and holidays.

We're also incorporating nurse practitioners which we think is a really, really important part of that model. So Seven Oaks will benefit from that, actually. More resources for nurse practitioners in that part of the city, in your community, which I think is really key.

We've seen by now it's over 11,000 Manitobans benefit from these clinics, and we know that that's going to be a very, very well-utilized clinic, the enhancement to primary care there, when we establish it. And we also know there's more to do. There's more to do, right.

So Seven Oaks hospital, unlike some others that I've had the opportunity to visit—(1) I would say meeting with them was great. They've not had a visit from a Health minister, which to me was, like, shocking. I've heard that a lot. Health ministers previously, in the previous government, hadn't actually gone to sites and visited with folks and heard from them directly. Personally, I really enjoyed it. You get to hear directly from people in their environment.

But we know there's more to do there. And as I was saying, you know, unlike some other hospitals or sites, they actually have a bit of space that they can work with, right, so there's more opportunity to work with Seven Oaks and partner with Seven Oaks, I think, to create some really unique care opportunities. So we're currently exploring that. I'm not entirely sure

just yet how that's going to be executed, but we're looking at those options.

And, of course, staffing, right. We need more people in health care, certainly at Seven Oaks, so our retention and recruitment office is working with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority to identify ways to not only retain but to train and recruit more folks to go specifically to that site.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

MLA Lamoureux: Just for the sake of time, I am going to be jumping around a little bit for topics within health care.

With respect to home care specifically, I remember there was a time here in Manitoba when home care included a lot more than it does currently. There was a time when it included things such as shovelling driveways, helping with groceries. It was a lot more inclusive for those who were experiencing or needing home-care services.

Everyone knows we don't have enough home-care workers. It is an issue. We've heard issues—I've heard issues from constituents where home-care workers have had to go from one house to another, and it doesn't allocate any time to actually spend within the homes with the constituents, with the people who need the care—home-care services. We've heard issues of last-minute cancellations. This one seems to be happening more and more recently, unfortunately.

What is being done, not only to hire and retain home-care workers, but to ensure that those who are receiving home-care services don't continue—because they currently are—don't continue to fall through the cracks, miss out on services, have to go—sometimes weeks—without being able to have the services that I would argue is part of our dignity—needed services?

What is the government doing? Is there a plan? Are there specific actions planning to be taken?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

* (16:40)

MLA Asagwara: Really appreciate the question from the member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux), who I know has been talking about home care for many years, and really been an advocate for that.

I, as a—I'm someone who worked as a support worker in community for years before—when I was a student, before I was a nurse, and really appreciate, on a personal level, the work that people do in our communities, in people's homes, right, and the relationships

that are built and what they foster. And what I do know—and the member probably already is aware of this.

We were both in opposition when this was happening—getting calls from people who were saying that their home-care services were being cut and changed. So some of the services that the member talked about, you're totally correct, were in place previously and were really scaled back under the previous government, which obviously was concerning.

I have a constituent of my own here in Union Station who's been really vocal about this and would call me, and he and I have had many, many calls about how his home care was cut and the impacts on him as someone who is a paraplegic. And so, you know, our government coming into government having heard those concerns for years and seeing the impacts of those cuts to home care, recognize that this an area that we really have to be very intentional about, that we need to do the work of restoring services.

I know that, recently, the rollout in home care in terms of the centralized scheduling: you know, the WRHA has essentially kind of conceded that this hasn't gone well, right. There's been real impacts as a result of the rollout not going the way that they had hoped or intended. They're working very hard and very quickly to rectify some of those challenges.

I would say at a broader, higher level, our government has worked with the regions across the province to have more capacity in home care, just generally. So investing in regions being able to train more folks and hire more folks into home care: we've done that not only in the WRHA, where the member has a constituency she represents, but in other regions as well; and working with them directly to sort out, well, what does it really look like, what does home care look like in your communities.

Our government also has a commitment to ensure that there's home care services for kids living in First Nation communities, so that work is also happening to expand those services. We're working in partnership with First Nations to do that work.

And, you know, in regards to the recent centralization and the rollout of that, I want to be clear that what the member is talking about is correct, that a change to centralized scheduling actually came as a direct result of a review that was done because a family was unable to get the home care that they needed in time, right. It's a very devastating circumstance that a Manitoba family experienced.

I had the opportunity to talk to Mr. De Schepper myself, and he's been a really big advocate and a proponent for change. And so one of the recommendations out of that review was to centralize scheduling.

Again, recognizing that the rollout has not gone the way it was intended, there is a lot of work being put into addressing that now. So we've been investing in more home care, more jobs, more training, opportunities, all of that. Investing in more capacity.

This particular rollout, the WRHA has been very responsive. They've held several town halls with nurses and front-line staff to hear their concerns and to leave those town halls and take action to fix the concerns and strengthen home care. I attended one of those town halls very recently and heard directly from nurses and managers myself.

They have hired 19 new nurses into roles and they've hired 10 more as of this week will be joining, so that's a total of almost 30 additional staff members to do this work. They've added another manager to help with this work and to not only help stabilize but really strengthen home care. And they've—they have additional training that's been rolled out for folks. So there's a—and there's a number of measures beyond that; I just wanted to make sure the member was aware of a few of the measures that have been actioned and recognizing there's much more work to be done.

Beyond the immediate concerns regarding the rollout being addressed, we're committed to continuing to retain, train and recruit as many people as possible into home care and also improving structures like the self- and famil--managed care option, right.

That process can be kind of confusing for some families, and we want to make sure that that process is much more seamless, easier. We also want to make sure that those opportunities are there for First Nations Indigenous peoples across the province. We've had really good conversations on a nation-to-nation basis in terms of how we can expand and improve that as well.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

MLA Lamoureux: On the topic of regulating talk therapy, psychotherapy: it's something that I've raised over the years, again, with previous governments and with this government.

And I think it's really important that Manitoba start to take an initiative, start to take the lead on regulating talk therapy for a multitude of reasons, a couple of being: (1) Coverage for folks who are

seeking out talk therapy. Oftentimes, people go to begin and they decide not to, because there is no coverage and it can often be very costly on Manitobans.

We've seen it now be regulated in other provinces in—like, across Canada—not every province, but in a few. And it's something that I believe that we need to take action on sooner rather than later.

The other reason it's really important—and I know that the minister is aware of this—is that those who are providing services, we need to ensure that they're trained to be doing so. We wouldn't want someone who is providing physical health-care services doing so unless they were properly trained. If you break an arm, you want someone to fix your arm who knows what they are doing. It's the same case with mental health.

As of right now, and it's a scary reality, anyone can practise therapy. You can be a high school—a person who has not received your high school diploma and make yourself business cards, call yourself a therapist, charge \$150 and treat people, talk with people who are arguably at some—in some of the most vulnerable situations and cases.

* (16:50)

So we need to make sure that it is regulated so that those who are performing these services are, in fact, properly trained to do so.

Does Manitoba have any plans to regulate talk therapy over the next couple of years?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you for the question.

We are engaged actively in conversations with different therapy bodies, so—I'm trying to find the right language here; apologize for my pause.

We're having conversations with different therapeutic organizations and representation—representatives, rather, who are expressing their concerns and ideas for what they think the path forward needs to look like.

I certainly take the member's point. I know that the member has her own expertise and her own training in this area, so—and I respect and appreciate that. I think we need more folks with that level of education and training to provide care to Manitobans, and so I want to thank her for taking that on and being somebody in the province that folks can benefit from when they need that kind of support.

And we know—and the member is well aware; I think we're all well aware—there are more Manitobans than we've ever had who need this kind of support, and I wholeheartedly agree that we need to make sure the people who are providing that care are safe and qualified.

And we've had really good conversations with different bodies who have provided recommendations and their thoughts on this, including the recommendation to develop some sort of a centralized way to identify folks that are appropriate and safe, which I think is a really good recommendation.

I know that there's currently websites that do that, but perhaps an approach where—you know, not necessarily sure who would lead or be responsible for that, but I think that government can play a role in that: one place that people can go to get that information and know that that information's been vetted somehow. But I certainly take the member's point in terms of the regulated health professionals being an important part of that work and conversation.

There is a report that I'm awaiting—eagerly awaiting from the health professionals advisory council who will be providing a report with recommendations on this issue and others. And I look forward to seeing what's in that report.

But I do want to reassure the member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux) that we are aware of this issue. We're doing work in this space. The member is well aware there's a number—a number—of different therapies and ways of practising. And so also understanding, you know, as we look at the path forward with the regulated health professionals act and folks coming under that, what does that mean for this particular body, right, because there are such—there's so much uniqueness in terms of different therapeutic modalities.

So I'd be happy to keep that member up to speed in terms of how that work is unfolding. I can make sure that when we have—when that report is released and we take a look at it, I take a look at it, I'd be happy to have a follow-up conversation based on that.

This is an important area, and I take the safety of the public and their health very seriously, no matter how that health care is being provided.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

MLA Lamoureux: A few years ago, when the government was in official opposition, one of the things that they often talked about was restoring health-care coverage for international students.

I've had, over the last couple of years, many—I'm going to argue probably close to 50 over the last couple of years—international students actually come and see me at McDonald's on Saturdays, and they always express to me: How is it going to happen? And I've often been very optimistic with them and suggesting that, you know, the government really stood strong on this prior to the election; I believe that their intention is to bring it forward.

But we're going on two years now, and international students are more than halfway through a lot of their degrees, who have been waiting on it.

What does the minister recommend I share with these international students who continue to come to me and ask when it's going to be restored?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

MLA Asagwara: I want to thank the member for Tyndall Park for that really important question, and I know that she's been a good advocate on this. I want to reassure her that we are continuing to work on this really important commitment that we've made.

And I just want to share that—and I've said this before in regards to other health-care issues—that it is so much easier to cut a bed, to close an emergency room, to fire a nurse than it is to add a bed, reopen an emergency room and hire a health-care worker.

It—the reality of it is, unfortunately, we had seven and a half years of a PC government that was pretty callous, that cut health care every which way they possibly could and didn't really care much about the consequences. I remember when that happened. It was a \$3.1-million cut. And I remember looking at that budget line and thinking, like, why; and knowing how it would impact people.

And what I can tell you is that we are working very hard to find ways to address this, recognizing that it requires a lot of work in collaboration to restore that cut, as we've seen for other areas, right? But the work is happening.

And so if you could go back when you meet with your constituents or folks who are reaching out to you when you're having coffee with them at McDonald's on Saturdays—which I think is phenomenal, that you continue to do that—you can let them know that you and I have had a conversation about this and that that work is ongoing. We know it's not happening fast enough.

The previous government cut 500 beds from the health-care system. Our government has been able to

add about 280 beds back to the health-care system in just about a year and a half, you know. That's still not enough, right. It's much easier to cut and close and do damage than it is to add capacity and to fix that harm. But we're doing it.

And so I look forward to having conversations with international students. We've had the opportunity, and myself and many of my colleagues—the MLA for Radisson, my legislative assistant on Health. Has been wonderful, meeting with international students and different student representatives and having these conversations.

And we've been working with Advanced Education and Training as well, so that we can work with post-secondary institutions and make sure that they also have a role to play in this conversation—

The Chairperson: Order, please.

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

ROOM 255

FINANCE

* (15:00)

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

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Yes.

The Chairperson: Okay. The honourable Minister of Finance.

MLA Sala: So just maybe want to speak briefly by, you know, talking a bit about the importance of the budget we released recently. Was very proud to bring forward a budget that responded to the challenge of the moment that Manitoba is facing.

We know that the threats that we face from tariffs to the south of us from Mr. Trump have created significant uncertainty and worry for Manitoba families, communities, businesses and that those tariffs and the threats that they present to our economy are concerning and that it was very important for us as a provincial government to make sure that we responded to those threats, and I think that this budget did exactly that.

It responded to the threat of the moment and it was focused on ensuring that not only did we continue

to do the incredibly important work that our government has been doing since getting elected, which is focusing on starting to fix the damage that was done to our health-care system, focusing on improving affordability in Manitoba, improving their safety and their security in our communities, but also ensuring economic resilience, sustainability and a stronger economy for years to come.

And I was so proud that this budget leaned heavily into a lot of really important investments that will help us to ensure that we do just that, including, of course, the centrepiece of the budget being the \$3.7-billion capital plan that we were really proud to bring forward where we committed to build 11 schools, three personal-care homes, new important infrastructure to support Manitobans getting their health needs met—for example, the new ER at the Vic—and including economy-supporting sustaining infrastructure like our investments that we've committed to making the Port of Churchill, the rail line, CentrePort, as well as NEWPCC, which was a very important, of course, water project that we know we need to move forward with to ensure our economic engine, Winnipeg, can continue to grow and thrive.

So those are, I think, some centrepieces of the budget that we're really proud of and I think responded to the threat of the moment, in addition to a lot of other areas of focus; for example, finally building the energy we require to meet our needs of a growing province. So 600 megawatts of wind we've announced, in partnership with First Nations, will help to ensure that we can meet the energy needs of our—of Manitoban citizens but also, of course, the growing energy needs for our businesses.

We also, of course, in this budget, leaned into other important areas; for example, buy Canadian. We know that Manitobans right now, and all Canadians, are making different purchasing decisions where they are focused on ensuring that when they spend their dollar, that they're doing that in such a way that creates the greatest possible benefit for our local economies.

And I'm proud to say that our government has committed to doing the same and that our buy Canadian legislation leans into that and will see us working to ensure that their government, the Manitoba government, makes similar decisions when we spend provincial dollars, that we're getting the best return for Manitobans on those expenditures.

Of course, other important areas of focus that I'm really proud of include our focus on interprovincial

trade barrier reduction. We've seen great progress from our Premier (Mr. Kinew) and the work that's being done by our minister for jobs in working with colleagues across the country, and—you know, exciting things are coming very soon.

Beyond that, maybe I'll just speak briefly to some of the other important things we've done to help support a more resilient economy here. Our payroll tax cut is reducing taxes for small and medium businesses, making Manitoba into an even more investible destination for capital.

We, of course, made further investments in tourism to encourage folks to visit our beautiful province and to spend dollars with our local businesses; great opportunities for them. And, of course, to encourage Manitobans to stay right here in Manitoba to continue to support local.

And then just so much other good news in the budget, including, of course, a number of important investments that we've made to support some real key local job producers. For example, Magellan, and NFI, who now, in partnership with our government, are now in a position to be able to do an all-Canadian build electric bus.

So the work of building more resilient and sustainable economy in light of those tariffs, I think is ongoing. I think our budget showed the way forward.

I was really proud last week to spend many days out east visiting with credit rating agencies, giving them clarity on our fiscal plan and our path forward, in addition to investors and spelling out the important work that we did to ensure that our provincial government has a fiscally sustainable path forward.

But also to outline the important work we've done to make sure that Manitoba's economy can continue to grow and develop and thrive, and that message was really well received. It was exciting to meet with investors abroad, to hear just how confident they are in our path forward as a province and to hear that excitement from them.

So I think that reflects the good work that our government is doing, led by our Premier, and, again, that work continues. And I'm pleased to be here today to have a chance to answer any questions from the official opposition.

Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

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

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I will keep my opening comments brief as I do look forward to digging into the details of the Finance Department, and Manitobans deserve to hear direct and factual answers from this minister.

We are seeing in this budget and the Finance documents significant new tax increases on Manitobans at a time when Manitobans are faced with a cost-of-living crisis, the highest foodflation in the country, decreasing job growth and increasing unemployment.

Combined with weak economic growth, market volatility, and the current state of global trade, we continue to face unprecedented US and China tariffs on our key Manitoba industries.

This budget missed the moment for Manitobans, as evidenced by the lack of trade strategy for Manitoba and the lack of meaningful solutions and a tangible path forward. Despite those significant challenges facing hard-working Manitobans, this NDP government has decided to increase taxes: \$182 million in education property tax increases on top of double-digit school division tax hikes.

The decision by this minister to get rid of the 50 per cent rebate, while not taking into account property values and the general assessment that occurs every two years, was sloppy financial planning, and Manitobans are paying the price for it.

In some school divisions, property owners are seeing over a thousand dollar increase on their tax bills. Some of these individuals have been in their homes for years, while others are new homeowners, and neither the \$1,500, nor \$1,600 rebate will provide much relief to those homeowners who are seeing double-digit increases on their tax bills.

School divisions are publicly blaming this NDP government in the absence of properly funding education and an equitable education funding model, and homeowners are now bearing the price for this sloppy planning by the NDP government.

While cottage owners and business owners are paying significant more in property taxes, as exemplified recently by Victoria Beach. These increases are erasing the progress made towards eliminating education property taxes on homeowners while this NDP is enabling unprecedented, historic hikes as a result of removing the cap on school divisions.

Homeowners and Manitobans are also faced with increased income taxes as the NDP has brought back bracket creep by freezing the indexation of income taxes and not adjusting to inflation. This is a sneaky way of increasing taxes on Manitobans, as inflation can bump taxpayers into a higher tax bracket.

* (15:10)

Increases in wages will not be felt by the taxpayer as a result of being in that higher tax bracket. The NDP continues to place a higher debt burden on Manitobans and future generations with a deficit of upwards \$1.9 billion and debt-servicing costs at \$2.3 billion. That's \$1,700 for every Manitoban, just for interest costs, to Bay Street and Wall Street lenders.

This minister has barely a page in his budget to reduce spending and to reduce the deficit to pay down the debt. There is no credible plan presented to balance the books by 2027, and at his current rate of spending, this is becoming a far-reaching goal.

There is a lack of a legislative commitment to reduce interprovincial trade barriers despite other provinces being well ahead. This NDP government talks a big game, but when it actually comes to taking action and making the commitment, they are significantly falling short. I look forward to digging into these details during the Estimates proceedings.

It was not too long ago that we sat at this table for the 2024 Estimates and the Hydro committee where the minister was asked direct questions and, instead of providing answers, he wasted time by reading press releases into the record and 'reiterated' meaningless talking points. Now that he is almost two years into his role as Finance Minister, enough of the smoke and mirrors. Manitobans expect and deserve to hear factual answers about—he and his government are managing taxpayer dollars and their hard-earned money.

Today, we will dig into some of the details on office expenditures and operations and move forward into the tax increases to get some answers on how that is impacting Manitobans as well as the Province's debt management strategies.

With that, I will conclude my remarks, and I look forward to getting the answers that Manitobans expect and deserve as we move forward.

The Chairperson: We thank the member.

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 7.1.(a), contained in resolution 7.1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff and the member of—the critic for the portfolio's staff to come to the table, and we ask that the minister introduce the staff in attendance.

MLA Sala: I'd like to introduce the team here that's joined me. First of all, I'd like to introduce Paul Bretscher, my director of ministerial affairs; Ann Leibfried, the ADM for Central Finance; and Matt Wiebe, the ADM for Analysis and Strategy Unit within Treasury Board Secretariat.

Thank you so much for being here today with us.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Stone: We'll start off with a pretty simple question that the minister should be able to answer fairly quickly.

Can the minister please list the political staff that work out of the minister's office or within their purview, and if the minister could please provide the name and the position of those staff?

MLA Sala: Thanks so much for the question.

So I'm grateful to have a chance to talk about some of the folks that are providing really important supports to us in Finance. Of course, we have a bit of a unique role as the Department of Finance in that we're a department that has a number of different areas.

And, of course, I'm—not only have the honour of serving as the Minister of Finance, but I'm also serving as Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro, Public Service Commission as well as the Public Utilities Board. And so just a significant number of incredible people working to support what we do in our office.

You know, as I think about those teams, one thing I want to highlight is the important work that they do in supporting the development of a budget. I think about, you know, what it takes to bring together a budget and the enormous amount of effort that goes into that, and I want to start by just highlighting the important work that's done by the good folks who work within our Treasury Board Secretariat.

They spend, you know, months and months and months doing the incredibly important work of putting together the building blocks, what ultimately becomes a budget, and they're the ones who are really working to dig in, understand all the details, make sure that, at the end of the day, that our plan will land and help us deliver on our goal that we set. And we've worked very hard together over the last year to ensure that we developed a plan that will allow us to deliver on our balanced budget commitment.

So, you know, to that end, I think about the inordinate amount of time that our teams in TBS and otherwise have spent with us, working towards that goal. Over the past year, and I think especially, you know, last spring into summer, we spent an unbelievable amount of time together, including late nights on the weekend, working through a process of developing a multi-year cost structure to ensure that we had a pretty clear line of sight on all of the major expenditure decisions that we were going to need to make over the course of our mandate.

* (15:20)

And that involved very, you know, intensive analysis and work and support from a huge number of really wonderful folks that put in a lot of time to make sure that, ultimately, that goal that we set—that audacious goal—which is to make sure that we delivered on a balanced budget in year four of our mandate, that that could be possible. So that work was done, of course, you know, in—with support from those amazing folks at Treasury Board Secretariat.

We also were really lucky to, of course, have wonderful supports from the Department of Finance and a lot of talented people, some of whom are sitting with us here today, to help us ensure that we had that broader picture, that broader fiscal understanding of where, you know, where our economy was, where it's going, and benefiting from the deep insights from our statistical team, statistics team working within the department, as well as just some of the great folks that are there that, again, are just helping us to ensure that that broader fiscal picture was maintained as we did that work of developing the budget.

So, you know, aside from those amazing people, who I want to thank today, thank our amazing team and Treasury Board and Finance and beyond, I'm also lucky to have some really great folks supporting me directly in our office on the political side.

So, you know, I'll speak to one of those individuals who's here with me right now, Paul Bretscher. I'll

embarrass him a bit, but I'll say that, you know, I feel, since he's come into our office, just incredibly fortunate to have had the benefit of his experience, steady hand and helping to guide the work that we do—just an amazing support.

I'm also very lucky to have two other direct political support in my office: Ben Dearing, who acts as my executive assistant, as well as Jessica Teel, who's my special assistant. She joined us not so long ago and has just done a spectacular job fitting in and, again, is providing very important supports, helping to ensure we can deliver on our important mandate, which is to deliver on that balanced budget goal while we continue to make sure that we make life more affordable for Manitobans, which I'm very proud to say we've been doing.

Our first budget, you know, helped to focus on reducing the cost of school taxes for Manitobans. That work continued with our last budget, along with other personal income tax reductions that we made—proud to be doing that work, proud to have this team, and I want to thank everybody that helps to get this job done.

Mrs. Stone: For the record, it took the minister five minutes to list half a dozen staff, so hopefully he can be quicker in his answers and not eat up time that Manitobans are looking for direct answers on.

If the minister could please provide, has the minister hired any external consultants or advisers, and, if so, if the minister could provide their names, salaries, wages and/or contract amounts?

MLA Sala: Yes, it gives me pleasure to talk about some of the folks that we've been fortunate to bring on board to support the work that we're doing.

I want to start by talking about one individual that we hired on to support our important work, and that's Trevor Tombe. He is a doctor, sort of academic, from UCalgary, who folks might recognize as being a frequent commentator on economics and inter-governmental trade, and is a phenomenal expert, really, in the functioning of provincial economies.

We hired him on to help us sort of benefit from his expertise when it came to the potential risks and impacts of tariffs. And we were very fortunate to be able to get very beneficial insights thanks to his work about some of the risks that those tariffs were presenting to our province and to Canada, ultimately.

Some advice on how we could mitigate those risks and navigate them in the best way possible to

result in the best outcomes—economic outcomes possible for Manitobans. And those were insights that we were able to put to good use in our budget development process.

One of the great things about, I think, what we were able to benefit from as it relates to Dr. Tombe, is that not only did he help to inform our budget and how to navigate the tariff risks that we were facing, but he also built capacity.

We had him support development within our Department of Finance, and I think that was a very smart way to make sure that we leveraged, to the greatest extent possible, his expertise, and not only benefit us in terms of our budget development process, but also to have a leave behind that would ensure that departmental staff were able to benefit from his expertise.

* (15:30)

So that was something, I think, was a very smart approach taken by our deputy to use that in that way. He's unfortunately—Deputy Komlodi is unfortunately not able to join us today, but speaks to sort of the—I think, the way that we've—we approached leveraging that kind of expertise.

We also—I'm happy to speak to another individual that we were able to benefit from, from their supports, and that would be Jim Crone. Jim was a—I think a 30-year civil servant within the provincial government here with an expertise on energy, Manitoba Hydro. And Jim retired not so long ago, but we were very proud to bring him back on a contract where he's now helping us to develop the regs as it relates to duty-to-serve legislation that we were proud to introduce.

We know how important that legislation is because for many years, Manitoba essentially was required to simply serve whichever industrial customer was next in line. We had in our legislation a first-in, first-out system where effectively, if you had a significant energy ask, it's 300 megawatts and you only had five jobs attached to that, and right behind that industrial proponent was another similar 300-megawatt ask with 100 jobs, we currently have to serve that first person in line, that first organization or business in line.

And, of course, in an era where clean energy—and not only clean energy but our clean baseload energy has never been more valuable, we have to make sure we make good use of that energy and that we create the highest and best value for Manitobans in our—in terms of how we allocate it.

So I've been very proud to have brought him back to help us ensure that we develop those regs in a way that ensures, again, Manitobans get the greatest possible value from our clean energy and that ultimately, we work to keep our rates low as possible.

Jim's also working to support other work that we're moving forward when it comes to energy, for example, the 600 megawatts of wind that's going to be developed in partnership with First Nations and the Métis Nation here in Manitoba.

Very, very exciting to know that we're moving forward in a way that—in a novel—using a novel approach that's never been used in our province, that will create significant, significant opportunities, wealth-building opportunities for First Nations that I think really shows the way forward in that it clearly demonstrates our government's commitment to economic reconciliation, to working in collaboration with First Nations in a good way that really points the way forward, and I think frankly shows the way forward in the broadest sense in that if we are going to continue to develop new sources of energy in Manitoba, it—they'll need to be developed in a way that ensures First Nations and the Métis Nation are included as part of that work.

And that's a very different approach than we saw for many years under the former government, but one that we're proud to take because we know it's the right way forward, the only way forward. And we're going to keep doing that important work.

So I thank Jim and Trevor for their important contributions to our work so far.

Mrs. Stone: In April 2024, in an order-in-council, this minister hired an energy adviser by the name of Kenneth Klassen. Klassen's on the record supporting high and increasing carbon taxes, believing that Manitoba's gas taxes are too low, should be as high as 45 cents a litre, and advocating both to eliminate the PST exemption on home heating and rapidly phasing out natural gas in Manitoba.

Is Kenneth Klassen still an adviser in the minister's office and to the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala)?

MLA Sala: You know, I apologize, but in my last answer I didn't have a chance to speak to some of the other supports that we've hired on, and I really wanted to have a chance to speak to that a bit further. And, of course, happy to get to the last question.

The first thing that I wasn't able to mention in my last answer was the important supports that were

provided to us by MNP. And so, shortly after we got into government, one of the challenges that we faced was, of course, the significant deficit that we had been left as a government. And, ultimately, Manitobans know that that deficit grew to \$2 billion, which was really a deep, deep hole that we were left with and that Manitobans were left with and that we were forced to work to climb out of.

And so with the goal of ensuring that we could get clarity on how we got there, we hired MNP, who—you know, phenomenal local—or, phenomenal independent accounting firm, to help us get a better sense of what transpired under the last government that led to that disastrous outcome that they left Manitobans with.

And, you know, that independent report that they produced, I think, did a really important job summarizing some lessons that our government was able to take away as to what not to do and really showed at a high level some of the concerning decisions that were made by the former government when it came to fiscal management, economic management.

And, you know, I'll never forget the main quote from that report was that the former government made decisions that, quote: constituted high budgetary risk. And they went on to spell out in their report that one example of that, and I think one of the worst examples of that, was that they had budgeted in excess of \$500 million for Hydro profits in the final year prior to the election.

Now, to be clear, that is a level of Hydro profits that would be far in excess of anything that would constitute a typical net income year for Hydro, and at the very best, this was just sort of irresponsible budgeting, you know, a concerning oversight, maybe an overzealousness with what they expected in terms of Hydro profits.

* (15:40)

On the other end, it's concerning because, you know, there's reasons why a government might want to wildly overestimate profits from a Crown. So I won't—you know, I won't suggest anything further there except to say what we know is that was a very concerning decision that they made, in including that level of potential of proposed net income for Hydro.

And we know that, ultimately, at the end of the day, they went from a \$500-million-plus projection, and I think we landed at a place, and I unfortunately can't ask for this on the—live on the—off the floor here, but I believe it was—it ended up being negative \$100 million. So that single budgetary decision resulted

in about a \$600-million variance there that was a major, major contributor to that outcome, that \$2-billion deficit number.

And I want to just flag and highlight just how consequential that is, if you think about the importance of Manitoba putting its best foot forward when it comes to the bond markets, investors, credit ratings. That was a massive risk that they created for Manitobans, and really showed that the last government did not have the right approach when it came to fiscal leadership and economic decision making.

And, of course, we know that one of the more concerning things that they demonstrated was, unfortunately, an unwillingness to show transparency when it came to that. And there was a fiscal update provided in late July which I remember, which suggested that things were status quo; that there was nothing to see here, and that, you know, ultimately, the government, which was three months away from an election, was doing its best to put forward, I think, a fiscal picture, an economic picture that they wanted Manitobans to believe.

Unfortunately, what became clear is that, by mid-summer, when Hydro was facing significant drought that year, they failed to adjust and sort of step up to Manitobans and be honest about where we were. And the result was, when they provided that Q1 report at the end of July, three months before the election, they really did knowingly provide a very distorted picture of our overall fiscal position.

And that was very unfortunate. I would say it lacked transparency. And that's the opposite of what governments should be doing when they're going to Manitobans and providing them with an update on where we were at. And we saw the impacts of that, so proud that we did that important work with MNP.

There's other great supports that I'd like to speak to, but, again, in regards to the last question asked by the critic, I'm happy to get to that in my following answer.

Mrs. Stone: I understand that the minister likes to grandstand and put misleading facts on the record, because the reality is that the former PC government posted two surpluses during their time in office, all while through a historic unprecedented global pandemic, leaving this NDP government with a \$373-million surplus that they've now turned into a \$1.9-billion deficit.

And Manitobans need to remember that that \$1.9-billion deficit is this minister's deficit, and this

NDP's government's deficit, as they've now been in office for almost two years.

So to get back to the question, and it's a simple yes or no question, whether Ken Klassen, which this minister hired in an order-in-council in April of 2024, is still employed by the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala).

MLA Sala: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the question.

You know, I guess, given that the critic did raise the—again, the question of the deficit that we were left, it is important to remind her that, again, the one—the \$2-billion deficit that was left was connected to a budget that was PC-created. And, of course, the MNP report that was done speaks with clarity about who is accountable and who was responsible for that deficit.

So that's—you know, that's just the reality of the situation; was that we were left with this giant hole that they had dug due to poor fiscal planning. And that independent MNP report spoke to that failure to plan, and ultimately some of the decisions they made that constituted that, quote: High budgetary risk that left us in a really, really challenging position.

You know, speaking about planning, and speaking about important supports that our government hired, we also were really proud to hire Deloitte to support us in doing some of our work to understand some of the risks that were being presented to Manitoba as a result of the tariffs. And of course, during the time that we had hired them, that was a time when Manitoba was facing the risk of a 25 per cent tariff scenario across the board, and we needed to make sure that, as a government, we had real clarity to the best we possibly could on what the implications of that were.

Now, we did that work, that important planning work, to ensure that we were ready and that we were going to bring forward a budget that, again, responded to the moment and the risks that we were facing. And with the benefit of Deloitte—and they had some very advanced models that we were able to benefit from, that we could look at and really understand in various sectors of the economy what those prospective impacts would be—we were able to put together a very comprehensive picture of the impacts.

And, therefore, with that, the benefit of that, we were able to plan accordingly; again, something when I'm reflecting on the \$2-billion hole we were left, that really wasn't done by the former government.

So another great example of, really, the change that we have seen here in the Legislature in terms of

moving from an approach to fiscal management that was bereft of foresight, vision, really in-depth analysis, looking ahead, to one where we had a government that was finally focused on actually doing the hard, heavy lifting of planning appropriately for the challenges we were facing as a province.

And so what we did there, and with Deloitte's support, was, I think, really important, really good work. And that work ended up manifesting in our tariff contingency budget. And so I've often heard the critic reference, in different environments, that their team feels that, you know, we haven't prepared or we—our budget didn't reflect reality. I think that this is a great opportunity just to make sure that, with no uncertain terms, that this record is set straight; that not only did we prepare, we were very transparent with Manitobans about the risks that we were facing.

And we're able to do that, not, you know, through our guesswork or through hoping and praying that things were just going to work out. We did it with the benefit of expert analysis from Deloitte, and that translated directly into what we saw in our tariff contingency budget.

And so the tariff contingency budget, as a result, benefitted from the specific insights that we learned from Deloitte, and that translated into a revenue contingency proposal that we know reflected the prospective impacts of a full 25 per cent tariff scenario. It also reflected the impacts of the counter tariffs and the impacts of those that we would see specifically on the Manitoban economy and on specific sectors within the Manitoban economy.

So I'm really proud. I mean, when I outlined this, this is the work. This is the important planning preparation that Manitobans have a right to expect from their government, and that's exactly what we put forward: a transparent summary of what we were going to do in light of a 25 per cent worst-case scenario—tariff scenario.

* (15:50)

And, again, you have a very clear sort of A-and-B situation here, where you can compare as a Manitoban what our government did—the extent to which we prepared, the depths to which we examined and analyzed risks ahead for the upcoming year—that became present in a budget, versus a very different approach which we saw when—which we saw with the \$2-billion deficit that they left us with their former budget which did not account for risks, and it was, unfortunately, a real reflection on their failure to plan.

So with that, I'm happy to share more in a future answer.

Mrs. Stone: This was a very clear two questions now in asking about an order-in-council that this minister signed to hire Ken Klassen to advise him on energy. Perhaps this minister does not want to answer because Kenneth Klassen is repeatedly on the record encouraging rising carbon taxes.

In fact, just a few years ago, and I quote from Hansard, he has said: The truth of the matter, though, is that whether it's a \$25 tax or a 20-rising-to-50-dollar carbon tax per ton, that what we're going to be facing a need for much higher carbon tax in the future.

Considering this minister and his Premier (Mr. Kinew) refuse to stand up to the federal government to remove the federal backstop that is currently punishing Manitoba industries that are being faced with Canadian and China tariffs as we speak, this minister and Premier refuses to do so.

And now, as we've heard, this minister refuses to answer whether the individual who is repeatedly on the record encouraging a rising carbon tax on Manitobans is still employed by this minister or not.

So, considering he has refused to answer that question for the past two questions, I will move on to another topic because, in fact, economics—economists have disagreed with this minister in terms of his rosy projections for economic growth and revenue.

In fact, TD noted that Manitoba counts on the US for a large share of its international imports, exposing households to inflation risk from retaliatory tariffs. Manitoba's key GDP growth industries—manufacturing, agriculture, transportation—risk pulling Manitoba's revenue down comparable to the 2009 recession.

However, despite weak economic factors, this minister projected in his budget that Manitoba would see greater growth in 2025 compared to 2024, with a real GDP increase to 1.7 per cent. But TD Economics have said the government's baseline real GDP growth forecasts are relatively rosy for the economic realities that this province is facing. RBC has made similar statements.

So economists are disagreeing with this NDP government's outlook, and that their recent budget did not reflect the economic realities that Manitoba is currently facing.

So does this minister still project a 1.7 per cent real GDP growth for 2025, ranking it among the last of Canadian provinces—fourth last?

MLA Sala: Yes, I'm very happy to speak to the questions from the critic.

So just going back to, you know, a question that she asked regarding Ken Klassen. Ken came on board for a very specific reason, and that was to support the development of our affordable energy plan, which our government was very proud to release last fall. Ken has over 30 years of technical expertise in the energy field and provided an important perspective in the development of that energy plan.

And, you know, if anyone wants to see what ended up getting released, I invite all Manitobans to go look at that plan, which is publicly available, and it's an incredibly exciting plan. It shows the way forward in building new energy in Manitoba. I've spoken to the, sort of, core announcement that came out of that plan, which was our commitment to build 600 megawatts of wind in partnership with First Nations.

But it also shows the way forward on a number of other important respects, for example, on duty to serve, which—something we committed to in the plan. And now, again, as a government that follows through on what it says and follows through on commitments, we are now moving forward on that, as well, with legislation, as I've already been speaking about earlier today.

I'll say for the critic, just so she knows, Mr. Klassen is no longer a permanent employee. We thank him for the support he provided in the development of the affordable energy plan, which I know is really well received and in—thanks in part to the important supports he provided in helping to develop that.

That affordable energy plan was, I think, a remarkable achievement in that, you know, we did that plan in a novel way, in a way that represented true collaboration. And I'm very excited, actually, to say that my colleague, the current Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning who sits here with us today, in her previous capacity as the minister for Environment, we worked very closely together in the development of that energy plan.

It was truly a collaborative process between her team, the experts we had in Crown Services, Jim Crone, among others, who I mentioned earlier here today, along with Manitoba Hydro and Efficiency Manitoba, who all sat together for weeks on end working through, you know, a proposal to move our province forward and to ultimately respond to seven and a half years of the last government failing to do what was needed to be done when it came to ensuring

that we had energy to support Manitobans, to keep our homes lit and our businesses operating. So we had a lot of work to do and it was really important that we dug into that energy plan because of how far behind we'd fallen.

You know, the PCs like to talk about—they position themselves as a party that has a focus on business, we'll say. But I'll say, business can't move forward if they don't have energy to do the work that they do. And it's shocking to think about that. We spent seven and a half years—like, really think about that, seven and a half years—without developing any new energy of any kind.

And that put us in one heck of a tough position when we came into government, in that we knew we need to—needed to move with purpose to make sure we dealt with that. Again, there was the \$2-billion deficit that they left us; this is another deficit they left us. They left us in a hole when it came to energy and that—we have to move very quickly to put forward a plan.

And so proud to say that Ken was one of a large group of individuals who contributed to the development of that plan. And we're very proud of what we did there, and I'm very proud to have worked with minister—our current Minister of Education on that plan. And I think it's something I'll always look back on as something that I'll consider as sort of a key achievement that we did together.

You know, speaking about carbon taxes, it's kind of funny to hear the critic talk about the—trying to position Ken as—and his take on this policy or that policy. When it comes to carbon taxes, there's only one party sitting in this building that has actively advocated for carbon taxes in Manitoba. And that's the party that belongs to the critic. Her team voted in favour of carbon taxes—not once, but twice—when they were in power. That's an inconvenient fact I'm sure she'd like to sort of have us not talk about today, but that's just the reality of the matter.

And what I can say to Manitobans who are watching right now is this team will never, ever bring in a carbon tax like that on Manitobans. We will never vote in favour of that type of carbon tax that they supported. They can trust us to continue focusing on improving affordability. That's the work we've been doing so far, and we're going to continue to do exactly that.

* (16:00)

Mrs. Stone: I just want to pick up—I do want to get back to the real GDP growth projections; however, the minister mentioned that Kenneth Klassen is no longer a permanent employee. So if the minister could let us know if Kenneth Klassen is a consultant, adviser, still paid in any contractual way through the Finance Minister's office or Finance Department or Manitoba Hydro.

If not, did he receive a severance? And if so, how much was that severance?

MLA Sala: The question, I believe, from the critic was, has Ken received any severance? The answer to that is no.

Mrs. Stone: If the minister could please answer the first part of my question, which is whether Ken Klassen is a consultant or adviser to the minister. He mentioned that he is no longer a permanent employee, but is he still a—~~is he~~ a consultant, adviser through the Finance Minister, the minister's office, the Finance Department or Manitoba Hydro currently?

MLA Sala: So, to the critic's question, you know, I know since it's—where in my role I do require some form of technical expertise, we do continue to have access to Ken's services on an on-demand basis, but there's a base of zero there.

So, you know, in those situations where there's a need for me in my role to understand something technical, I can reach out and leverage his 30-plus years of experience as a well-respected energy expert here in Manitoba.

Mrs. Stone: Thank you, and I appreciate the minister answering that question, finally.

I would like to just go back to a previous question I asked regarding real GDP growth and the projected growth of 1.7 per cent. As I mentioned in one of my previous questions, economists are disagreeing with this NDP government's outlook, considering the economic and fiscal realities of the current global trade environment market volatility, among cost-of-living challenges. Manitobans are spending less into the economy as they have fewer and fewer dollars in their pockets.

So does this minister still project a 1.7 per cent real GDP growth for 2025, ranking it among the last in Canadian provinces? As we know, Stats Canada just came out in—with Manitoba's numbers and 2024 being one of the worst real GDP growth in the country, well before the national average at 1.1 per cent.

So, considering the economic realities that we are currently facing, does this minister still stand by the projected real GDP growth of 1.7 per cent for this fiscal year?

* (16:10)

MLA Sala: So, appreciate the question from the critic, and, you know, what I can say is that of course, as she knows, the 1.7 per cent GDP growth target was printed in budget. We do face that threat of tariffs as every other province is facing at this point in time. As she knows very well, there is significant uncertainty about what we're facing as we move ahead.

We are, of course, I think, doing the important work of ensuring transparency with Manitobans about those risks. If you look at the budget document, you can see on pages 38 and 39, it spells very clearly—it spells out the potential prospective impacts of a 25 per cent tariff scenario.

So I invite her to look at that and then I think that speaks to the, sort of, worst case scenario. And that's a scenario that we have been transparent about and have prepared for and printed in our budget, our proposed tariff contingency budget, which we would unlock in the event that those 25 per cent tariffs that had previously been, you know, a possibility, that we would go back to and seek to appropriate supports to respond to that.

So I think 38 and 39 really speaks to the worst case scenario and speaks to, you know, what could happen in that 25 per cent tariff environment, which at this point, fortunately, it looks like they will be significantly moderated. But, of course, right now, we've seen them—you know, that those tariffs have been moderated from a 25 per cent across the board to something that is still, of course, very concerning from an economic perspective but still much more moderate.

And yet, of course, moving forward, we will expect further changes as—now that we have a new federal government in place and as we saw yesterday, those discussions are already beginning about how we move forward together as our two countries look to find, you know, a path forward for our economic relationship.

You know, when it comes to credibility around our approach and our plan, one thing that I was just really proud of was the conversations that we had last week during the investors tour that I was on with my chief of staff and our deputy, where we had a chance

to meet with those investors who are supporting Manitoba.

These are institutional investors that, you know, buy our bonds at scale and really are paying very, very close attention to the fiscal planning work that we've done as a new government. And what I heard over and over and over again not only from the investors, but also what we heard from our discussions with the credit rating agencies was that they supported our approach, that they felt that our plan was credible and that they deemed our approach to be prudent.

That was a really, I think, telling experience for us as a Province, that we went to those, you know, those investors and those credit rating agencies, and we heard great feedback on their perspective on how Manitoba is doing and the important fiscal planning work that we've done and, ultimately, the path we outlined in our budget, which, again, I think speaks to the preparation we've done during this challenging time to, in light of all this uncertainty, put forward a budget that was made for the moment, that had a very clear set of priorities that sought to create resiliency, sustainability and more economic strength during a period of significant risk.

So, you know, I think one of the things that they responded to so favourably was the incredible work that we've done with this budget to, again, build a stronger economy and to create significant jobs and economy—economic growth through our plan.

They were very excited about our, you know—our focus on trade-supporting investments, specifically those kinds of investments that will expand Manitoba's role as a trade corridor to help make sure that Manitoba businesses can get their products to market and can look to an expanded set of options when it comes to getting our goods out of Manitoba and abroad.

So those kinds of investments in the Port of Churchill and the rail line, in CentrePort, what was clear, and this is the feedback that we heard from the investors was, they really saw a government that was forward-looking, that was focused on economic growth, resiliency and that was focused on the things that really matter and moving our province ahead and beyond, of course, just a more resilient economy, focusing on the other important economy-supporting areas of policy like improving health care and making life more affordable.

Mrs. Stone: Perhaps had the minister not been talking in hypotheticals as it related to US tariffs over the past number of months, then his budget could have properly

reflected the economic realities that Manitoba is facing. But instead, you know, this budget was released, March, well after Trump had announced tariffs back in January and well after—in November, when he was elected as President—indicated that tariffs would be coming.

My colleagues and I, including my colleague beside me, spoke at length about this in the media and on the record about the need to have a fiscal plan that would properly reflect what impact the tariffs would have on Manitoba. And this minister's response was that he would not be speaking in hypotheticals. However, as we all know, those hypotheticals quickly became a reality, and this budget missed that moment and missed that mark and did not reflect the realities that Manitobans were already facing at the time that this budget was released.

So as it relates to the projected 1.7 per cent real GDP growth for 2025, the minister's numbers are not adding up. The minister is projecting that growth at 1.7 per cent; however, his revenue is projected to increase by over \$1.7 billion from last year's budget. So if we look at page 12 of the budget documents, last year's fiscal revenues were already down by roughly \$70 million; budget last year was over \$23.267 billion, first projected \$23.337 billion.

This year's budget, the minister is now predicting revenues will go up by \$1.7 billion from previous year. Economists are saying that there is a possible—some are saying probable—economic recession coming, comparable to the 2009 economic crash. We know that tariffs are having an impact. There are very, very few affordability measures announced in this budget beyond just a few tax deferrals.

Plus, this minister has increased taxes on seniors, homeowners, property owners and workers—all paying more under this NDP government. As we know, when Manitobans are taxed higher and we have a weaker economy and projected job losses, Manitobans have less disposable income to put into the economy. Economists have already indicated that this budget was too rosy, as I already mentioned. Rather than properly planning for the fiscal realities that we were going to be seeing in 2025, this minister said that he would not talk in hypotheticals.

So I must ask the minister, where are those revenues coming from if his GDP growth doesn't meet the 1.7 per cent target that has been laid out in this budget?

* (16:20)

MLA Sala: Good to have the MLA for Steinbach joining us here today.

To the question that was asked by the critic: So again, we do continue to see significant uncertainty, of course. President Trump's tariff approach seems to change and shift, and we've seen multiple different iterations: they're on, they're off. So we continue to focus on the working through this very challenging problem. And I'm sure the critic and their team appreciates the complexity involved in being able to, you know, say with certainty what the future holds when it comes to Mr. Trump—President Trump's decision making.

One thing, of course, we can speak to is that the actions of President Trump have united Canadians in a way that we really haven't seen in some time—at least, I would say, for my generation that we've never seen. And not only uniting Canadians in a way that we've never seen, but also uniting governments—provincial governments, to be specific.

That has created an unbelievable opportunity for us as a province—as the Province of Manitoba. Because we now know that while for many years talks about reduction of internal trade barriers have been bandied about—been discussed, we really haven't been able to make progress as a country in reducing the scope of those internal trade barriers.

And one of the things that I think, again, we can look to, not as a silver lining but at least something that we can all agree on—that is President Trump has united us in a way that we've never seen in this country in recent memory. And that opportunity that that has created when it comes to the reduction of interprovincial trade barriers is massive.

You know, we've seen economists speak to the scope of that opportunity, the estimated extent of that opportunity. I think I've—I understand that it could increase Canadian GDP by as much as \$200 billion. That is an enormous lift to our country's GDP, and potentially to provincial GDP, that could really be a remarkable opportunity for us all and for businesses throughout provinces in Canada.

Now, you know, beyond that broader opportunity, we know that in Manitoba, we stand to have an outsized benefit from the reduction of interprovincial trade barriers. And one of the reasons for that is because we as a province have one of the lowest number of exceptions under the CFTA of any province. In fact, I think, actually, we are—we have the lowest number of exceptions, and I believe it's nine only—nine exceptions.

So that means that, as we go forward as a country and we work together with other provinces to try to reduce those barriers even further, Manitoba has an outsized opportunity here. The opportunity is—relative to other provinces—is much bigger because, frankly, we already are a relatively open jurisdiction when it comes to internal trade.

And so as we move forward in partnership with other provinces—and I'm excited to say there's some news coming on this and it's going to be very exciting, indeed, in the not too distant future—we know that Manitoba is in an incredible position. And so very excited about the important work that's being led by our Premier (Mr. Kinew) and by our minister responsible for jobs on this front.

We know that, you know, we need to keep pushing to ensure that we don't let this moment pass us by. And I think about when I was on that investor tour last week meeting with some of the institutional investors we were fortunate to connect with, you know, hearing from them how, for years, I think there was recognition of that opportunity, but a lot of skepticism about the willingness of provinces to do it, and the amazing sea change that they're witnessing in Canada from provincial leaders in terms of their willingness to get down to do the hard, detailed work necessary to make this happen.

And it is, frankly, a lot of very detailed work looking at, you know, NAICs codes and products and understanding all these archaic things that are preventing goods, services and people from moving freely across our borders to create more opportunity. And I think, you know, in Manitoba, one of those areas where that opportunity is really outsized is in services—professional services.

And look, in this future environment, where we're going to see lowering of interprovincial trade barriers, Manitoba, with our affordability advantage—with our incredibly low costs of living, our low hydro costs thanks to the work that our government is doing, just affordability advantage in general—is going to make us an even more attractive place to move and build a business.

Mrs. Stone: With all due respect, Chairman, to the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) there has not been anything done to remove interprovincial trade barriers by this Premier. That work was done by Brian Pallister and his team, which launched the path forward. However, there is still more to be done, as we all know.

But in fact that this minister and his Premier are holding up legislation to do that very thing by not passing Bill 227, The Free Trade and Mobility Within Canada Act, which is consistent with what other provinces across the country are doing. So while other provinces are well ahead, Manitoba is falling behind. As we see time and time again, it is all talk and no action by this minister and this NDP government. So they may say that they're doing things, however, they are clearly not.

But I want to go back and just very clearly put on this record the numbers that I had spoke to earlier, and perhaps this minister can answer that question that I had asked. Looking at page 12 of the budget documents, and I will repeat some of these numbers into the record.

Last year's fiscal revenues, already down by roughly \$70 million—last year's budget was \$23.267 billion versus the projected \$23.337 billion; this year's budget, minister is now predicting revenues will go up by \$1.7 billion from previous year.

So I'm going to ask the minister again, where are those revenues coming from if his GDP growth doesn't meet the 1.7 per cent target that he has identified within these budget documents? As we know, economists across the country are indicating that his revenue outlook is too rosy. So where are those revenues going to come if that doesn't get met? Is he going to increase taxes on Manitobans to cover off that revenue projections?

* (16:30)

MLA Sala: So again, you know, when it comes to prudence and the important work that we've done and the potential risks we're facing, again, I pointed already to the—for the critic to—she can see in budget we were transparent and outlined risks on pages 38 and 39, so I invite her to go back to those pages.

Again, the response to those risks is reflected in our tariff contingency budget, which did the important work of being very transparent with Manitobans about what we would do in the instance that we saw those risks manifest.

But, again, the question is, in this environment of uncertainty and in this environment where we don't, at this point, have clarity over what the scope of those tariffs would be, what Manitobans have a right to expect is that their government would be doing the important work of creating the most resilient economy possible, and I think that's exactly what this budget sought to do.

And, of course, I've had a chance to talk a bit about this already today but I'm delighted to be able to speak to it more. The centrepiece of that budget was a capital plan that will create an estimated 18,000 jobs in Manitoba, building the infrastructure that we need and that, frankly, where we fell behind in a really significant way when it comes to economy-supporting infrastructure, like the schools we need to make sure that families that move to Manitoba have a great school for their kids to go to; that the seniors that move to this province or that our residents have access to PCHs to make sure they can live in a dignified way and get the care they deserve—so significant investments to support, again, a strong economy.

And then, of course, economy-supporting investments, like our investments in the Port of Churchill, the rail line, CentrePort, our commitment to twin Highway 1 to ensure that that trucking corridor can be leveraged as it needs to. These are the kinds of investments and shows the focus of a government that is worried about ensuring—or that is focused on ensuring that we have a sustainable and growing economy, even in light of all the uncertainty we're facing.

Beyond that, of course, the budget outlined a significant list of other really important priorities that we continue to work through, whether it be the great work that's happening and the great progress that we're making on interprovincial trade and, again, very excited about what the near future holds on that front.

Buy Canadian: We committed to ensuring—led by our fantastic Minister responsible for Public Service Delivery—that we, just like Manitobans who are making different purchasing decisions and wanting to make sure that, as they spend money, that they're doing everything possible to support our local economies, they want their government to do the same, and our budget leans into that. And that buy Canadian legislation we brought forward will help to bring some of those expenditures that are currently going to the US back to Canada, and ideally, as much as possible, back to Manitoba.

Beyond that, of course, energy infrastructure. Look, I spoke to this earlier today. It is no exaggeration to say that the former government left us in, not only in a terrible fiscal hole with a \$2-billion deficit, but also the energy infrastructure deficit that they had created was significant.

It is, frankly, embarrassing thinking about the fact that we went seven and a half years, but when it came to energy, we made no progress of any kind other than to focus on finding new and novel ways, as I say

probably way too frequently in the House, to raise hydro rates.

Where—you know, we were—we saw the former government focus on raising hydro rates in BITSA bills. That's the first time that's ever happened in the history of this entire Province, that a provincial government decided to raise hydro rates in a manner that did not have the benefit of having any oversight from the Public Utilities Board; meaning they raised hydro rates there in a way that, ultimately, we'll never know if that increase was needed because the Public Utilities Board never had a chance to review it. They just rammed it through.

And ultimately, I think that just speaks to, you know, where really the other—the former government was at when it came to energy. It really wasn't about building the infrastructure, building a path forward. It was no vision for ensuring we had the energy we needed to grow our economy, and, unfortunately, we had to move really quickly, but I think we've done that in the right way.

And then beyond that, setting these foundational pieces in place like a critical mineral strategy that I'm so proud to have seen be put forward by my colleague, the minister responsible for jobs, who has done remarkable work setting the stage for us to unlock more opportunity. We've got two mines that are coming online since our government has come in. There's a new goldmine, thanks to Alamos making those investments in concert with the work that we've done with Hydro to help make that happen. And there's a new potash mine coming online in '25-26.

This is the work of a government that's focused on building jobs, creating a strong economy. That's why Manitobans sent us here and that's exactly what we're doing.

Mrs. Stone: Oh, the hypocrisy of this minister who gave himself the sweeping powers to increase hydro rates by 4 per cent in an order-in-council while also fearing with the Public Utilities Board by announcing a political gimmick rate freeze earlier this year.

But I do have a—just going back on to tariff analysis, and during Health Estimates, the Minister of Health said that the Finance Minister would be able to answer this question.

So has the Finance Minister done an analysis of the impact of tariffs on drug supply, medical equipment, et cetera?

* (16:40)

MLA Sala: So to the question that was asked, the critic might have seen that, just yesterday, Trump announced tariffs on pharmaceuticals that are going to be coming forward, I think, in two weeks is what we're hearing, the details in two weeks.

So, you know, I'm surprised that this question is being asked and that it's clear that right now we are all facing a lack of clarity about what exactly will transpire when it comes to pharmaceuticals or other health-care goods.

We are monitoring this very actively and we'll certainly be watching very carefully in the weeks ahead, but we don't know what that looks like at this point because no one knows except Mr. Trump. So we're looking forward to getting a little bit more clarity around those impacts so we can understand, you know, the consequences here in Manitoba.

It is important to go back, and I think the critic did reference, you know, their approach when it came to hydro rates, and it gives me a great opportunity to—just to dig a little deeper into what happened under their leadership when it came to hydro rates. And I'll remind the member that for three years in a row they brought forward a bill, that I think was most recently called bill 36, that was fundamentally about kneecapping the Public Utilities Board and setting hydro rates at the Cabinet table.

And any suggestion that our government is, you know, following in their footsteps needs to be clearly put to rest, and I'm happy to do that here today on the record, which is to say our government very proudly stands behind and understands the important role that the Public Utilities Board plays in ensuring independent oversight and rate setting. And, unfortunately, for many years, the former government worked to undermine that role that they played. That's not partisan spin, that's just a fact.

And anyone who's interested can look at the pieces of legislation that the critic's team brought forward year over year which sought to set hydro rates at the Cabinet table. You don't have to be an economist to know that that is a bad idea to have—you know, have financial targets for a Crown corporation set without any real connection or understanding of what the fiscal pressures or financial requirements are for that organization, and that's exactly what they did.

They—the bill sought to identify extremely aggressive fiscal targets for Hydro which were completely detached from Hydro's actual financial needs. And there was a clear purpose to that. Why did they do

that? Because by setting aggressive financial targets for Hydro at the Cabinet table, that was going to trigger massive hydro rate increases. That's the situation that they had set up for Manitobans.

That is, you know, direct—a direct impact on Manitobans' wallets because, ultimately, Manitobans, under that scenario, don't have the benefit of knowing that the independent regulator, who's there to ensure we pay the most affordable rates possible, is overseeing that rate setting. And what that bill proposed to do was to have the PUB's role be switched from one focused on ensuring that hydro rates were set in a way that reflected Hydro's financial needs to instead having the PUB's role be relegated to simply being there to determine whether Hydro was meeting their government's financial targets when it came to Hydro.

That is bananas. And, you know, we saw civil society and others rise up in response to that because Manitobans knew that that was a formula for ensuring very fast-raising hydro rates that would have realistically placed a significant burden on current generation of Manitobans as opposed to having that burden be spread over, you know, an amount of time that would reflect Hydro's actual needs, their actual fiscal position.

That is the difference between the former government and our government. They had a reckless focus on jacking up hydro rates as quickly as possible through, as I mentioned earlier and I—the words I've used too often—new and novel measures, whether it's putting hydro rate increases in BITSA legislation, where Manitobans will never have the opportunity to understand whether that increase was needed, or whether it was to put legislation forward that would ultimately have hydro rates be set at the Cabinet table by having, you know, again, the last former government and their Cabinet determine financial targets for an organization that were completely detached from the reality that Hydro was facing.

That's the difference. That's, really, I think, what Manitobans, you know—the message that they sent to the former government was clear when they kicked them out of government and they brought in a government that's actually focused on their needs and ensuring affordability when it comes to hydro rates.

Mrs. Stone: Well, Manitobans would all agree that it's a bad idea to interfere with the Public Utilities Board by bypassing it to announce a rate freeze without the Public Utilities Board being able to review that through interveners and the proper process. And Manitobans would also agree it's a bad idea to announce a rate freeze and then announce an 11 per cent hike less

than six months later. And that did happen under this minister's watch and as a result of these—this minister's bad decisions and poor fiscal planning,

I do want to go—shift gears a little bit and go back to some comments that the minister made during question period yesterday, as well as he's referenced it a couple times during these Estimates today.

The minister indicated that he's met with investors and credit rating agencies. So, as we know, last year our ratings were A+ stable from S&P, A high from DBRS and AA2 from Moody's.

So, easy question to the minister: When he—did the minister meet with all three credit rating agencies recently? If not, does he plan to. And, in those meetings, did he go there or are those agencies coming here, or a bit of both? And, if so, which ones?

The Chairperson: Before I introduce the minister, I'd just like to offer a gentle caution reminder that members who hold the floor should be able to speak without having other members talking over them. So I'd ask all members to show a little more respect for the member who holds the floor, regardless of who it is.

Thank you so much.

MLA Sala: So the question was, did I meet with the three credit rating agencies; and the answer to that is, of course. This is a time of massive uncertainty and, you know, I'm very focused on doing my job and doing it well. That is a critical part of my role and something that I'm very proud to say that our government has, I think, attended to in a very serious way in building strong relationships with S&P, Moody's, DBRS, as those key credit rating agencies that, of course, had significant influence over our borrowing costs through their ratings.

Those meetings which we had last week were, you know, only the latest in terms of our efforts of connecting with those rating agencies to ensure that they have the opportunity to ask us questions about our fiscal plan and to dig into the work that we've done to ensure that we can deliver on that balanced budget target that we've—were set on delivering on.

And, you know, I can say that all three of those credit rating agencies were, I think, very interested in and pleased to know that we had, as a government, done something that hasn't been done in this province for a very long time, which was to do multi-year planning to look at, as I mentioned earlier today, significant government decisions throughout the

track, you know, the impacts of collective bargaining, our commitments as government.

And we were very proud to outline for them, as a relatively new government, how hard we've worked to ensure that we have turned over every stone and have looked at all major decisions throughout the next three years so that we can give them confidence that when we say we're going to do something, that we're going to do it.

* (16:50)

And again, that is an incredibly important part of the work that I do in my role, is to maintain those relationships because, as I'm sure the critic knows, this is about ensuring that our costs of borrowing are as low as possible and to ensure that those spreads are maintained and that we manage those to the greatest extent we can. We need to make sure that those relationships are maintained and that those credit rating agencies have the benefit of understanding all of that hard planning, that work that we've done, and that they're given the benefit of those opportunities to dig in and ask us hard questions.

And again, I'm super proud that, after those discussions, the message we heard back is that they liked what we're doing, and that they thought our—we were taking a prudent approach. And I hope the critic can really hear that that is something that we are focused on and that that work is hard, but it's important and we're committed to it.

She also, in her comments, talked a bit about our Hydro rate freeze, which is great. I love the opportunity to talk about it. I think that that is, again, an important piece of our government's commitment to keeping costs low for Manitobans. And in addition to that, our gas tax cut. We know that the last government liked gas taxes to be very high. They really focused on keeping them as maximal as possible throughout their seven and a half years. You know, I think it was like, how much can we get out of Manitobans, how high can we make gas taxes.

And, you know, our government likes them low. And that's, I think, something that we've shown, and Manitobans have responded. I think this was a very popular measure that we took in our first budget to eliminate the gas tax for an entire year. Absolutely fantastic savings for Manitobans, and especially those folks living in rural communities, like the one that the critic lives in, where folks have to drive long distances to get to work, to drive their kids to a hockey game. Big savings for folks, again.

But not only those folks living in rural and northern Manitoba, but also, of course, all over our province. And then, you know, that gas tax freeze, or the gas tax holiday, we were excited and proud to have brought those savings to Manitobans, but it didn't end there.

Our last budget brought in a permanent 10 per cent cut to those gas taxes, again showing our government's focus on cost reduction in a way that was meaningful for Manitobans, who know that they face those costs every time they go to the pump. And under our government, they saw those costs go down, and we know under the former government, those costs were as high as they possibly could be.

That's the difference between our records. And, of course, in addition to those high gas taxes, they made it worse by their significant support for carbon taxes, and voting in favour of carbon taxation. That's the record they left Manitobans with, is a government that was in favour of carbon taxes on Manitobans, in favour of high gas taxes, in favour of high Hydro rates.

That's a sad record when it comes to affordability. We're showing the way forward when it comes to keeping more money in Manitobans' pocketbooks.

Mrs. Stone: And with respect to the credit rating agencies, it's good to hear that they're pleased with the work that was started by the former PC government, as in Budgets 2020 to 2023, the former PC started the multi-year planning and multi-year capital plan.

So I'm sure the former Finance minister, Cam Friesen, would say you're welcome to this current Minister of Finance (MLA Sala).

An Honourable Member: He'd say more than that.

Mrs. Stone: And probably more than that—thank you to my colleague, the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen).

Just in regards to the meetings with the credit rating agencies, with upwards of a possible \$1.9-billion deficit, \$2.3 billion in debt servicing costs, borrowing limits at \$44.4 billion and a 7 per cent increase in spending compared to initially predicted in last year's spending plan, on top of weak economic real GDP growth for both 2024 and 2025, what did those agencies say about Manitoba's fiscal position and did they give any suggestions regarding government spending and restraint?

MLA Sala: So again, grateful for the chance to talk about the important work and the conversations we had with credit rating agencies and some of the discussion and what it focused on. And what I can say

is that we did talk a lot about that multi-year planning work that we had been doing to understand our cost structures throughout the next three years, digging deep into, you know, how we went about that work and, ultimately, some of the lessons we learned from that MNP report, which spoke to, again, really, the very different approach that we saw under the former government, and, you know, we focus a lot on what we're going to do to effectively not replicate what the PCs did when they were in government.

Now, we talk about what the work, the multi-year planning, that was purportedly done under the leadership of the last government and their Finance ministers. The issue is that we know that they were just numbers on a page; it's not worth anything. We know that the plans did not reflect reality.

So you can do multi-year planning, but if it's all imaginary time and it's not based in what's actually happening, then there's really not a lot of value to having a multi-year plan. We look at, for example, the fact that the last government didn't settle collective agreements for years and years and years and years. They pretended that that wasn't an issue. They gave zeroes to workers, including nurses, during the middle of COVID and through one of the most challenging times in our province's history. Those were all costs that were going to have to be paid at some point. Again, were those costs reflected in the last government's planning? No, they didn't do that work; it was all imaginary.

So, you know, again, you can make a three-year plan, a five-year plan, a 20-year plan, if it's make-believe it doesn't really benefit anyone.

So, you know, further to that, we saw their failure when it came to collective agreements. We saw their failure to account for so many different areas of costs that they just ignored, but, again, fortunately—and I think we made this quite clear with the credit rating agencies—we're focused on the hard reality, the hard costs that governments face. We looked at multiple years to make sure that we put together a credible plan. We showed fiscal prudence, and that's something that had not been shown in Manitoba for many, many years.

I'm so proud, again, to work with this team, I'll say, you know, as we come closer to the end of the day today, to have amazing supports in Treasury Board and in Finance that have helped to inform the work that we've done, to serve Manitobans, to make sure that we put forward a credible fiscal plan, a prudent fiscal plan and one that will ensure that we,

again, in light of the risks we're facing at the south of us, have the most resilient, strongest economy to protect jobs here in Manitoba.

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

CHAMBER

JUSTICE

* (15:00)

The Chairperson (Tyler Blashko): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Justice.

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

Could the minister introduce their staff in attendance?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Thank you very much, honourable Chair, and you caught me a little bit off-guard, there, but I appreciate your promptness in starting off the committee here this afternoon.

Introductions of the staff: so today we have, of course, deputy minister Jeremy Akerstream, assistant deputy minister and assistant deputy—sorry, deputy AG Michael Conner and, of course, assistant deputy minister Owen Fergusson.

The Chairperson: Thank you so much.

And now, as per subrule 77(15), questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): At this time, I would like to cede the floor until 3:30 p.m. to the honourable member from Tyndall Park.

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I would like to thank my colleague from Brandon West for allowing me some time here this afternoon to ask some questions, as well as the Minister of Justice, who I have a great working relationship with. And I would love to fire off as many questions as we can get through and get through as many answers as possible, so I'll dive right in.

How is the Justice Department working with municipalities to improve community safety and visible presence of peace officers without overpolicing?

Mr. Wiebe: I appreciate the kind words from the member for Tyndall Park and I will do my best to keep up with her flurry of questions.

In this case, the question that she's asking—there's a lot to it. There is a lot to that answer, and so I wanted to take the time to make sure that we got some of the information on the record, and of course I'm happy to dig in deeper if she prefers.

So, just as a starting point, I think she knows well, honourable Chair, about some of the work that we've done around stabilizing—first enhancing the funding fundamentally to law enforcement across the province by increasing in Budget '24 law enforcement by 28 per cent, the funding.

And we read these numbers into the record last time, but just as a frame of reference: the urban police grant in '24-25 was at \$57,353,000, and that was a massive jump from '23-24 where the number was at \$43,614,000. And, of course, that was a number that was flatlined for, you know, seven and a half years under the previous government.

And so that massive increase and injection in support at the base level was important for communities to be able to start to do some of the work that they wanted to do, but of course, since then, we've also built in that escalator. We've committed—in this budget we've committed an additional 2 per cent, but we've committed to bring that number at 2 per cent going forward, which gives some stability to the overall funding.

But I think the member opposite's question is a good one because it focuses not just on that stabilizing funding that we've provided and that additional funding, but it talks about the input of communities, and that's really been a key to our approach.

We, of course, as she knows, have developed our public safety strategy. We travelled across the province, we listened to communities and what we tried to do there was not to simply tell communities the kind of policing models that would work for those communities, we asked them what solutions they had and what could they bring to the table.

In the case of Swan River, of course, that looked like a GIS, an investigation—an investigative section that allows for a deeper dive into some of the organized crime and some of the deep-seated and -rooted crime issues that they're having in the Swan Valley.

Now, of course, in Thompson, we're working with the City of Thompson on their crime suppression unit,

and so it was using those individual issues and being able to then support them. In Brandon, it was the—it was a downtown safety initiative that we supported.

Here in the city of Winnipeg, the Downtown Community Safety Partnership, right. So each community, each area is bringing a different idea or solution to the table and that's where our government has had some success in really building off of those.

But it goes much deeper than that because, of course, we have the community mobilization tables which exist in a number of communities throughout the province of Manitoba. These are, you know, driven by—at the community level. And it's really about that kind of holistic solutions that they can bring. And we're supporting those.

We're also supporting our community safety planning, which has been under way for a number of years as well. So there's a lot of work that's being done at the community level.

And then a number of municipalities have said, well, look, you know, law enforcement—we need them and that investment is great, but we want to supplement or build off of that capacity and we want to implement a community safety officer program, a CSO program.

And so, you know, record investments in CSOs—more and more communities are starting to understand how those would fit with the overall public safety picture in their communities and they're starting to come to us with sort of different angles—I could maybe put it that way—on how to deploy that program in their communities.

All of these are tailored to the needs in community, and so that's where I think we're going to have the most successes when we partner with communities rather than just a top-down approach where, you know, it's law enforcement but there is more to the story.

And, of course, there's more that we're doing in terms of the root causes. We're talking about mental health; we're talking about housing; we're talking about addictions. That's not always only in the Department of Justice, but of course, the whole team here in government that's making a difference in that regard.

MLA Lamoureux: As I'm sure the minister is aware—I'm sure all MLAs experience this—we often hear from homeowners in our constituencies as well as small businesses of all the ongoing crime, whether that be

theft, whether that be break-ins, vandalism; it's ongoing, on a daily basis, all throughout the province of Manitoba.

Are there currently any programs in place for homeowners or small-business owners to help with some of the financial cost that they either endure putting up cameras or after the fact, if a crime takes place, such as fixing glass?

* (15:10)

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, well, I appreciate, again, the line of questioning here because I think it really speaks to, I think, as you said, the lot of the work that we're doing, honourable Chair, as MLAs: you know, out in community, talking to folks and just hearing the frustration that they have, right, around—I mean, sometimes it should characterize as maybe petty crime or a feeling of unsafety or concerns in the neighbourhood, but oftentimes these are significant issues, and oftentimes they lead, of course, to more significant issues.

So I think she's got—honourable Chair, she's got the right—she's on the right track with this line of questioning.

Of course, the member opposite will know that during the campaign, we talked about our Security Rebate Program. We had earmarked \$500,000 for that program and we—you know, we anticipated it would be popular, but I'll just say we didn't maybe anticipate just how popular and significant this was going to be for homeowners.

And so, as I said, \$500,000 originally earmarked; we boosted that to \$2 million and we saw that money go out the door very quickly.

Because what this program essentially did was it enabled homeowners to protect their own personal property, which, of course, is important, but it's having a larger impact in community. Because now, not only are you protecting your own stuff, but my neighbour's camera across the street is helping to protect my house. My camera is helping to protect somebody down the back lane, and, you know, and the business down the street who's participated as well in the program is also part of that solution.

What we did recognize, though, through that process—as I said, businesses were eligible and many applied and were successful in taking some of these steps, but we met extensively with the Retail Council of Canada, with the restaurants Manitoba, Restaurants Canada and a number of other representatives of business, and what they were telling us was they want to do more and they want to be even more proactive

when it comes to safety and security. This is not only for their business and to protect their, you know, their business itself, but it's for the workers, the people who work there. We want safe businesses where they feel comfortable hiring people.

And so we identified this need, we identified the success of the original program. That's coming back; that \$2 million is now earmarked for this upcoming year, and so that will be—begin flowing soon for people to take advantage of it once again.

And then, we've now got a separate stream for small businesses, of \$10 million. And this money will not only be for security systems, for them to be able to enhance or to get some security stuff; what it's also going to do is for repairs, and I think the member opposite mentioned that. It will be eligible for repairs, and we're going to work with their insurance and make sure that if it's—you know, there's a deductible or something that needs to be paid, that'll be eligible as well.

We've modelled this after other provinces who have done similar programs. We know that it can make a difference. But it's about supporting business, making sure they're feeling like they want to invest in the communities that they're in, and, again, keeping workers safe.

Now, there's a whole bunch more we could talk about. We could talk about Crime Stoppers, we could talk about the Citizens on Patrol Program, we could talk about money that's flowed directly through the community—the property forfeiture fund—and we could talk about how that money is used for additional cameras and security and that flows out into community.

But I think that gives, maybe, the member a broader sense of it, and I'm happy to dig into any of those individual pieces.

MLA Lamoureux: What role is the Justice Department playing specifically with city transit?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, I do my best to capture as much information and pass it along to the member. I apologize my answers are going long because there's just so much to say, but I do want to hopefully get some of this on the record here.

So the member opposite will know that the creation of the transit safety officer program was actually only possible because of the amendments that we made here to the legislation around CSOs, the community safety officers. Those transit safety officers are designated as CSOs, and we had to make the

changes to give them additional authorities, make sure that they were able to do the work that the City of Winnipeg was envisioning with regards to the work in transit.

Of course, I'll just—maybe just back up and just to say, you know, stabilizing the municipal funding for the City of Winnipeg as well as every other municipality, I could turn it over to one of my colleagues who could talk more. I'm sure this minister could spend lots of time talking about the—repairing the relationship, but that is a key point to just maybe mention.

But it does go a step further with the transit safety officers, because not only do we continue to have oversight and work with them to ensure that the reporting that's done, it fits with the standards that have been established for CSOs across the province, but we also, of course, at the starting point, provided the training for those officers.

And so we're continuing to listen to the City of Winnipeg. We're ready to work with them because, you know, there's been lots of conversation about whether that program should be expanded or what it should look like. Really, this is, again, the City of Winnipeg who's leading the charge here, but we want to make sure that we're helping to set the stage for them to build on that program and then also develop the supports around that program—things like the DCSP, the Downtown Community Safety Partnership, which, of course, does a lot of work in supporting the work of the transit safety officers.

How can we build off of the successes that they're having in transit and then give them that support once, you know, people are identified that need additional supports?

And, again, I mean I could go on about the work of the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith), but these are all part of a bigger tapestry of work that's being done that will provide that level of safety and security that people are looking for.

MLA Lamoureux: What's being done to reduce the wait times for family court hearings, particularly in cases involving custody or domestic issues?

* (15:20)

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I appreciate the question, and it is a good one, one that is important, of course, not just in delivering justice in—you know, for families, but it really makes a difference to individuals and to, sort of, how they're able to move on with their lives.

We know that the Family Resolution Service, which is a branch of the Courts Division, has created that single-window public-community-private partnership that's been developed to meet the obligations and address the diverse needs of Manitoba families who are navigating separation, divorce, other issues. And service providers who are there are able to deliver that continuum of resolution supports—those are social, legal, financial and emotional—with the goal of supporting families' safety and wellbeing.

It's important to note that this is—provides better access to justice and is done in a non-adversarial approach, which makes a huge difference in, you know, and, again, not the—not only the efficiencies of court but also in addressing the issues of family violence, helping to reduce child poverty and concerns for children, and ultimately it's about promoting the best interests of the child.

So those are some of the quick details about the program, but it is an important question to ask, and it's one that we believe through this program we're able to address some of those concerns around wait times and ensuring that there's a smooth functioning of that part of the justice system.

MLA Lamoureux: How is the department expanding access to restorative justice for youth, especially those in inner-city schools? And will the department consider bringing back youth justice committees?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I do have some of the information the member opposite asked for. I'm conscious of the time; I want to make sure we get another question in at least. So I will answer maybe just with some of the information she asked for and we can always follow up offline if that's her preference.

With regards to the community justice centres—sorry—community justice councils—committees. Say it again—community justice committees is what she was asking about, for youth—youth justice committees. So built into that, there are 52 operating within the province of Manitoba. If she likes—would like some additional information about the dynamics of those I'd be happy to share them but I just wanted to make sure that we put that on the record.

That being said, I think the broader question around restorative justice is an important one. That's why we focus so much on building capacity around restorative justice in our public safety strategy. And so the public safety strategy talked not just about some of the successes that we've had, of course, the RJ branch cost shares, manages a cost-shared funding agreement with

the—Canada through the Indigenous Justice Program, and there are currently 10 of these programs that are operating in Manitoba, of course, in various communities. Again, I can get into some of the details, there.

But we are also operating and we're funding four Manitoba-specific restorative justice programs which have no federal involvement, and those include partnerships with the John Howard Society of Brandon, the John Howard Society out in the Parkland region, Mediation Services in the city of Winnipeg and the salvation of—Salvation Army.

Those programs are a starting point. And what we're looking at building from there are additional resources, additional supports for restorative justice, because we know that they can make a difference, again, in access to justice and true healing for communities.

We also know that, you know, it makes sense in our justice system, where we have challenges around capacity, that by enabling communities to come on board to build off of successful programs, that we can take some of the challenge out of that equation. And that's really going to be our focus. As I said, it's in our public safety strategy. It's a main focus and something that we're going to continue to work on over the next few years of the mandate.

MLA Lamoureux: Again, I want to thank my colleague from Brandon West just for allowing me half an hour here this afternoon to ask some questions. This will be my last question.

How is the Justice Department working across departments to provide wraparound supports to survivors, especially those in culturally diverse communities?

* (15:30)

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I want to thank the member opposite for the question, and I think this is where the limitations of the time that's been allotted here today to the member, I think, are a bit of a limitation in terms of what we can dig into. Because there really is a lot, and in terms of the, sort of the breadth of the question, it might be difficult for me to get exactly what the member opposite is asking for. But I can definitely put some words on the record about this.

I just wanted to start by once again commending the member opposite for the work that she did around Keira's Law. And, you know, I think it really highlights, again, I think, a different kind of approach to the political sort of arena that we find ourselves in, but one where we can be as collaborative as possible.

And there's always room to maneuver around the edges, I'll—maybe I'll put it that way.

But when it comes to the overall importance of this kind of work, I think what she did was commendable, and I'm glad to see that that's now moving forward, and she's done a great job in continuing to bring that issue forward.

And so just in terms of, kind of, how we support victims of intimate partner violence, how we support survivors, you know, that's going to be a big part of it. We're working with the judiciary, we're working with our prosecutors, working with law enforcement and ensuring that some of these resources and tools are available to them. We've committed, again, in the public safety strategy, to specifically look at the Victims' Bill of Rights and address issues there.

We know that there's work that needs to be done, and there's also work that we can do as a department when it comes to supporting, you know, all victims of crime. And, really, that's the focus that we're looking to take: not only intimate partner violence, but for all.

With regards to Victim Services specifically, the Victim Services ensures staff are trained in culturally appropriate and in trauma-informed service delivery and so that they are—our staff are up to date with the best practices, allowing us to screen for intimate partner violence and also understanding how to approach that when it comes to, again, that culturally sensitive approach.

Intimate partner violence is screened early and throughout the service delivery that's provided. It's identified—you know, identifying a greater number of families now who are disclosing IPV for the first time. And so we're able to now connect them to those public and community supports that we have much sooner.

The need for the supports has increased. Approximately 80 per cent of families experiencing some sort of violence when separating or divorcing and the national family violence rates have increased, as well, by 20 to 30 per cent, so this is a serious issue.

Families experiencing intimate partner violence who have access to our FRS services report feeling relieved to not only just be able to tell their story once, but then to access supports in less than 24—or sorry, in less than 48 hours is our service standard and for a single worker to start to assist them in navigating both their civil and their criminal matter where charges have been laid. And so that's a more personalized type of support that's offered directly to those folks.

The FRS continues to expand the capacity to meet the needs of families, having recently added a new position to provide triage of co-ordination of complex cases in addition to trauma-informed supports to families who are experiencing family violence.

Our department, as well, continues to expand initiatives to reduce the traumatizing effects of the justice process more broadly on victims of crime. These initiatives include creating additional soft spaces for victims in or near court buildings, improving the availability of cultural supplies for our victim services in that—at our FRS offices, and permitting support animals in the courtroom, which I've had the chance to meet some of those, and what a difference they make.

But it really is about providing that cultural and trauma-informed training to staff, ensuring that they have the tools that they need to support victims. It's an important part of the equation.

Again, we talk a lot about getting tough on crime and of course there's a lot of work that needs to be done. But it's also about supporting victims and it's about creating those supports for them over the long term; again, building out from the—you know, our department into other departments, a whole of government approach is going to be important. We're committed to that and that's going to be a focus for our department over the next couple of years.

And thanks to the member for the question.

The Chairperson: Before we continue on with questions, I'd invite the member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen) to introduce the staff in attendance.

Mr. Balcaen: With me today, again, as yesterday, is Mr. Shannon Martin, researcher with the PC team.

The Chairperson: Perfect.

Mr. Balcaen: Yesterday, I asked a few questions regarding costing and what was provided to various municipal police services for the retail crime initiatives and the fact that retail crime is not just a Winnipeg issue; it's an issue that impacts all Manitobans.

So just a question for the minister: Besides Brandon and Winnipeg Police Services, were there overtime dollars afforded to any other municipal or federal agency to have projects or initiatives involving specifically retail crime?

* (15:40)

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I just wanted to start today with the member from Brandon West by, first and foremost,

acknowledging the incredible work of the Winnipeg Police Service. Today they released their statistics, their crime stats, for the year 2024, so the first year that our government has been—first full year that our government's been in office, and, you know, it's starting to show the beginnings of an improvement, of a plateauing and, in some cases, a reduction in the overall crime numbers that we're seeing in the city.

And, you know, I think notable in those numbers, or at least maybe just on my mind because I am wearing this jersey here today and other people in this Chamber are wearing their Jets gear, as are tens of thousands of Manitobans who are very excited to come down and either be at the game, if they're so lucky—I wish I could go—but at the very least to come down and experience a Whiteout party.

And we know that a big part of Winnipeggers' enthusiasm for the Jets is being together and being together in their downtown. You know, we talk about this as Winnipeg's downtown, but it's Manitoba's downtown in a sense too because so many people travel in, again, for a hockey game or anything else. What we're seeing with the Whiteout parties and with the support of the Jets here, right now, is a great example of bringing Manitobans together and talking about how important it is for all of us to be united and be on the same page, in this case celebrating the Jets, but for so many of the challenges that we see.

And so it's important for us to focus, you know. Again, the city of Winnipeg is, you know, we saw the crime rate go up, and up, and up every single year under the previous government. Zero action—less than zero action I would say, when you are actually not keeping up with the rate of inflation—and we saw the support for the WPS be affected by that: 55 less officers on our street under the watch of the members opposite. These are examples of, you know, where government policy can make a real difference, and in this case, and the case of the members opposite, to a detrimental effect.

Now we recognize that early in our mandate that retail crime was, again, had skyrocketed under the previous government. We needed to take action, and that's why we came with our retail crime initiative, you know, immediately in the city of Winnipeg, starting to address some of those issues, support community policing, allow officers to do a proactive—take a proactive approach to policing. And so that started to make a difference.

And, again, the crime stats that we're seeing today are starting to bear out that a lot of that enforcement,

you know, reflected in the stats now, are showing that we're starting to address that and we're taking on that challenge head-on.

But as the member opposite talks about, there are different concerns and different needs in other communities. In the city of Brandon, for instance, they identified they also had an issue around retail crime, and so they approached the government, you know, what are the solutions that we can come with, and, of course, their retail crime initiative, we funded to the tune of \$85,000.

But, of course, it doesn't stop there. We talked to every—each and every community. How can we partner with you, how can we build your capacity? In the Swan Valley that looked like a GIS; in the city of Thompson now it's a crime suppression unit.

All of these approaches are tailor-made to the needs in community, and so, overall, of course, the member opposite knows that funding has gone up for the Brandon Police Service; that's, you know, a \$10-million commitment. For the First Nation's police, that's an \$11-million commitment; Altona, \$674,000; Sainte-Anne police, \$449,000; Springfield, \$10,000; Victoria Beach, almost \$70,000; Winkler, over \$2-million commitment; Cornwallis; Rivers, additional funding and support; Morden, of course, \$1.5 million that we supported them as well.

And what we saw is by partnering with each of these communities individually, we knew we could make a difference. And each of them has a different set of circumstances, a different set of concerns but we know that, starting with a base level of funding and building on their individual ideas and initiatives, we can begin to make a difference.

It's about Manitoba's downtown, but it's about everybody's downtown. That's why our public safety strategy, if member opposite has noticed, is titled Safer Neighbourhoods, Safer Downtowns, plural. That's because that's our focus across this province.

Mr. Balcaen: Once again, five minutes and absolutely no answer to the question that was posed to the minister. It was a lot of political rhetoric coming from the minister. Manitobans deserve answers.

So with no answer, I'm left to assume—and Manitobans are left to assume—and know that the Retail Crime Task Force dollars were all centred around two urban centres, particularly Winnipeg; and the rest of rural Manitoba was ignored by this government and, you know, put out to fend for themselves.

So moving slightly here: this week there was a stabbing incident at the Brandon Correctional Centre where a guard was stabbed, and I'm wondering if there is going to be a commitment to institutional safety for not only the Brandon Correctional Centre but all correctional centres. And will there be an increase in staffing to help them deal with the issues that they're facing with overcrowding under this government?

The Chairperson: The honourable—no.

Mr. Wiebe: Oh, sorry.

The Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe).

* (15:50)

Mr. Wiebe: This is a very, very concerning issue, and I first and foremost just want to, you know, express my concern for the individual, the employee—the Justice employee—who—the corrections worker who's—was involved in this incident. My understanding is he is stabilized, that he's in hospital, but hopefully on the mend, and I can only imagine that this is a very scary time for his family and for friends and loved ones. And so this has really just been top of mind for us about concern for him and for the well-being of himself and his whole family.

I also just—I do want to take a moment to also just thank the Brandon Police Service who are engaged on this as well, the major crimes unit who's leading the investigation. And we—we're obviously working very closely with them, you know, through the Brandon corrections centre to make sure that we're supporting that investigation and we're taking the appropriate steps to make sure that they have what they need.

I just visited BCC not too long ago, and so this is very fresh in my mind about the facility itself. Some great people that are working there and I just—I cannot say enough good things about the incredible staff that we have there that are doing the work that they are doing.

But, you know, those workers, they know. They know the kind of neglect that they dealt with over the last seven and a half years where vacancy rates skyrocketed in our corrections centres, where, you know, facilities—jails were closed under the previous government. Actual capacity in our corrections centres was reduced under the previous government, and, you know, and what did they—they faced additional work and additional pressures in their jobs.

We're starting, again, to—starting to turn the corner with regards to staffing levels. We talked about our

vacancy rate last time here in the Chamber, but just to put it into perspective, in 2021, there was a 27 per cent vacancy rate for corrections, and that's really, you know, a function of starving a system, a lack of resources, no money available to our officers—our corrections officers—who are doing this incredible work.

And then again, on top of that, not only were, you know, our vacancy rates high and not being addressed, but we also had the Dauphin jail closed despite the protests of not only the community but the entire Justice community as well, who were saying we need to build on capacity, not cut it. But then also, of course, the Agassiz Youth Centre in Portage la Prairie was cut. They also closed additional beds over at Milner Ridge, and—I mean, this just goes throughout the entire system.

So crime rates are skyrocketing under the members opposite, and they're closing beds and they're starving the system of resources, they're cutting workers and they're not—they're allowing vacancy rates to skyrocket. I mean, you know, the kind of neglect that we saw under the previous government has real consequences. And, unfortunately, these are the kinds of things that we see when those kinds of cuts are made. That's the kind of impact that this can have on the safety of our workforce.

And so just to sort of, you know, end off where I began, it's really about—well, first of all, about this individual, and my heart's with him right now, and we're looking for a speedy recovery. We want to make sure that he's safe and that his family is supported.

And we're very, very concerned about the incident that's happened. Again, the thanks to the BPS, the law enforcement who's stepping in and supporting us in making sure that we get to the bottom of this incident.

And then also a commitment to not only the people of Manitoba, but specifically to our corrections workers that we're going to continue to staff up.

We're going to build off of several, you know, successful initiatives that we've started to address the staffing issues, and we're going to continue to build capacity to make sure that everyone's safe in our corrections centres, staff and inmates alike.

Mr. Balcaen: Again, there was a lot of talk; not sure I received an answer at all in there. But the question was about adding additional staff and safety initiatives for correctional officers and that wasn't addressed whatsoever. But this is a common theme under this government.

You know, the NDP has a tendency to put justice and police and law enforcement, anything to do with community safety, on the backburner, and really don't have the care that's necessary for the work and the efforts that these people do.

As a matter of fact, I know the guard personally that was stabbed and attacked violently by the inmate, so I understand from a work history of the violence and the consequences that can happen with individuals. And just noting with this and linking it a little bit to the Winnipeg Police Service, their latest 2024 statistical report. It's noticed—although the minister touted his efforts of making sure that these stats have gone down—simply not true—8.5 per cent increase in assaults against police officers.

My question is—with the stabbing at Brandon Correctional Centre and with the violence that's happening in many of our front-line service providers—we saw it last week at the Brandon emergency health centre, where a nurse was choked, spat on, and nearly stabbed; 8.5 per cent increase in assaults on police officers; stabbing at the jails.

What is this minister and this government doing to protect our front-line officers?

* (16:00)

Mr. Wiebe: You know, supporting our Winnipeg Police Service, supporting law enforcement more broadly across the province is important; to understand, in a larger context, that we've talked a lot about the additional resources that we've provided. That's just—you know, that's funding that's supporting individual initiatives.

We've talked about the net loss of 55 officers under the previous government. We heard the deputy chief, today, talking about additional 51 officers—so, net loss of 55 under the previous government; a net gain of 51 officers under this government. And, so, additional resources, of course, as I always say, start with that understanding of base-level support and building on the success that the law enforcement is doing out in community.

But, that being said, you know, I think the member opposite brings up a good point and that is, is that we need to support our officers in a number of different ways: not just more officers and not just more funding, but also, for instance, in their, well, their safety of course and in their mental health.

And that's why our Premier (Mr. Kinew) has committed to the WPS, to other first responders, that

of the 100 mental health workers that this government is hiring to deploy to support law enforcement across the province, that the first supports that are going to go out through that commitment of 100 mental health workers is going to be directly for first responders and law enforcement.

And I've had a chance to meet numerous times with the Winnipeg Police Association president, Corey Wiles. This is a focus of him and of his time as president. He's indicating that he wants to continue to support the safety of his officers but also, like I said, the mental health of his officers and that's a goal that we share and that we're going to continue to work together on.

More broadly, you know, again the member opposite is talking about both law enforcement but also our corrections workers. You know, again, it comes down to what kind of resources are deployed and what kind of supports that we have for them so that they're not out on their own.

Under the previous government, a 27 per cent vacancy rate in our correctional centres, you know, speaks to the priorities of the kind of government that the member opposite signed up for. He ran as a candidate proudly you know, supporting the work of Heather Stefanson who cut these workers in our justice system and neglected our correctional centres.

And so, you know, I mean, he now wants to come in and say we need more resources. Well, I think we agree on that, but what he fails to mention is that they were the ones that broke the system in the first place. They put people in danger because of the cuts that they instituted. At the Cabinet table, Heather Stefanson said we should, you know, we should have less funding for law enforcement; we should close correctional centres; we should be fine with a 27 per cent vacancy rate in staffing.

Well, you know, that's the kind of leader that the member opposite supported. I think he needs to answer for why he was so willing to jump on that bandwagon and why now he changes his tune. And he says, well, you need to—him speaking to me, honourable Chair, saying now, I need to, as minister, fix the problems that were caused by his government more quickly. You know, it just, it boggles the mind. But, you know, maybe the member opposite will finally take some accountability for that.

When it comes to supports for officers, we know that overall violent crime is on—is going down. That's what the crime stats have shown us here in the city of

Winnipeg. We know that the Crime Severity Index has gone down.

That means that, for our officers, we're starting to see a trend where they're hopefully less—they're put in danger less often. The addition of the violent offender apprehension unit, for instance, doing the work that they're doing to support law enforcement out in community is making a big difference.

There's a lot of additional supports that are happening because of the work of our government that were neglected under the previous government. The member opposite needs to answer for that.

Does he support those cuts, or now is he changing his mind? Does he support the work we're doing?

Mr. Balcaen: During that diatribe, I did get some interesting information about mental health workers and the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) promise and this minister's promise of 100 mental health workers to be deployed with front-line officers.

And so I'm just wondering, to date—to today's date—how many of those 100 have been hired and are out on the streets working with first responders or with police officers as of today?

* (16:10)

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, I mean, it is encouraging now that the member opposite seems to be supportive of this initiative from this government because he spent his time in 2023 knocking on doors, campaigning door to door and saying we do not support mental health workers for law enforcement. That was—I mean, they ran their campaign on the fact that they didn't think this was a good idea.

And, of course, he ran for a party that, for seven and a half years, they knew that the mental health burden on our law enforcement was only getting worse, that it was getting worse more generally in the public, that our officers were having to deal with more complex situations every single day. They took no action.

So it just, again, boggles my mind that the member opposite could run for a party that did nothing and then he went door to door and said, no, that's a bad idea; we shouldn't add mental health supports for our officers and the public. And now, now he comes in here and says, well, we want more of them.

Well, I would love for him to step up here today and to just put it on the record. He thinks it's a good idea; 100 mental health workers is a good idea. And

maybe that's a good starting point for us to say, yes, 100. Well, you know, have you gotten them fast enough? Have you—maybe it should be 200? Maybe it should be 1,000? I mean, 500, the member opposite, I think I saw him say. That could be our starting point if he had any credibility on this issue whatsoever, but of course he doesn't. And so it's unfortunate that we have to be where we are.

That being said, there are some important steps that are already being taken. I already talked about the three mental health workers for first responders and that we're supporting work that's being done. That's being complemented right now with some work that's being done through Shared Health that's giving some of those mental health supports directly to law enforcement and to other first responders.

It's a phone line: a service that's provided instantly to members who are feeling like they need additional supports. So that's part of the commitment and that's rolled out right now. But the additional supports that we have in terms of our direct supports to the law enforcement that we talked about, those three FTEs.

But, of course, we're building outside of that and we're continuing to roll out additional capacity. That's going to start, quite frankly, with some of our community partners who are already doing some of this work but need additional training and additional capacity.

We've talked a lot about the Downtown Community Safety Partnership. They provide a lot of service, front-line service for those who are experiencing mental health crises. We know that we can build on the capacity that they have, and that's going to be a focus that we're going to continue to build off of; give them the training that they need to ensure that the people who are providing these services are able to give those—provide those services in a way that ties into the additional supports being provided in the department of addictions, housing and homelessness.

We know that we're going to continue to build through successful programs like the ARCC program. Right now, four constables and two mental health workers are deployed right now who are doing this support work in community, but more are on the way. We're going to continue to build off of those initiatives.

We've also supported officer mental health when it comes to—I've—you know, I'm not sure if the—I saw the member opposite writing down some numbers but I don't know why he's so confused about this. I've answered this now in very specific ways for each of

these categories and maybe, if he spends some time reading the Estimates book, he'd have a better sense of exactly what we're doing.

But I'll continue. We're also supporting the officer mental health initiatives through our C-P-F funds. These are funds that are flowed directly to—as he knows, applied for by law enforcement and just flowed directly to law enforcement, back out to support the work they're doing in their several mental health initiatives that are under way there.

Overall, honourable Chair, we are continuing to work towards meeting our mandate of 100 additional mental health workers. We are partnering with the department of Shared Health—sorry, the Department of Health, Shared Health within the Department of Health—Shared Health within the department of Shared Health—of health—oh, my goodness.

The member opposite, I think, understands where I'm going with that—and the Department of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, because we know that the hiring of these workers and supporting our law enforcement directly is a good idea, not just for their own mental health but, of course, to support those who are in community.

And the—you know, if the member opposite wants to now support this initiative, put it on the record, we can move forward.

Mr. Balcaen: I'll just make a comment on this because, of course, didn't get any answers that brought any clarity to this, once again.

So, you know, promises that have been made continuously by this government: we heard it today from the front-line health-care workers and we've heard it from many other of the unions that used to support this government about the failures of the announcements, so—but what I will put on the record, honourable Chair, is that I will absolutely deny that I was out canvassing against putting mental health workers in vehicles with police officers or with law enforcement.

Matter of fact, I will put my record out for the minister to maybe take a look at some of the previous annual reports from the Brandon Police Service and speak with the members, and I would actually ask him privately to speak with people that are at the table in front of him about advocacy for mental health amongst law enforcement and first responders. Certainly, it was under my watch that money was asked for and provided by the government for Project Resilience

911, as well as a response was put in under—or, for our funding for the ARCC program in Brandon.

Project Resilience 911 was an initiative that had to be undertaken to make sure that the health and well-being, the mental health and well-being of first responders—not just police officers, but correctional officers, nurses, emergency room staff, dispatchers, military, fire officers were taken at the front line and given the services that they need.

So I will support mental health work and initiatives for front-line officers every day of the week, and special shout-out to Amanda Conway, who is one of the police officers at Brandon Police Service who's also a registered social worker, who made sure that this program, Project Resilience 911, came to fruition and continues to support front-line officers and front-line service providers.

So with that stated, I'll move on to my next question and ask about this minister's commitment to combatting impaired driving. He mentions Winnipeg Police Service stats. We all—we know that there's many law enforcement agencies that provide statistical data, but Winnipeg, of course, being the biggest centre, is what the minister likes to focus on.

A 24.1 per cent increase in the impaired driving area, so limited effects under this minister's new initiatives, and I'm just wondering if he still stands by his statement that severe consequences for a privilege of driving are disproportionate to the crime of taking somebody's life?

* (16:20)

Mr. Wiebe: It's an important question and it's one of focus for myself as minister and as our department and our government, and so I want to put some words on the record about some of the work that we're doing, specifically around impaired driving.

But I do need to address what the member opposite started with, and that was his claim now that he, you know, he never campaigned with the previous premier of this province, Heather Stefanson, who—not only did she sit on her hands, do nothing from the period of 2017 to 2022; funding for the WPS, for instance, was locked in, was flat, flatlined at \$21 million—absolutely no support for law enforcement in a tangible way.

Of course, in our first year and at subsequent year, we've increased that to over \$40 million, so almost doubled the budget that is flowing to the WPS. That's why it was a net loss of 55 officers under the previous

government, and now 20 new officers—or, sorry, 51 officers that are, you know, from the WPS being funded from our government.

But that being said, what we're talking about here is mental health supports for officers. A key campaign commitment of this—in fact, I believe it was one of the first campaign commitments that we made in August. While members opposite were taking vacation during that campaign, we were busy knocking on doors, talking about supporting our law enforcement through 100 mental health workers.

And the member opposite now says: Well, actually, I thought that was a great idea. He knocked on doors and he said: Well, the NDP's doing a really good job, you could vote for them or you could vote for me. Did he say that on the doorstep? No, of course he didn't. He said, we don't believe in what they're doing over there, we're—you know, Heather Stefanson's got it all right; she's the one that you should vote for.

So that's—that was his position. Now he's changing his mind. Okay. I think I heard him say that. So now he's on board with our commitment around 100 mental health workers. Let's get it done.

He should also take that same approach when it comes to impaired driving, because this is not a partisan issue. In fact, it was an NDP government who led the country, year over year, with new legislation, stricter penalties and more enforcement that, year over year, was making a real difference across this province, and we were leaders in Canada.

And then, of course, we got the PCs who said, well, I don't know, let's cut that budget, let's cut those supports, let's not make any meaningful progress. And there was no meaningful progress from 2016 until, you know, maybe 2020 or 2021 when finally maybe a bill that started to strengthen those initiatives came forward.

You know, it's the kind of non-partisan work that we should be doing as a baseline around this place, but the member opposite is so stuck on his divisive—where it comes from, I don't know; it could come from anywhere. Maybe it is actually how he really thinks, or how he—what he believes, but I hope he doesn't, because I think when it comes to impaired driving it's something we can all find common ground on.

That is why we work with the experts, the advocacy groups who have been doing this work, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, who have just been a phenomenal partner pushing us as government. They should push

us every year. I ask them, how can we do better? That's the work that they do.

But we know that, through the work that we have supported around mandatory alcohol screening, the additional campaigns around cannabis and other drug-impaired driving that we've directly supported—other work that we've done around impaired driving to support initiatives of the WPS, we know that the numbers are going up because the enforcement is now finally there in a way that was never supported by the previous government.

So we are going to continue moving our feet on this. We should do it in a non-partisan way. He should put the sword down, he should get over and start talking to us in a collaborative way, because we—there's a lot of common ground, and we are not always going to agree, and he is going to say maybe we should move a little quicker, maybe you should move a little bit slower. That is fine, we can find those—a path forward from those disagreements.

But the divisive kind of politics that the member opposite continues to play isn't helping anyone. So the numbers are going up; he knows full well the numbers are going up in the latest stats reports because of the enforcement that's been supported by this government.

It's going to address the real issues and address the problem going forward. We're going to continue to make legislative changes, and when it comes to making a difference on our streets—making safer streets—that's how we're going to get it done.

Mr. Balcaen: That does actually lead into my next question, and I can certainly agree that sometimes when there's enforcement, statistics go up slightly and, you know, they move, they ebb and flow. Statistics ebb and flow every year, and—but when you see something that is such an anomaly and such a shock to the system, where, you almost want to give it CPR—to this document—because that's how shocking this was.

What is this government doing? And specifically, what is the minister doing besides any time that there's an opportunity to work together with the critic for Justice or with the PC caucus, any suggestions are immediately turned down? They're not entertained, and they're not even given a thought.

And, you know, the minister talks about being divisive, but he's the first one to divide any time that there's an opportunity to work in a non-partisan fashion. And I'll bring forward committee that happened a short while ago on Bill 5 and the Reimer

family who the minister is well acquainted with. The Premier (Mr. Kinew), not so much, because he refuses to meet with them.

But, the minister, of course, has met with them, and, you know, said that he would respect them and work with them, but when they brought forward some simple amendments, some effective amendments on impaired driving, that was shut down and his response was that that's disproportionate to the life of their daughter and the life of any other impaired driver. Quite shameful, actually, and, you know, that's why I am certainly looking forward to further discussions on impaired driving and the victims of impaired driving and how we can continue to support them.

So, again, going back to the shock factor, honourable Chair: 785.7 per cent increase in drug and drug-induced-impaired operation with drugs, a vehicle, vessel, or aircraft.

So, again, what is the minister and this government doing in regards to this, other than turning down legislation that could be very helpful, in not only the denunciation, but in ensuring that impaired drivers get proper sentencing provincially for their driver's licence and suspension of their privilege to drive, not their right to drive?

* (16:30)

Mr. Wiebe: You know, some of the most impactful meetings that I've had have been with, more broadly, victims of crime, but specifically the work that I've done with MADD Canada and with victims of impaired driving. Member opposite acknowledged it in his question.

And even before I took on this role, I met with the Reimer family; but subsequent to that, I've met with them a number of times. And what's also encouraging is that multiple members of the government caucus, including multiple ministers, have met with the Reimer family. And there is a lot of grief there and rightly so. You know, Jordyn was a beautiful young lady, and her family is a great, great family.

They've seen tragedy in their community before, and to have it happen to their family, I mean, it's just—you know, I don't live too far away from the—where the accident happened, and I know the places that they were just before the accident. I know them personally. And so—and I've got young kids and think about my daughter. It's just absolutely heartbreaking.

And so we've been—I've been able to meet with them a few times and I look forward to further meetings with

them, because what I'm hearing from now is that there is a real interest in improving and enhancing impaired legislation in this province. And that's a step in the right direction, that they're willing to commit to that.

And so, you know, this is where, again, this isn't a partisan issue, right. This is about bringing the family in, helping them to understand the, sort of, the framework that the member opposite, as former law enforcement, is now a legislator who makes—is here to make laws that will withstand challenge in the courts. He knows the limitations that we all face.

He says no. He says he doesn't care about that. It's a good example of his reckless approach—the kinds of questions we hear in the Legislature where it's like—you know, I mean, if Trump said it I wouldn't bat an eye, but when it comes to members of this Legislature, it gives me real pause. He should know better. I think he does know better. He's chosen a different path.

What we're seeing when it comes to the drug enforcement numbers—so the member opposite is noting that in 2023, the member opposite—or the government that he is now a member of; the party that was in government at that point—there were seven drug-impaired charges that were laid, and now, in 2024, 62.

And what that shows us is that this is a—this was a problem; it's not—didn't just happen yesterday. It didn't just happen in one year; all of a sudden, the number of people who are on our roadways are being—are now driving under the influence, but they have always been there. And now, through the funding of our government, we're giving better tools; we're supplying better education for the public; we're giving resources to law enforcement to go after those folks, and now we're seeing those numbers increase.

And so, you know, the member opposite wants to talk about—crime stats go up and down. Well, actually, under the previous government, they all just went up. So I take issue with that.

But I think he's pointing out an important element, and that is that, yes, by providing more resources to law enforcement, we're going to see these numbers go up, but it's going to make our roads safer.

And so when it comes to work we can do for families like the Reimers, when it comes to so many victims of impaired driving, is we need to take the steps here in the province of Manitoba that we can take, that are constitutional, that are going to pass muster in the courts, that are going to, you know, bring the kind of justice that is lasting for communities. That's the kind of legislation that we're developing.

And I've said—I've opened the door. Of course I'm working with MADD Canada every single day. I've opened the door to families of victims. In fact, I'm going to be spending time with some this weekend. My door is open because I want to hear about ways we can improve legislation.

But it needs to be done in the way that—the member opposite should be—you know, as a starting point, the oath that he took to come into this place dictates that he should be doing this in an honest and a straightforward way, and I'm not sure that that's necessarily what he's presenting to some people.

Mr. Balcaen: Just want to finish one more question here on impaired driving, and, you know, I'm certainly intrigued and happy to hear some of the remarks that the minister put on the record today regarding impaired driving and some of the steps that we'd need to take.

Yes, matter of fact, you know, we have to look at why so many people are charged with drug-impaired driving, and I think what it is—if we look at the truth, is that this government is light on crime, and they're light on the causes of crime, and they know that people that are involved in the drug subculture have no concern with this government because there's no consequences, and they know if they do get caught, they're going to get out on bail. And it's a failed bail approach.

So, of course, you know, one of the big crimes is drug dealing, and this minister is light on crime, and no consequences is encouraging people to break the law. So, you know, we have to be tougher on crime.

But you know, I want to get back to the impaired driving comments, and the minister said that he works with MADD Canada and he works with MADD Manitoba and he's worked with the Reimer family, and I know from their political statements that have been put out that they've also quoted the Verwey family from Portage who had a very tragic accident and lost their daughter.

So you know what, I also support these agencies that do great work for the victims of impaired drivers and for advocacy for impaired driving. And I think we really have to look at the statements that this minister made that there's many steps that we can take for impaired driving and, you know, we want to bring justice that is lasting.

* (16:40)

And so with that, I know I've also reached out to MADD Canada, MADD Manitoba, MADD Brandon, Reimer family, the Verwey family regarding some legislation that will be debated in this House tomorrow, regarding victims of impaired driving commemoration day act. And the day that we've chosen to commemorate is May 1, which happens to be the day that Jordyn Reimer lost her life to impaired driving, and, you know, it's very impactful for that family, but also for all victims of impaired driving, their families and their communities.

So I have a simple question for the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe): Will he and his caucus support this bill tomorrow?

The Chairperson: So just a reminder to members that Estimates is not the place to debate legislation. The minister is free to answer the question if he so chooses.

And also, we should be cautious of the language we use and imply that people are being dishonest or lying.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I have to say I'm encouraged that the member opposite has decided to finally reach out to MADD Canada; that he's now decided to maybe start talking to advocacy groups, you know, MADD Manitoba and others; that he's decided to maybe start to listen to victims, hopefully giving them good advice. You know, being honest and serious about the advice that he gives.

Maybe taking off his partisan hat; maybe he's telling his leader, look, sorry, I'm not coming to be divisive like you have been. I'm not going to follow that same divisive line of tactics that, you know, the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) was sitting at the Cabinet table, he was deciding, I guess, that divisive attack ads against victims of a serial killer was a good campaign strategy; that attacking trans kids was a way to get votes.

Maybe the member for Brandon has now said to that leader, you know what, actually, you were wrong and I am—I'm going to take a different tactic. I'm going to work honestly and, you know, in a straightforward way with victims of crime. I'm going to listen to the advocates, I'm going to listen to the good advice that's provided to us. And maybe he's starting to turn a new leaf. He's going to continue to listen to those good advice—the good advice that's being offered by, again, by MADD Canada and others.

I hope that's the case, because when he does that, he's going to learn that there is a path forward here.

It's a non-partisan path, it's one that we can all get behind, we can all continue to work together on.

You know, Bill 5, I'm sure he's going to be the first one to stand up. He's going to leap to his feet when it comes to the vote. He's going to support that. He's going to put down the partisan attacks and he's going to say, yes, we're taking a step in the right direction, and then he's going to come see me afterwards and he's going to say, hey, Minister, let's do the next one together. And I'll say, yes, let's do that; let's do the next one together. The next bill is going to be one that we bring together because it's going to show everybody that it's not partisan.

I don't know if he'll go that far, because I think the member opposite is maybe too stuck on bringing that kind of divisive rhetorical, you know, sort of, I don't know, mean-spirited politics that we see day in and day out from the members opposite to the place. But, you know, here's hoping.

What I also hope he'll say is that, look, we've done some good work around supporting law enforcement overall, of course. You know, he'll say sorry, we made a mistake by not doing this earlier, but here we are now and we support the NDP government who's doing good work around supporting law enforcement. And he's going to say that the—specifically around impaired driving, there is more we can do when it comes to providing better tools, the education campaigns that we support, and he's going to see that we're on the right path and get behind that. And I hope that's the posture that he's going to take going forward.

In the meantime, you know, let's continue to find the common ground where we can. I think that's really what all of us are here—should be here doing, and especially when it comes to such a serious issue.

And, you know, I think maybe, again, he's turning a new leaf, he's finding that new way of approaching serious issues. That might give people confidence that this is actually official opposition that's here for the betterment of all Manitobans—it's here for safe streets, it's here for the victims of crime, it's representing those concerns and those needs.

And that's where we're going to find that common ground to move forward together on and, you know, abandon the reckless approach that he's taken before. Words matter and the way that he's approached things matters a lot. We'll hear what he has to say in debate tomorrow, if he's someone who can come put the sword down and, you know, sort of put some of this on the record to really be clear to the victims that the

steps that we're taking are serious, that they're making a difference and that we want them to be substantial and we want to continue to implement as much as we can.

I think we're going to find that there's a lot more to agree on than disagree on when it comes to this issue. And, again, that's, I'm hoping, the approach we can take.

Mr. Balcaen: So, you know, with all of those positive comments, I will take that as a yes, and I'm looking forward to the debate tomorrow and the discussion on that bill.

At this time, honourable Chair, I would like to cede the floor to my colleague from Agassiz for some questions on rural crime.

The Chairperson: Order.

Apologies. I've—my mic was not on when I recognized you so I have to re-recognize you. I apologize.

The honourable member for Agassiz.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Thank you to my colleague from Brandon West for giving me a few moments here.

* (16:50)

And I want to take this time to thank you—send a thank-you out to our law enforcement and our first responders who are on the front lines day in and day out protecting communities, protecting the Manitobans that live in our province.

And we see, in rural Manitoba, an increase to crime. I've heard from many of the residents within my Agassiz constituency with concerns, you know, with situations taking place in their yards, very close to their homes. And nothing speaks more to this than what we saw unfold in the community of MacGregor, where we saw armed individuals get out of a vehicle and, you know, invade private property.

And I did get up in the House and raise questions and ask the minister about that situation that unfolded. And hearing from many of my constituents that day specifically and days afterwards, with concerns regarding their safety, their family's safety, their children's safety, and I just want to ask the minister—or maybe it was even a day after the minister made an announcement. I believe it was providing additional resources or members to the Emergency Response Team and the staffing comms centre.

I'm just wanting to know: Are those resources in place as of today?

Mr. Wiebe: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. It's an important one, and I'm glad that she had her notes written down so that she could, when the mic wasn't working, she was at least able to get that back on the record, and I appreciate that she started with thanking our law enforcement because I think it's just—it's an important thing to do to sort of ground ourselves in the fact that these are people who are putting their lives on the line every single day.

And, you know, when we see an incident like we saw in MacGregor, like, as scary and as traumatic as it is for the victims of a crime like that, we're now asking law enforcement to go right into that situation and to help us keep our communities safe.

And so I think it's a great place to start, is to just thank our law enforcement. You know, RCMP in general do such good work across this province, and, I mean, really, when it comes down to support for law enforcement, I've talked about it a few times here with regards to police services and, you know, we talked a lot about the WPS today because of the crime stats.

But just to put on the record, specifically around the RCMP, we're talking about, in '22-23, \$167 million. That was the flatline number that we've talked about before. That \$167 million has increased to \$193 million in Budget 2024, and in now, Budget 2025, that has gone up again, that escalator that we're talking about, to \$198 million.

This is a massive increase to support law enforcement and to give the RCMP, in this case, a solid footing as they're addressing some of the challenges around recruitment and retention that were left to us from the previous government. There was no action taken; there were no plans that were developed, and so by having this kind of support, we know that they can make a big difference.

When it comes to specific resources that are available for, again, the case, the situation that we saw in MacGregor, right now we know that the force that—or the resources that we have able to deploy—is called the Manitoba integrated—no, yes, okay, let me try this again. If the member can give me one moment here. It's the Manitoba integrated violent offender unit—apprehension unit. Okay. We've—we have taken to calling this MIVOAU. I don't actually know if that's an acronym that anyone else uses or says it that way. We've started saying it that way, but now that I say it

that way, I have trouble remembering all the rest of the—filling in the blanks.

But regardless, this is a serious issue, and MIVOAU is a very effective tool that's being used. It works across the province and across jurisdictions to go after these kind of violent offenders, and I can just let the House know, I think the member opposite does know, all suspects in this case have, in this incident, have been apprehended. And so that is—so it should give some solace to the community, and now the important work of the investigation continues.

But we're not stopping there. So we're not stopping with those additional resources that we fund in MIVOAU; we're actually building off of that. And so, the member opposite will know just recently we announced the ERT, the Emergency Response Team, that's additional resources for the RCMP and we know this is the kind of work that they're going to be doing.

This team is made up of highly skilled, highly trained officers and—so this will be—this will take time to build this capacity. We're working with the RCMP. Now that the funding is in place we know that they can build these resources, they can build this team, and it's going to take resources and give them that specialized ability to now address, you know, violent or emergency response situations like we saw in MacGregor.

This speaks to the overall challenge of recruitment within the RCMP. The federal government has left us in a really difficult place because of the—you know, the lack of support for the RCMP. We're going to continue to push them and to make sure that we're getting the resources we need.

There's a class coming just—soon—[interjection]—May, okay, so, yes, so this month a new recruit class that's going to be coming. Members are going to be coming to Manitoba. There's more on the way, and we're going to continue to, you know, do everything we can to work with the RCMP to ensure that we're getting the people into depot and we're getting them out and that they're coming to Manitoba to support, not only rural Manitoba, rural communities, but, I mean, the North. The challenges we see in some of our remote communities are immense.

They've dropped the ball. We're going to continue to work with them and we're going to continue to support RCMP.

Ms. Byram: Just in the essence of time here, I'm going to make this question very quick and hopefully the minister can respond very quickly, as well.

Can the minister provide some stats and confirmation on the rural policing vacancy rate for March and April of this year?

Mr. Wiebe: It's, again, an important question. I appreciate the member opposite for bringing it forward because, again, we know that this is a challenge.

I want to be clear about what I was saying in the previous answer. The federal government is the one who dropped the ball. I, in no way, want to, you know, make any suggestion that there's any concern about the RCMP. They've been working very closely with us to ensure that they're addressing this issue. And so the federal government certainly bears responsibility in this case.

Time is very short. When it comes to—so I'll—it's difficult to maybe pull out exactly the number she's looking for. If we're talking about law enforcement in general, because RCMP is one number and then, of course, other agencies. Other agencies, the vacancy

rate is very low, and we've been working to address where there are issues.

With regards to the RCMP the hard vacancy rate is around 20 per cent, but I don't have that specific number. I know RCMP has put some of that information out there, but, again, this is the challenge that we're facing and this is exactly the kind of work that we want to continue to do with the RCMP to understand how do we build up their capacity, how we can get them the officers that they need. Giving them these additional resources will help, but it's about that base level as well.

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 10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 7, 2025

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