



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

Monday, May 12, 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.

**Speaker's Statement**

**The Speaker:** Prior to routine proceedings, I have a statement for the House.

Today, Monday, May 12, 2025, marks the 155th anniversary of the day the Manitoba Act received royal assent in the Canadian Parliament. This act created the Province of Manitoba and accordingly, May 12 has been designated as Manitoba Day.

In honour of this occasion, members will notice some treasured artifacts displayed on the Clerk's table today: the star blanket cushion and beaded mace runner, gifted to us by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs in 2010; a Métis sash, gifted to us in 2023 by the Manitoba Métis Federation; and a soapstone polar bear carving, gifted to us by the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut in 2023.

These artifacts are displayed in the Chamber today to recognize and pay tribute to the Indigenous peoples of Manitoba as we celebrate this day. They serve as a reminder that this Chamber and our Legislative Building and the province reside on the

traditional lands of the Indigenous people, as we recognize each day in our land acknowledgement.

As your Speaker, I am honoured and humbled to include these treasured artifacts in our annual celebration of Manitoba Day. As members may know, in the interests of advancing the Assembly's commitment to reconciliation, it is my intention as your Speaker to find ways to incorporate these artifacts and other meaningful symbols or acts in the Chamber on a daily basis.

As another important example of the Assembly's commitment to reconciliation, I would point to last week when, for the first time in our 154-year history, we were able to provide live interpretation of a ministerial statement delivered in the Cree language. I'm certain that will not be the last time we provide such a service to members, and I am pleased we were able to offer this benefit to all members.

In addition to these artifacts, as we have done for many years now, in today's Speaker's parade our Sergeant-at-Arms carried our original Manitoba mace. This mace made its first formal appearance on March 15, 1871, on the first sitting day of the first session of the first Manitoba Legislature, held in the home of A.G.B. Bannatyne in the Red River Settlement. The Bannatyne home was destroyed by fire in December 1873, but thankfully, the mace survived.

After 13 years of service, our original mace was retired in 1884 when our current mace debuted. The original mace has a permanent home on display outside the Speaker's office, coming out of retirement annually to mark this day and other special events.

This historical artifact 'sits'—sits on the table today to reference our past, but also to remind all members that we are part of a very select group of Manitoba citizens.

Since the mace was first placed on the Clerk's table in 1871, only 882 Manitobans, including all of us, have served as members of this Assembly in this room and the rooms that preceded it. Out of the millions of Manitobans who have lived in the province over the last 154 years, only this small, fortunate group has had the honour, privilege and solemn responsibility of serving our fellow citizens as their elected representatives.

Our system is certainly not perfect. Historically, not everyone in Manitoba has had the right to vote, and it took many decades for Indigenous people and women to gain that right.

As we commemorate this event, then, it is worth remembering that our democracy is a fragile work in progress; it needs to be protected, and this has never been more evident than it is now in 2025. We should never take the privilege of living in a democracy for granted. I am reminded of the honoured veterans who graced us with their presence in the Chamber last week to commemorate VE day.

Those men were here representing the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who fought to preserve our democracy. I hope we all remember them and their sacrifice as we strive to do our best in this place each and every day.

In honour of Manitoba Day and with this rich history in mind, I would encourage all members to reflect on our shared responsibility to serve Manitobans with honour, respect and reverence.

I would encourage all of us to remember that our work in this place is part of a very long legacy of service to the people of Manitoba, and we should be thinking of them every time we stand to speak in this House.

Thank you.

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

**The Speaker:** Introduction of bills?

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### Standing Committee on Public Accounts Fourth Report

**Mr. Josh Guenter (Chairperson):** Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

**Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish):** Your standing committee—

**Some Honourable Members:** Dispense.

**The Speaker:** Dispense.

*Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts presents the following as its Fourth Report.*

### Meetings

*Your Committee met on May 8, 2025, at 7:00 p.m. in the Chamber of the Legislative Building.*

### Matters under Consideration

- *Auditor General's Report – Oversight of Post-Secondary Institutions dated October 2020*
- *Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations dated March 2023*
  - *Oversight of Post-Secondary Institutions*
- *Auditor General's Report – Follow Up of Previously Issued Recommendations dated February 2025*
  - *Oversight of Post-Secondary Institutions*

### Committee Membership

- *Mr. BRAR*
- *MLA CHEN*
- *MLA COMPTON*
- *MLA DELA CRUZ*
- *MLA DEVGAN*
- *Mr. EWASKO*
- *Mr. GUENTER (Chairperson)*
- *MLA LAMOUREUX*
- *MLA MALOWAY (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *Mr. OXENHAM*
- *Mrs. STONE*

### Officials Speaking on Record

- *Tyson Shtykalo, Auditor General of Manitoba*
- *Jan Forster, Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Training*
- *Colleen Kachulak, Assistant Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Training*

### Reports Considered and Passed

*Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:*

- *Auditor General's Report – Oversight of Post-Secondary Institutions dated October 2020*

*Your Committee completed consideration of the following chapters as presented:*

- *Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations dated March 2023*
  - *Oversight of Post-Secondary Institutions*

- *Auditor General's Report – Follow Up of Previously Issued Recommendations dated February 2025*

- *Oversight of Post-Secondary Institutions*

**Mr. Guenter:** I move, seconded by the honourable member for Elmwood (MLA Maloway), that the report of the committee be received.

**Motion agreed to.**

## TABLING OF REPORTS

\* (13:40)

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** Honourable Speaker, I want to table, for consideration of departmental Estimates for the Committee of Supply, the sequence for today only.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

### Wildfire Risks

**Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures):** I rise today to bring attention to the ongoing increased risks of wildfires across Manitoba. It's another dry spring and already we have seen numerous grass fires and a significant wildfire near The Pas and Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

Some of these fires occur naturally with lightning strikes, but many fires are also caused by human activity. The operation of vehicles such as ATVs and even lawn mowers have been cause of significant fires in our province.

I encourage all Manitobans to be more vigilant when conditions are so dry. It's also important we all do our part to stay informed and be prepared to take action. I urge everyone to take action to prevent fires as current conditions pose a serious threat to public safety, and emergency response may be limited due to high demand on provincial and local firefighting resources.

Because of the extreme wildfire risk and rapidly changing fire behaviour, we adamantly discourage travel into backcountry areas. Anyone permitted to travel in the backcountry are reminded to check weather conditions and have adequate suppression equipment.

It's important for everyone to exercise caution when in or near forested areas. Provincial burning permits will not be issued until conditions improve. Further restrictions may be implemented if the fire danger levels increase or if conditions change

significantly. Failure to comply with restrictions is a serious offence—may result in prosecution and significant fines.

Manitoba's emergency Wildfire Service and our water bomber fleet are currently deployed and in service. We must all do our part to ensure Manitobans are safe from the impacts of wildfires.

I would like to give a shout-out to all members of the Wildfire Service, our emergency firefighters and members of our water bomber fleet.

I also want to give a shout-out to the BC wildfire crews that joined the fight as of today. It's proof that we are all in this together. Thank you to our friends in BC for the helping hand.

We can all play a critical role in mitigating wildfire risks together by being fire smart and by looking after each other and our communities.

Miigwech.

**Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River):** Today, our hearts are with the families who have been forced to flee their homes, cottages and communities due to the devastating wildfires burning across our province. We recognize the fear, uncertainty and grief that comes with such sudden upheaval.

To every family displaced in The Pas, Clearwater Lake, Carrot Valley, Wanless and all affected communities: please know that Manitobans stand with you.

The crisis has touched the lives of hundreds. For some, it was a sleepless night of evacuation in flames—as flames lit up the horizon. For others, it was escaping through thick smoke and falling ash as they rushed to safety. These stories reflect, painfully, reality that many are enduring right now.

In fact, as they—we face these fires, we have seen extraordinary courage. I want to extend our deepest gratitude to the firefighters, local and provincial, who are on the ground, risking their lives to protect homes and save lives. To the water bomber pilots flying into thick smoke, the dedicated teams from the Manitoba Wildfire Service, the Office of the Fire Commissioner, Emergency Management Organization and all our EMO staff: we cannot thank you enough.

You've been joined by emergency responders from across the province, and soon crews from British Columbia, in united effort to confront these fires. Your tireless service on the front lines are making a vital difference in protecting lives, homes and entire

communities. You deserve our highest respect and you have our heartfelt appreciation.

We also thank the countless volunteers and neighbours who have opened their homes, provided food or comfort to the stranger. You are the spirit of Manitoba, and your compassion doesn't go unnoticed.

Let me also take this moment to echo the urgent call from Manitoba Natural Resources Indigenous Futures Minister: We all have a role to play in preventing further catastrophe.

Let us continue to show each other kindness, patience and support, and let us remain vigilant in protecting our Manitoba, our communities and, most importantly, each other.

Thank you.

### **National Nursing Week**

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** It is my absolute pleasure to acknowledge National Nursing Week which is this week. Our government is always pleased, we're always grateful to have the opportunity to celebrate and thank the amazing nurses working in every corner of our province.

Nurses are the backbone of our health-care system, and this week, during National Nursing Week, we recognize them for going above and beyond and celebrate their passion to provide the best care possible in communities across our great province.

Nurses are health-care heroes, but they are also everyday people. They are the MLA for Tuxedo. They are the Minister of Health. They are our siblings, parents, friends, neighbours, loved ones, community members. They are everyday Manitobans who are a comforting presence during some of people's most precious moments at the bedside and also during some people's most difficult moments. They save lives and they heal entire communities.

Nursing can be a difficult career, and there are difficult days, especially after seven and a half years of cuts, chaos, closures and disrespect by the former PC administration. But what nurses do, Honourable Speaker, even on those difficult days, matters greatly to their patients. They always provide the best care possible with dignity, care, compassion and respect.

During National Nursing Week and during this day, in particular, I think it's important for us to highlight Indigenous nurses. We celebrate National Indigenous Nurses Day, and we want to recognize that

Indigenous nurses bring highly skilled important lived experiences to the front lines of our health-care system. They provide care in a culturally sensitive manner and are often keenly aware and understanding of the structural barriers that exist for patients in our health-care system. They are often strong advocates pushing for equitable access and improving health-care outcomes.

Here in Manitoba, we're seeing increased numbers, record numbers, quite frankly, of nurses, Indigenous nurses, training, graduating and joining the front lines. I want these nurses to know that our government is committed to continuing to support you on your health-care practitioner journey and investing in making sure that your journey is as positive and successful as possible.

Nurses, we celebrate them this week; we should celebrate them each and every day, but not just for what they do on the front lines, Honourable Speaker. We celebrate them for their innovation and research, in policy and advancing health equity. And this year, given that the theme of National Nursing Week is The Power of Nurses to Transform Health, it's very fitting. We get to highlight nurses' impact in shaping health care, driving innovation and advancing for patient-centred care.

Nurses are leaders. They're change makers and trailblazers in health innovation, and they contribute to advancements in fundamental treatments, technologies and patient-care practices, including as part of our government's lower wait times and system improvement team, or an event I had the pleasure of attending during Black History Month, a historic Black History Month celebrating Black nursing students at the University of Manitoba. Nurses are doing transformative work in post-secondary, on the front lines and in research.

I'd like to take a moment to also acknowledge that we have some wonderful advocates for nursing in the gallery with us today: the Association of Regulated Nurses of Manitoba, organizations that lead the way in bringing nurses together and fostering important change.

Listening to nurses has allowed our government to take real steps and real action in improving the health care that patients receive but also the way that health care is provided. We're investing in retention, recruitment and training. We're investing in nurses. It's so important that we recognize that we have to take better care of the people who take care of us.

We're creating pathways back into the health-care system. We've welcomed nurses back from retirement. We've supported internationally educated nurses for our nurse re-entry program. We've expanded the Provincial Travel Nurse Team by over 117 per cent. And there's more work being done. These nurses are working in the public system, and we're doing so much work, Honourable Speaker, that it's being noticed outside of our own borders not just in Manitoba, not just in Canada, but outside of our country. I'm really, really thrilled to take a moment to welcome Sanna, who is a nurse from the United States who has joined our health-care system in the front lines of Manitoba in just the recent months, and she joins us in the gallery here today.

Thank you for joining the front lines here in Manitoba, Sanna. We welcome you not only in the province but here in the Manitoba Legislature.

Honourable Speaker, we value our nurses. We know the significant knowledge, expertise and experience they bring to the bedside each and every day. We're going to continue to listen, action and work together to fix health care, improve culture and ensure we have a health-care system that all nurses are thrilled to be a part of.

Manitoba nurses, to each and every one of you, we thank you, we see you, we lift you up this week and every single week moving forward. Happy National Nursing Week.

Thank you.

\*(13:50)

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** I just want to also welcome the guests in the gallery today. Nurses are the heart of our health-care system and their work changes and saves lives. It would take more than a week to recognize all that they do for our province.

Not only are they dedicated professionals, they are passionate community leaders, advocates and educators, and in particular, I'd like to thank the Association of Regulated Nurses of Manitoba. I had the pleasure of meeting with them this morning, along with many of our colleagues on this side of the House, and we discussed some of the challenges facing nurses.

But these nurses came to the Legislature with solutions. They discussed all of the ideas that they have that will improve the working environment for nurses, but also for Manitoba patients, care home residents, home-care clients and other who rely on the

services of nurses every day. And they expressed the need to have a seat at every decision-making table when it comes to health care. And I think that's so important, that nurses are able to provide their perspective.

And while I'm proud to stand up today in celebration of such an incredible workforce, I think that, quite frankly, nurses have heard enough words.

They deserve empowering action and not empty announcements. They deserve safety, not slogans. And they deserve a helping hand, not headaches. It should go without saying, but nurses deserve and need to be able to work without being yelled at, punched or stabbed while trying to help people. They deserve a safe workplace.

And they deserve a government that works on addressing nurses' concerns ahead of varnishing the minister's image. Nurses deserve to see the results from the listening tour they participated in. But unfortunately, just last week, we heard from the head of the Manitoba Nurses Union when she said, quote: if the government had truly been listening during their listening tour, would we be here again, over a year later, with no measurable progress? Nurses are beyond tired of the spin of being used for announcements, campaigns and photo-ops, only to be ignored when the decisions are being made. Unquote.

They deserve a government that puts solutions ahead of ideology.

Just last week, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) shot down Bill 227 which would have eliminated some of the interprovincial barriers that prevent nurses from coming to work here in Manitoba where we need them.

Honourable Speaker, nurses simply deserve better from this government that promised them all the solutions. And that is why hundreds rallied at the Legislature last week to give this minister and their government a resounding D-.

**An Honourable Member:** Were you there?

**Mrs. Cook:** In response to the heckling from members opposite: yes, I was there. And a D- with three NDP MLAs working on the health-care file is shameful, Honourable Speaker.

So to nurses across Manitoba, I want to say thank you. To nurses working in long-term care, in public health, who work in education to graduate the next generation of nurses, who work in ERs, ICUs and on the units in our hospitals, who work in CancerCare,

who work in the community, who work at remote nursing stations, thank you. I know your job isn't easy and I know the toll that it takes on you and your families. And I want to thank those families as well for giving so much of their loved ones to Manitobans in some of their hardest moments.

Happy National Nurses Week.

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

**The Speaker:** Does the honourable member for Tyndall Park have leave? *[Agreed]*

**MLA Lamoureux:** National Nursing Week takes place from May 12 to 18, and this year's theme is The Power of Nurses to Transform Health. Manitobans know the impact that nurses have in providing and shaping health care, driving innovation and advocating for patient-centred needs.

As it is International Nurses Day today, we come together to recognize nurses from across Manitoba for their incredible hard work, long hours and big hearts. Their drive truly demonstrates such dedication to the health of all Manitobans receiving their care.

Honourable Speaker, over the past decade, nurses have been stretched to unfair and extreme limits. They are often facing violence and individuals with complex mental health needs, without the adequate support and staffing to do so.

We frequently hear stories where nurses are being 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.

I want to thank those who have joined us today here in the gallery, and, Honourable Speaker, I ask that my colleagues enjoin me—join me in recognizing and thanking all nurses throughout our province for their abilities and commitment to all of us.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Prior to moving on, there's some guests in the gallery that have to leave us right away; so we have seated in the public gallery, from Gordon Bell school, 30 grade 9 students under the direction of Alana Ollinger, and they are guests of the honourable member for Wolseley (MLA Naylor).

And we all welcome you here today.

And seated in the loge to my right we have Kerri Irvin-Ross, former member for Fort Garry, Fort Richmond.

And we welcome you here today.

### MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

#### Women in Aviation

**Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation):** I want to celebrate a group of exceptional women whose determination, talent and perseverance are reshaping what leadership and excellence looks like in here our community.

The Women in Aviation program are mastering complex technical skills, pushing personal boundaries and stepping into roles traditionally not made with them in mind. Many had never imagined themselves in aviation; yet today, they are thriving as mechanics, inspectors, engineers and changemakers.

This is about transformation and women boldly shaping their futures and, in doing so, becoming powerful role models for others. They are showing young girls across Manitoba that every path is open, and that they too can thrive in fields that they choose and lead with confidence wherever they go.

Behind their success is a team of powerful leaders: Barb Bowen, Caroline Sicat, Darci Radley—whose mentorship and vision have helped open doors and guide the way forward. Thanks to their support, the women in this program have stepped directly into full-time roles where they continue to grow and lead.

Meeting and getting to hear experiences of several of these trail-blazing women, it is remarkable to see the positive impact this opportunity has had on their lives.

To every woman who took this leap, your strength and brilliance are building a better Manitoba.

So I ask my colleagues to join me in applauding Caroline Sicat, lead technical trainer and program curriculum co-ordinator, who joins us here in the gallery today.

Thank you so much.

#### Manitoba Day

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Honourable Speaker, it is with great pride and honour that I stand here today to wish Manitoba a very, very happy birthday.



It was on this day, 155 years ago, that our great province, in the heart of Canada, received royal assent to join the Canadian confederation. As someone born in a different province and chose to make Manitoba home, I can say with a full heart that Manitoba is the greatest province in the greatest country on earth.

Manitoba is a hub of both cultural and natural beauty that people from all over the world come to explore. We are the home of Neil Young and the northern lights. Our history is profound and groundbreaking.

Manitoba is the homeland of the Red River Métis Nation and the first province to recognize women's right to vote.

It is within these lands that people have crossed oceans and continents to plant their roots here. Early settlers like Icelandic immigrants, Mennonites and voyageurs sought Manitoba for economic opportunity, religious freedoms and a hope for a better life.

And Manitoba continues to be a beacon for hope for so many, Honourable Speaker. From our lakes and parks and incredible wildlife; to the Jets—go, Jets, go—to the Bombers and jazz festival; to all the amazing people, the kind of people you won't find anywhere else, there is no place like friendly Manitoba.

Let's work together to grow this province and unleash all of its beautiful potential.

Just as the Red and Assiniboine rivers unite in the heart of our capital, let us all unite to create an even better Manitoba.

\* (14:00)

Honourable Speaker, I am so proud to be a Manitoban.

Thank you.

#### **Louis Riel School Division Powwow Club**

**Hon. Mike Moyes (Riel):** I rise today to highlight a powerful example of community, culture and reconciliation in action—the Powwow Club in the Louis Riel School Division.

This club welcomes all students from kindergarten to grade 12 and brings together families, educators and community members from across the division. It is not just a club; it is a space for learning, for belonging and for celebration.

With guidance from parents, guardians, elders, knowledge keepers and community members, students learn powwow dancing, regalia making and engage in

interactive activities to learn Indigenous languages. Each child has the opportunity to gain wisdom, express their identity and connect to a living culture. By year's end, they are honoured at the LRSD Graduation Powwow, dancing in regalia they helped create, recognized as powwow dancers.

But Powwow Club is more—is about more than skills; it's about reconnection. It's about reclaiming community through tradition. In this circle, generations gather to share stories, teachings and laughter. It is a space that empowers our next generation to live boldly, rooted in culture and community.

The Powwow Club shows reconciliation in action. Indigenous students are supported in their identity. Non-Indigenous students are welcomed to learn with respect. All students walk away with a deeper sense of belonging and understanding.

I'm grateful for the educators, families, elders and community members who make this possible, and especially the students, whose commitment and spirit bring this circle to life.

The Powwow Club reminds us: when we make space for Indigenous knowledge, we all grow stronger. When young people are proud of who they are and where they come from, we all move forward together.

I ask all members to join me in recognizing the members of the Powwow Club who have joined us in the gallery today, and that their names be added to Hansard.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

*Carrie Bird, Cyndi Bird-Hanslip, Adam Dobriansky, Emma Doiron, Colleen Fredrickson, Gloria Genaille, Critter Hanslip, Nicole Mager, Zoey Merasty, Jamie Septon, Jaydon Septon, Juniper Sikorski, Nancy Stucky, Alana White.*

#### **Brandon Area Community Foundation**

**Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West):** It is an honour to stand in the Manitoba Legislature today as we celebrate an incredible milestone: 60 years of impact, generosity and vision from the Brandon and—area community foundation.

I am proud to recognize the executive director, Ms. Laura Kempthorne, and chairperson of the board, Mr. Marc Alain, who join us in the gallery here today.

Since its inception with a \$25,000 donation from Joseph and Gwen Sector, the Brandon Area Community Foundation has grown exponentially, now stewarding

\$26 million in assets and awarding over \$1 million in grants annually.

Under the exceptional leadership of the executive director, Laura Kempthorne, and a dedicated board of directors, Brandon area and community foundation has been a force of positive change. Their work has strengthened local organizations and empowered communities through transformative initiatives like Youth in Philanthropy, which has awarded \$240,000 in grants since its founding 20 years ago by the late Keay Dobson-Golletz.

What truly sets Brandon area and community foundation apart is the way it fosters connections, uniting donors, volunteers and organizations under a shared vision for a thriving future. Whether supporting seniors through the technology access program; enhancing education at Assiniboine College practical nursing program with the donation of mannequins; improving key infrastructure like the Westman centennial auditorium speaker system; or initiatives like those at the Brandon YMCA and Ashley Neufeld Softball Complex, Brandon area community foundation's impact resonates today, tomorrow and for generations to come.

As we reflect on this remarkable journey, let us look forward with optimism and determination. To Laura and the board, thank you, and to everybody who contributes to this foundation—for your dedication, your passion and belief in power of community.

Congratulations on 60 years, and here's to many more years of making a difference.

### **Manitoba Day**

#### **Fête du Manitoba**

#### ***French spoken***

**MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface):** Aujourd'hui, nous célébrons la création de notre grande province, le Manitoba.

#### ***Translation***

*Today, we are celebrating the creation of our great province, Manitoba.*

#### ***English***

Honourable Speaker, today we celebrate the creation of our great province, Manitoba. This place that we call home was founded after the Hudson's Bay Company sold Rupert's Land to the Dominion of Canada without consulting the Indigenous peoples.

In protest of the decision, the Red River Métis leader Louis Riel founded the first provisional government in 1869. The provisional government was instrumental to creating what we know now as Manitoba.

As there was 40 Métis officials who wrote the List of Rights which formed the foundation of the Manitoba Act. The Manitoba Act was then given royal assent on this very day 155 years ago, May 12, 1870, creating the province that all of us call home.

The act then had to travel back to the Red River Valley and was proclaimed on July 15, which was the day we joined Canada as the fifth province after it was agreed upon by the provisional government of Louis Riel and the Red River Métis.

Our shared history, both as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, is apparent in the creation of our province. Even the name of our province, Manitoba, comes from the Anishinaabemowin phrase Manitoba Abi [*phonetic*], which refers to the Great Spirit.

#### ***French spoken***

Aujourd'hui nous rappelle qu'il est important de réfléchir à la création de notre province et de tirer les enseignements de cette histoire pour guider notre avenir. De la création du premier gouvernement provisoire sous la direction de Louis Riel jusqu'à l'histoire que notre gouvernement écrit de façon journalière, nous avons tous la responsabilité de continuer à faire rayonner notre belle province.

#### ***Translation***

*Today reminds us of the importance of reflecting on the creation of our province and learning from that history to guide our future. From the creation of the first provisional government under the leadership of Louis Riel to the history our government writes every day, we all have a responsibility to continue to make our beautiful province shine.*

#### ***English***

So I ask the House: Who joins me in celebrating the history, beauty and foundation of the great province that we call home, Manitoba?

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

#### **Introduction of Guests**

**The Speaker:** Prior to oral questions, there are more guests in the gallery I would like to introduce.

Draw attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us today Fred Hill,

Leading Influence Saskatchewan chaplain; Major Karen Hoeft from the Salvation Army; Sherri Dyck, Leading Influence; Demelza Martin, Leading Influence; Samuel Doerksen, Focus of Family; Cory Friesen, Lakeview Insurance; Jeff Friesen, HSD chair; Alain Cayer, Bethel Selkirk organization; Marie Cayer, Bethel Selkirk organization. And they are here as guests of the honourable member for Fort Richmond (MLA Chen).

We welcome you here today.

Further, in the public gallery, we have with us today for National Nursing Week: Abigail Kawadza, Victoria Charski, Shellie Anderson, Joyce Kristjansson, Kahla Evans, Marie [phonetic] Lugar, Shanna Keller-Heikkila, who are guest of the honourable Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara).

And we welcome you all here today.

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### All-Party Committee on Local Journalism Consultation Concerns

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Honourable Speaker, let's be very clear. Our PC caucus is supportive of local journalism here in Manitoba.

However, the Premier thinks he can make a unilateral announcement. He claims to be an all-party committee but no consultation from anyone else in this Chamber other than his own caucus. The Premier puts out a release, puts on a smile, takes a picture; it does not make it true.

Why did the Premier put out a misleading press release, once again playing games with Manitobans?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Honourable Speaker, I want to wish everybody a happy Manitoba Day, a happy Nursing Week, a happy allied health-care professional week and, of course, a happy National Police Week. And I would be remiss if I didn't also announce that today is the first-ever international you-can't-kick-the-puck-into-the-net awareness day.

\* (14:10)

I welcome the friendly question from the members opposite. Give us the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter). Let's get to work. Let's figure out how do we support local journalism initiatives across this great province.

We know that you, the people of Manitoba, use newspapers, radio, online portals to stay informed. There's a long tradition—if the member wanted to turn to his right and ask about the all-party committee on organ donation—of having this. And when it came to consultation, we brought it to the House.

What more do you want? Let's get to work. I know you don't like to work, took six months off, but let's get down to it.

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

**Mr. Khan:** Manitobans, you can see it once again. I asked the Premier a very serious question about journalism and freedom of speech, and what does he do? He makes jokes. That's who he is.

Honourable Speaker, PCs introduced an amendment to the committee that this Premier is talking about. It called for coverage of all faiths, races and cultures so long as hate speech is not permitted. Rather than debating our amendment on supporting all local journalism like this Premier said, bring it to the House, it was brought to the House.

Why is the Premier dodging and going around this Legislature when an amendment was before the floor? What words in our amendment did the Premier object to?

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

I would just remind the First Minister when answering questions to make sure he directs his comments through the Chair and not directly to members opposite.

**Mr. Kinew:** There is no substance to their objection. Yes, yes, fine. Cultural media—let's do it. Different languages—let's make it happen. Let's talk to Golden West. Did you run this by Golden West before you—doing your little temper tantrum, I would say through you, the Chair.

Again, let's get to work. We think that there's a ton of tools that we have to support journalism here in Manitoba. There's advertising that the core of government does. There's advertising that Crown corporations do. There's notice requirements that municipalities and others have to fulfill. All of these are resources that go out to support the journalism ecosystem.

Again, the proper place to do this is by having hearings in every region of the province. We're extending that hand across the aisle.

Yes, if you bring forward a critique without a substantive point behind it, Honourable Speaker, I will crack a joke at your expense. But when it comes down to supporting local journalism, let's take the politics out of it and get down to work.

**Mr. Khan:** Honourable Speaker, Manitobans, you heard it right there. This Premier thinks it's a temper tantrum when our PCs brought forward an amendment for all races, all religions, all cultures, to be addressed in this committee, and he calls that a temper tantrum. That is the quality of your Premier right here.

Let's look up the makeup of this committee, Honourable Speaker. It could be the farthest thing from an all-party committee. PCs weren't consulted about this; the Liberal MLA wasn't consulted about this, and the independent member wasn't consulted about this. So how is this an all-party committee when he only consulted his own NDP caucus?

Why does this Premier think he can bully and force other members of this Legislative Assembly into a committee that they were not even told about?

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, it's an all-party committee because, like every all-party committee in the history of Manitoba, it has the different parties represented. Yes it does. There are two formally recognized parties here and there is membership open to both of those parties.

When it comes to the comment of temper tantrum, well, what I'm getting at there is that the members opposite have known about this since last year. There's no big surprise here. What happened when we brought it to the House? They talked it out. For what substantive reason? There is no substantive reason.

You want to bring forward issues around cultural media, different languages? Great. Show up at committee. Send us the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter); he used to work at committee.

But, no, they don't want the member for Borderland to get to work. They would rather have spectacle and smoke rather than bringing forward any fire in question period.

So what are we going to do? We're going to keep fixing health care; we're going to keep making the economy more affordable. And, yes, we'll get to work on journalism, too.

The question is: When are the PCs going to join us on the issues that matter to you?

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

## Property Tax Bills Increase Concerns

**Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Last week, Winnipeggers started getting their property tax bills in the mail, and what did Manitobans find out when they did it: that the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) and this Premier had misled them.

Many of them have reached out to say what the minister and the Premier are saying is not matching what's on their bill. One family in the RM of St. Clements reached out saying that their bill has skyrocketed.

Why does this Premier have to—what does this Premier have to say to the family in St. Clements that has seen their bill jump 24.7 per cent under this Kinew government?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** What I say to that family, and to every family across Manitoba, is we're so excited to go to work for you each and every day.

One hundred per cent of families in our province are better off because you have a government that values education. You have a government that's delivered a universal school food program, which is an investment in the kids today who are now going to be able to graduate; but it's also an investment in our economy and public safety a generation from now, when those lifetime outcomes will be curved towards the more positive direction.

When we're talking about saving you money, there's good news there, too: \$1,500 this year in terms of a tax credit on your property taxes. Next year it's going up: \$1,600 is the amount that you're going to be saving.

So, again, the members opposite received a \$500,000 handout from the Stefanson government to his own private business interest. We're not doing things like that, so that's why he's mad. Instead we're—

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

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

**Mr. Khan:** Honourable Speaker, you can see the Premier again once ducked and dodged that question about the 24.7 per cent increase on that family in St. Clements. Is the Premier calling that family liars? Because I'm pretty sure they sent us an invoice or a tax bill for 24.7 per cent increase.

It's simple: what does the Premier have to say to the family in St. Clements that received a tax bill with an increase of 24.7 per cent?

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, Honourable Speaker, I'll repeat the very specific answer that I gave, because I think it covers off that follow-up question as well.

One hundred per cent of families in Manitoba are better off because we have a government today that is making real investments in our children and grandchildren by way of the education system.

And when it comes to saving you money, \$1,500—\$1,500—doesn't seem like much when you get \$500K free from the Stefanson government, but for hard-working, blue-collar, average everyday Manitobans, \$1,500 is still a lot of money.

But we weren't done there. Honourable Speaker, \$1,600 next year.

You want to talk about the economy? The member opposite thanked Donald Trump. Trump's tariffs are the biggest threat to our economy. Before he wants to raise these economic issues in the House, perhaps he'd like to distance himself from the Trump gratitude tour.

Meantime, what are we up to? Fixing health care, making your life more affordable, \$1,500 more in your pocket this year; \$1,600 more for you next year.

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

**Mr. Khan:** Oh, Honourable Speaker, just my second week on the job and you can see the Premier is already crumbling. You can see he's already crumbling. You can see—[interjection]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Khan:** —that he wants to talk about anybody else's past, but he won't talk about his own past. I don't think the Premier wants to go down that path, Honourable Speaker.

The increases—[interjection]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Khan:** —are even more severe within the city of Winnipeg, where municipality taxation experts are saying 132,000 properties will see their tax bills jump; 132,000 properties will see their tax bill go up under this Kinew government and this NDP. The Premier talks a big game and has an even bigger smile for Manitobans, but all he's doing is jacking up their taxes.

Why is the Premier standing by incorrect figures? Will he fire his Finance Minister today, yes or no?

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, I'll overcome my aversion to the PC's new anti-smiling platform and point out the following: Manitoba's got the best Finance Minister in the country. He's going to stick around for a long, long, long time.

When it comes to property taxes, \$1,500; that's what we're saving you. Honourable Speaker, \$1,600 is what it's going to be going up to next year. Now, of course, the members opposite get it again. There's a lot to lose; there's a lot at risk—\$1,500 this year; \$1,600 next year.

But the member opposite, the Trump tariff thank-you? It doesn't make any sense when you're talking about affordability. And it's not just that he said that on the podcast; he came in here in his first week as the Opposition Leader, six more times he said thank you to Donald Trump. It's right there in Hansard.

\* (14:20)

Why would you make the mistake to thank Donald Trump once and then come into here on the permanent record and say thank you to Donald Trump six more times? While he debates that, there's no debate about this.

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

### Education Property Taxes Increase Concerns

**Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland):** The facts are coming out and the tax bills are hitting Winnipeg families' homes. We're talking 132,200 properties in Winnipeg that are worse off under this NDP government. One family reached out to share their home in Waverley has seen a \$1,300 increase to their education taxes.

Why is this minister targeting families in Waverley with higher taxes?

**Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance):** This team, this Premier (Mr. Kinew), this government is lowering costs for Manitobans and we're doing that work every single day.

You know, Honourable Speaker, the PCs like to have really high fuel taxes. What did we do? We offered a holiday for a year and now we've introduced a 10 per cent permanent cut.

They like to increase costs on renters. What did we do? We introduced lowering—we increased the size of the tax credit for renters.

They like sky-high Hydro rates, we like to keep them low. That's the work our government is doing.

And when it comes to school taxes, our government has focused on doing what we can to make sure school taxes are low. That's why, with our first budget, we brought in that \$1,500 school tax rebate, and our most recent budget brought in a \$1,600 rebate, raising up \$100.

This team understands the importance of making—

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

The honourable member for Midland, on a supplementary question.

**Mrs. Stone:** Honourable Speaker, this minister has had four days since we asked these questions last week to do his homework.

Under the NDP, this hard-working family in Waverley is receiving \$1,500 versus the \$2,400 it would have received under the PC education rebate. Clearly, this family is not better off under this NDP government. The City of Winnipeg has identified almost 50 per cent of properties in the city of Winnipeg are worse off, thanks to this NDP. This is just one example of a family that's worse off under this minister.

How many other hard-working families in Waverley is this minister targeting with his tax hikes?

**MLA Sala:** Honourable Speaker, we're making life more affordable. We know that the Department of Finance clarifies that with our \$1,600 rebate, again, almost 80 per cent of Manitobans will be better off than they were under the measures of the former government. That's a fact.

You know, beyond that, of course, again, we're not only bringing in those savings; we also brought in personal income tax changes that lower costs for Manitobans. We increased the basic personal exemption. We changed the brackets so we're saving money for Manitobans on their personal income taxes in addition to the long list of other measures we've brought in over the last two budgets, including, of course, free park passes for a year, Hydro rate freeze. We brought in our universal school nutrition program. We continue to do the work.

They made life more expensive. We're making life more affordable.

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

**Mrs. Stone:** Honourable Speaker, let's repeat: 132,200 properties that are worse off in the city of Winnipeg under this NDP government. That is 50 per cent of properties that are receiving higher taxes, thanks to this NDP government. Not only did this family in Waverley's tax bill skyrocket, their rebate decreased.

If the minister refuses to answer, then why doesn't the member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz) stand up and answer to this family as why he is allowing his Premier (Mr. Kinew) and his Finance Minister to hike taxes on those families in Waverley?

**MLA Sala:** Look, we know that the members opposite like making life more expensive for Manitobans. They did that over seven and a half years. They did that in all sorts of new and creative ways like they did with their Hydro rate increases, which they included in BITSA bills, where Manitobans had no opportunity to know whether or not that Hydro rate increase was needed or not because they tried to circumvent the PUB.

That's their record, moving forward in a way that lacks transparency. That's what they did over seven and a half years.

What are we doing? We brought forward a long list of affordability measures to keep life affordable for Manitobans. Not just for Manitobans, though, even for small businesses. We brought in, of course, measures that we know are going to keep their costs low with a reduction to the payroll tax so they can keep doing the important work they do of creating jobs and growing our economy.

This government will continue to do the work—

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

### **Manitoba Municipalities and Property Taxes Request to Reform Education System Funding**

**Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside):** Honourable Speaker, not only are the NDP jacking up people's tax bills, they don't even have the courage to do it themselves. They're forcing municipalities to be the bad guys and send out the news: taxes are going up; rebates are going down, as my colleague from Midland has already shown. And now the minister of municipal relations wants you to blame the messenger.

Why is the minister putting our municipal officials in the position of delivering bad news about taxes they didn't even impose?

**Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations):** Mayors, reeves, councillors, I can tell you I know how you felt for seven and a half years. Seven and a half months it took them to ask me a question. I mean, they ignored you then and now they're ignoring you in the House. They stand up with all this indignation and they say, what's going on? How come you're blowing—you're making someone else do the dirty work?

We are actually doing the work. We are investing in municipalities. We sending out that one Manitoba growth and renewal fund, \$62.5 million, and they get up here and have the gall to say it's nothing. Get a grip.

**Mr. King:** Honourable Speaker, they say that we're ignoring; they're ignoring.

The Association of Manitoba Municipalities, the very people this minister claims to work with, passed a resolution calling for an overhaul of how education is funded. They want education taxes off the municipal property tax bill because they know it's unfair and unsustainable.

Why won't this government listen to municipalities and finally reform a broken system that ties school funding to rise property values?

**Mr. Simard:** Municipalities want schools that thrive, right? They don't want to be going out there and blaming the bad government. What they want to do is they want investments in their schools; that's what they say.

And what I would say—you know, I'm going to table this for the opposition. On May—in May—or, in March—sorry—we tabled the budget—a budget. The next day in the Brandon Sun, they said: budget brings benefit to Westman. Those Westman MLAs got up the next day and said: there's nothing in it for Westman.

Who do we have to believe? The paper of record or, you know, the people on the other side talking about all these other things. It's bluster. It's not—

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

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

**Mr. King:** Honourable Speaker, Manitoba is the only province in Canada that still funds education through property taxes collected by municipalities. Having a valuable property does not necessarily correlate with

the ability to pay. Adding the additional burden of misplaced tax on struggling Manitoma [*phonetic*]-Manitoba families only drives housing insecurity.

Will the minister work with his colleagues and remove education funding from proper-property tax bills, just like the previous PC government was working towards?

**Mr. Simard:** Yes, I'll work with my colleagues in building schools in your community. Brandon, Neepawa, Ste. Anne, all over Winnipeg, we'll actually get these things built. We'll actually invest in schools. We'll actually invest in kids. We'll actually do the work that those educators and those school boards have been begging for, and, finally, they have a partner at the table.

We'll work with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. That's why we've invested \$42 million in Manitoba GRO, in communities, like St. Laurent, like Virden, like Boissevain, like Rivers, like Minnedosa. Those are all constituencies—

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

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

**The Speaker:** Order.

### Education Property Taxes Increase Concerns

**Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot):** This week, the Kinew government sent out the NDP education tax hike bills. All the same time, families from Kildonan-River East want to enrol their children in sports, dance and music for summer programs.

What advice does the member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Schott) have for her constituents? Do families pay for youth activities or the NDP education tax hike bill? Which one?

\* (14:30)

**Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance):** For years, the members opposite made life more expensive—Manitobans and they also made life harder, whether that was raising costs on Manitobans, again, in new and creative ways, or making cuts to every single thing we care about as Manitobans.

So we know for years they cut education; they set our kids back. We know for years they cut health care, they cut nurses, they left—they gave zeroes to almost the entire civil service for years in a row and made life harder.

We're moving the province ahead. Finally, Manitobans have a government that's focused on their best interests, and we're working to get the job done, funding education, fixing health care, and while we do it, continuing to make life more affordable. Almost 80 per cent of Manitobans are better off, thanks to the measure we brought in, and that's a fact.

And we're going to keep making life more affordable every single day.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Springfield-Ritchot, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Schuler:** Thanks to the previous PC government, Kildonan-River East has amazing sports and dance programming available to families: Gateway community centre, Garden City sports complex, LA Dance Academy, to mention a few.

Can the MLA for Kildonan-River East give advice to families in her community? *[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Schuler:** Should families in Kildonan-River East enrol in sports or dance or music, or should they pay for the NDP education tax hike bill? Which one?

**MLA Sala:** If the member does want to provide any helpful advice to his constituent, I would encourage him to look at list of 25 things we're doing to make life more affordable for Manitobans. And I'm happy to read those off for him: again, permanent cut to the gas tax, 10 per cent; free park passes for a year; a hydro rate freeze; a universal school nutrition program; a \$1,600 homeowner affordability tax credit; free birth control; more coverage for menopause; we doubled the fertility tax credit; we doubled the prenatal benefit; we increased the renter's tax credit, which they reduced so that renters would have to pay more money in Manitoba.

They took us backwards; we're moving us ahead.

**Mr. Schuler:** So two questions and the member still hasn't answered, so we'll continue; perhaps this is the one.

Thanks to the previous PC government, both River East Collegiate and West Kildonan Collegiate offer great sports programming. Now families are looking to continue by enrolling in the FC Northwest or Phoenix soccer clubs.

Unfortunately, families in Kildonan-River East have had hard choices to make this summer. The choice for some will be: summer youth activities or the NDP education tax hike bill.

Can the MLA for Kildonan-River East advise: Should families choose activities for their children or pay the NDP tax bill? Which one?

**MLA Sala:** Again, if the member opposite wants to give more advice to the constituent, he can tell that constituent that our government has done the important work of stopping the millions of dollars of cheques that they were sending to Bay Street, instead of having that go to our education system. And I'm happy to know—get feedback on how that conversation goes.

And in the meantime, the work continues. This team continues to focus on making life more affordable, and we're very proud to say that, again, our budgets, both of the budgets we released, focused on the everyday affordability challenges Manitobans are facing, whether it's their cost of energy or otherwise.

We're doing that work, and we're going to do that work every day because this team, every member of this team, is focused on making life more affordable. They made life more expensive; we know which way we're going: we're going to make life cheaper for all Manitobans.

#### **Number of New Paramedics Government Hiring Target Inquiry**

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** Honourable Speaker, it's Allied Health Professionals Week, so there's no better time for the Minister of Health to address the fact that 93 per cent of paramedics in Winnipeg say they've experienced violence on the job and 71 per cent have seriously considered quitting.

Over a year ago, the Minister of Health promised more paramedics. Where are they?

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** Honourable Speaker, I find it really interesting that, during allied health-care professional week, instead of standing up in this House and apologizing for her role in driving 90 paramedics out of our health-care system by advising Heather Stefanson to cut health care and turn her back on rural health care and rural paramedics, instead of standing up and apologizing for that, she's asking our government: Why aren't you doing the work of cleaning up our mess faster?

Well, I'll tell you what. We are doing the work of cleaning up the mess that they made in seven and a half years of damaging our health-care system. On this side of the House, we have 168 net-new allied health-care professionals on the front lines. We know there's



much, much more to do. We're committed to doing that work.

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

**Mrs. Cook:** The minister knows that the allied health-care professionals they're referring to are not all paramedics. I'll remind the minister they promised 90 new paramedics in 2024. We're now well into 2025.

How many net-new paramedics has the minister added to the health-care system?

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker, not only have we added net-new paramedics to the front lines of our health-care system, but our government has added emergency medical response folks to the front lines of our health-care system.

We work directly with AMM. We work directly with rural Manitobans and leaders to make sure that we could have emergency responders attending to Manitobans in need who have that basic training—first aid and other skills that are needed to provide care in Manitoba's most vulnerable moments. They've been asking for that for years—seven and a half years, in fact—but the previous PC government turned their backs on rural Manitobans and wouldn't work the leadership.

We—they brought forward a resolution. Our government listened; we've made that policy change, and now they can practise in our health—on the front lines of our health-care system.

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

**Mrs. Cook:** The minister still hasn't answered the question, so I'll answer it for them for the benefit of Manitobans. Of the 90 new paramedics they promised to hire last year, they've hired 14.

How does the minister justify hitting just 15 per cent of their own hiring target?

**MLA Asagwara:** I want to be clear, Honourable Speaker, what the member opposite just said. Under the former PC government, with her advising the former Health minister and former premier Heather Stefanson, they drove 90 paramedics out of our health-care system. They wouldn't allow them to train or practice advanced care paramedicine across rural Manitoba.

Our government is hiring net-new—for the first time in years, net-new paramedics across our province.

We're meeting with these graduates; we're giving them a letter of offer in their hands for a job in this province, something they never saw under the failed PCs.

So yes, Honourable Speaker, we have a lot of work to do to fix the damage that that member and members opposite did for seven and a half years. And we wish it were going faster, but we're doing the work each and every day. We're making progress. Much more to do, and we're doing that for Manitobans because we respect them, we love health care—

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

#### **All-Party Committee on Local Journalism Composition of Committee**

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** The government has announced the formation of an all-party committee to explore the future of local journalism in Manitoba. However, the proposed composition includes four members of the NDP caucus and only two from the PC caucus, with no representation from independent MLAs.

This structure raises concerns about the committee's ability to function as a truly non-partisan body that reflects the diverse voices of our province.

Will this government commit to revisiting the committee's composition to ensure equitable representation so that the committee's work genuinely reflects a collaborative all-party effort?

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Well, local journalism is a public good. It's something that Manitobans rely on to hold, yes, governments but powerful people, in general, to account; it's something that is used to celebrate the young people in our communities who achieve great things in sports or in school, and it's something that we use to notify each other about the times where we want to come together and celebrate, whether that's the anniversary—like we're celebrating with Manitoba today—of a significant milestone, or perhaps it's an achievement like that Stanley Cup parade that we hope will be celebrated in Manitoba someday soon.

Now, it's a shame to see members opposite on various parties of the House asking questions when they've had the opportunity to engage with this all-party committee since last year, but that's fine.

The point is this: let's sit down at the table, hear from Manitobans about what they believe in journalism and then get to work recommending solutions.

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

#### **Consultation with Diverse Communities**

**MLA Lamoureux:** Local journalism serves as a vital platform for many diverse communities across Manitoba.

Currently, the journalism committee lacks provisions for consulting with these communities and the media outlets that serve them, risking the exclusion of important perspectives.

\* (14:40)

How does the government plan to ensure that journalism committee actively engages with the—with and includes input from diverse media voices, particularly those representing marginalized and cultural communities to create a comprehensive and inclusive strategy for supporting local journalism.

**Mr. Kinew:** Yes, what the member's describing is the work of the committee. Travel around the province, go to the Pembina Valley and ask people there: So Golden West does a great job of serving you through the online platforms and the radio stations in this region, right? And I'm sure people in the Pembina Valley, Steinbach, the central plains, will say enthusiastically: yes.

Other parts of the province will go there. Perhaps in Dauphin, you've got the radio and online, but there you've got a community newspaper, as well, too. When we go to the North, Indigenous language media, Indigenous language publications. Here and in many other parts of the province, other cultural communities, faith-based media, as well, too.

Let's get to work and bring everybody around the table so that we can go out to hear from Manitobans about which media outlets are serving you, and how you think we, as your provincial government, can work together with those organizations to ensure that you continue getting the unbiased, well-supported and public-good-serving information—

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

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

#### **Public Transparency and Accountability**

**MLA Lamoureux:** Honourable Speaker, transparency and accountability are cornerstones of a healthy democracy, and local journalism plays a crucial role in upholding these principles.

The proposed journalism committee must embody these values, not only in its objectives but also in its own operations and mandate.

What specific measures will this government implement to guarantee that the journalism committee operates with full transparency and accountability, including public reportings of findings and stakeholder engagement, to reinforce public trust in the government's commitment to supporting local journalism?

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, I think the most important step is we've invited the opposition in to draft the recommendations. I'm pretty sure that they're going to come into question period high on their horses once again if, you know, those recommendations are not being shared with the public.

So the members opposite, again, don't have a substantive 'objection' to the all-party journalism committee; they just want to come forward and, you know, light their hair on fire, as they do on any number of issues on a given day.

But here's the real, substantive work that we're doing; we know that there's a public good here that needs to be served that the market is failing to address in a sustainable way. That is the role of government, to step up and address.

So we are going to do so. We are going to be very patient with the members opposite, and we continue to have that hand outstretched for them to come forward. I really wonder whether the media organizations in their respective backyards are on board with the questions that they've asked here today; I don't think that they are.

Again, we—we'll be very patient, because our objective—

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

#### **National Police Week Recognizing Law Enforcement**

**MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface):** Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to share it's National Police Week, a week to honour law enforcement across Manitoba and across Canada.

For seven and a half painful years, Manitobans had a PC government that froze funding to law enforcement. But our government is supporting law enforcement, giving them more tools to fight toxic drugs and violence in our communities.

Will the Minister of Justice tell us about the importance of honouring National Police Week?

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Honourable Speaker, on behalf of our government, I'm honoured to extend a huge thank you to everyone that's working in law enforcement in all corners of this province.

As part of our commitment to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, we'll never return to the days of funding freezes where law enforcement is disrespected year over year. We'll continue to invest in public safety.

National Police Week is an important chance for us to recognize and honour our police officers here in Manitoba. To all those who put your lives on the line every single day to protect and serve our communities, we will never be able to say thank you enough.

#### **Oak Tree Towers Emergency Services Calls**

**MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie):** The minister opposed 24-hour security guards at Oak Tree Towers, but the residents would not take no for an answer.

Honourable Speaker, how many community safety officer, fire department and RCMP calls have occurred since the minister listened to those residents?

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness):** Safety and security in our Manitoba Housing buildings is a top priority for this government.

Members on the opposite side, when they were in government, they cut tenant service co-ordinators; they cut security services in these very buildings.

We'll take no lessons from members opposite. Since we've come into government, we've invested \$5.2 million into Oak Tree Towers.

And I'll share more in my next answer.

#### **Oak Tree Towers—Resident Concerns Calls for Permanent Security Services**

**MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie):** Honourable Speaker, because people deserve an answer, let me help the minister with their portfolio.

I table PortageOnline article—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Bereza:** —that did the math—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Bereza:** —for them. Zero calls for fire—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order, please. Order.

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

**MLA Bereza:** It was 19 before security guards were in place. Zero calls for community safety officers, where before it was multiple calls per day. Many, many less RCMP calls.

Can the minister explain why they are cutting 24-hour security guards effective June 4?

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness):** Well, what I can tell that member is, those members—or, those residents from Oak Tree Towers were banging on their doors since 2021 with no answer.

We've come to the table. We've put in a shatterproof door at the front door. We put in security cameras. We put in key card access. That's what's brought those numbers down.

We've been working with the mayor. We've been working with the Winnipeg police. We've been working with fire and paramedics.

We'll take no lessons from members opposite, who can't work collaboratively with anybody. They like to light everything on fire and fear monger. We'll take no lessons from members opposite. We'll continue to work with those residents, with the mayor, with fire and police.

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

**MLA Bereza:** Honourable Speaker, I just want to make it clear that Oak Tree Towers is in Portage la Prairie.

I met with the residents last week and though it doesn't meet the formatting requirements to be tabled as a petition, I wanted to table the calls to action residents wrote themselves.

Honourable Speaker, residents are demanding that the minister immediately reinstate security guards and make it permanent.

Will they listen to the residents, yes or no?

**Ms. Smith:** I don't know where that member thinks that the security guards have gone. The security guards are still there.

We've put shatterproof front doors in. We've put key card access in. We've put security cameras in there. And this work had started a long time ago, soon as we got into government.

They were knocking on that former failed government's door asking for these improvements for years, to no avail. We'll take no lessons from that government.

In fact, they're holding up a bill, Bill 12, which, in fact, would save housing. Do they want to sell that Oak Tree Towers housing? Will that member answer that question?

#### **Bail Reform Plan Number of Repeat Offenders**

**Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West):** Last week, I asked the Justice Minister to stand behind his inaction on bail. He failed to answer once again.

Can the minister advise how many repeat offenders he has released to reoffend again under his failed bail reform non-plan?

**Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Well, Honourable Speaker, I have—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Wiebe:** I'm happy to report to the House that not only is our five-point bail plan starting to see results, but we're also building off of the success of the electronic monitoring program.

Of course, these are the ankle bracelets that the members opposite cut when they were in government—cut that program completely. And so, of course, we've invested in that program. I can report to the House, Honourable Speaker, we've got a hundred of these ankle bracelets out in community. They're keeping people safe.

We're going to keep taking action with the National Police Federation's recommendations. We're going to continue to push the federal government. And we're going to make our communities safer every single day.

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

Order.

\* (14:50)

## **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—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Balcaen:** The background to this petition is as follows—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

Speaker's standing, so I would ask members to kindly quit hollering across the way. Someone is trying to speak. I can't hear them, so I need to be able to hear what people are saying.

So I would ask members to please quit hollering back across the way, from all sides—*[interjection]*

The honourable Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), the Speaker is still standing.

**Mr. Balcaen:** Thank you for always guiding us properly, Honourable Speaker.

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's, WPS, investigation provided adequate evidence to meet the charging standards and recommended charges be laid against the accomplice. The Crown prosecutors declined to proceed—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 in 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 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 prosecutor's decision to not prosecute the accomplice in the death of Jordyn Reimer.

Honourable Speaker, this petition was signed by Kevin Nelson, Kim Skoc, Larsen Nelson and many, many other fine Manitobans.

**The Speaker:** No further petitions?

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly, and 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.

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(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 petition is signed by Tricia Kauk, Leigh Stachniak, Lindsay Baumer and many, many other Manitobans.

**The Speaker:** There are no further petitions? Grievances?

## ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

### House Business

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** I'm announcing that Bill 10, The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act (2); Bill 25, The Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act; and Bill 26, The Vital Statistics Amendment Act, which were previously announced for the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development on Tuesday, May 13, 2025, at 6 p.m., will instead be considered by the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs on the same date at the same time.

**The Speaker:** It has been announced that Bill 10, The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act (2); Bill 25, The Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act; and Bill 26, The Vital Statistics Amendment Act, which were previously announced for the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development on Tuesday, May 13, 2025, at 6 p.m., will instead be considered by the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs on the same date at the same time.

\* \* \*

**MLA Fontaine:** Can you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply for the consideration of departmental Estimates?

**The Speaker:** The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Will the deputy please take the Chair.

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

#### ROOM 254

#### BUSINESS, MINING, TRADE AND JOB CREATION

\* (15:10)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation):** Yes. Good afternoon. It is my great pleasure to be here on behalf of my department as the Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation to discuss Budget 2025, which sets us on an exciting path to build one Manitoba together.

We want Manitoba to be a province where everyone can build a good life with an affordable cost of living and good paying jobs, driven by a strong, diversified economy. To support these priorities, this budget makes investments that will drive economic growth and northern investment, grow our mining sector and build a diverse and inclusive workforce.

Manitoba's greatest threat right now is the economic uncertainty and risk resulting from the trade tariffs imposed by the United States, our largest trading partner, as well as from China.

We are working to protect Manitoba's economy and have already implemented significant measures in response to these tariffs.

Budget 2025 takes significant steps to make Manitoba's economy more resilient and diversify our trading partners and export markets. This includes supporting our local business community through the small-through the Support Manitoba. Buy Local campaign to encourage more Manitoba consumers to buy Manitoba products from Manitoba businesses and help ensure that more of their money stays within our Manitoba economy.

We leveraged our relationships with our economic development partners and sector councils to effectively promote the export support program. In 2024-25, 48 companies were approved for funding to attend 82 national and international events, trade shows and missions to form valuable partnerships. As a result, these Manitoba companies were able to expand the export of their products and services into new and more diversified markets.

Our government continues to reduce our province's reliance on the US as our main export market by strengthening our internal economy, as well as cultivating and expanding additional markets for our province's exports.

To support this work, we have invested up to \$1.5 million in grant funding to Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, CME, to develop supports and programming for Manitoba manufacturers that may be impacted by US tariffs.

This made-in-Manitoba tariff response program will include business and workforce training on tariffs and market diversification, a summit to promote business-to-business connections and financial support for tariff planning consultation.

We are dismantling barriers within our domestic economy. Manitoba is a leader in Canada on internal trade and we will continue to lead. Manitoba is the only province that allows direct consumer sales on all alcohol beverages.

We will also continue to work closely with our federal, provincial and territorial counterparts to further reduce barriers and expand interprovincial trade. This includes initiatives such as working toward mutual recognition agreements for trucking and consumer goods, Canada-wide credential recognition of labour mobility and a rapid reviewing—exceptions under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement to create a more open, domestic market.

Manitoba will also be opening an office in Washington, DC, to build and strengthen our relations to advance—to advise of Manitoba's 'interense' with the US administration and other DC-based partners. At the same time, Manitoba will actively pursue opportunities in global markets and participate in trade shows to showcase our Manitoba advantage.

Manitoba's position as a central trade corridor has never been more important. That's why we have dedicated \$36.4 million over two years to the Arctic Gateway Group for capital infrastructure projects at the Port of Churchill that will strengthen our central trade corridor, expand international trade, create good jobs for northern Manitobans and protect northern sovereignty.

In the face of economic uncertainty, driven by tariffs, it's especially important for Manitoba to have a plan to develop our economy in a way that will take—that takes our future into our own hands.

Our new economic development strategy will help us build Manitoba for the future. Our consultations on this draft strategy have begun. We are listening to Manitobans, businesses, labour leaders, Indigenous communities and municipalities across the province to ensure our strategy will help improve quality of life for all Manitobans with concrete actions that will lead to higher wages and grow real income per capita.

The survey on EngageMB is open now, and I encourage everyone to provide your input.

The Manitoba Strategic Innovation Fund supports Manitoba's economic development strategy by attracting investment that will transform our economy through increased productivity, job creation and sustainable growth. Budget 2025 continues the fund with another \$50 million to invest.

\* (15:20)

Strategic investments from this fund, like the \$13-million investment in the development of global agricultural technology exchange, or GATE, in downtown Winnipeg, are protecting Manitoba jobs, driving innovation and bringing more investment to Manitoba.

Now more than ever, we must work together to drive Manitoba's economic growth and diversification through enhanced trade partnerships, increased investments, improved productivity and responsible mineral development.

Manitoba is a leader in responsible mineral development and is home to critical minerals of global interest. Last year, we released our Securing Our Critical Mineral Future strategy, which will help us unlock our full mining potential. Working closely with Indigenous nations and industry, we will deliver the critical minerals the world needs, create more good-paying jobs and bring new investments and opportunities to northern Manitoba communities.

We are partnering with the Mining Association of Manitoba to deliver—to develop and deliver an internationally focused critical mineral marketing campaign to attract foreign investments to the province and diversify export markets. This \$1.5-million investment will help reduce the long-term effects of tariffs on Manitoba's critical mineral sector and increase investments from international markets.

Continued growth and investment requires a competitive, inviting business environment that makes it easy to do business in our great province. To attract investment and advance Manitoba's mining sector, we created a single window critical mineral office to provide mining businesses with customized service to streamline processes and speed up projects to development while respecting the environment.

We were proud to announce the new mine construction phase within 18 months of taking office. In March, the Alamos Gold began shovels in the ground in Lynn Lake, Manitoba. The gold project will be the first new mine open in Manitoba in over 15 years. Our government is ready to work with industry and Indigenous communities to realize a range of mining

and mineral opportunities that are critical for the clean energy economy of the future.

To provide guidance and inform this work we have established a Mining Advisory Council with representation from government, Indigenous organizations, environmental groups, academia, municipalities and labour, with key objective of advancing Indigenous inclusion and mineral sector partnerships.

Manitoba's economy is resilient. It's growth is only possible because of its talented workforce, and as our workforce and workplaces evolve and global trade policies are uncertain, our government is committed to building a skilled, inclusive and adaptive workforce we need for the future.

And to do this future-proofing, our training and skills infrastructure is modernizing our apprenticeship and certification system and aligning our workforce development programs to labour market needs.

This Budget 2025 provides \$400,000 to help equip Manitoba's technical training institutions with more modern tools, equipment, materials and ensuring apprentices receive industry-relevant training that meets today's workforce demands.

I'm so excited about this and many more initiatives our department are taking on this year, and to all those watching, today is May 12; happy Manitoba Day.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister, for your comments.

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

**Mr. Jeff Wharton (Red River North):** Thank you, Chair—Mr. Chair. How would you like to be—Chair? Just Chair? Honourable Chair, okay. Thank you, honourable Chair, for recognizing me.

I'd like to thank the minister, too, for his opening comments.

My opening comments are very brief, because we have a lot to talk about today. I'm looking forward to our discussion, of course. Economic development is, of course, one of the leading departments when it comes to the future of Manitoba. We know that, without an eye on economic development and continued growth, that we as Manitobans will not be able to continue to enjoy the services we count on each and every day, like education, health care and social services.

So this is a very important file for us, and I know it's important for the minister and his staff, so I look

forward to discussing more as we continue to talk about some of the areas that were started under the previous government and continued on—which we're happy to see—and some areas that we would like to see move forward to ensure that, certainly, Manitobans and Manitoba families can continue to get through these very, very unprecedented difficult times.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Red River North.

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 10.1. (a) contained in resolution 10.1.

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

**Mr. Moses:** It's my pleasure to introduce the staff who will be with me today. I take the moment to also thank the staff for the tremendous amount of work that they do to prepare, not only for this committee, but also for preparing the budget as a whole and the commitment to delivering on the budget and its impactfulness that it'll have for all Manitobans; not just this year, but in many years to come.

So it's my pleasure to introduce deputy minister, Michael Jack; assistant deputy minister, Finance and Administration, Melissa Ballantyne; assistant deputy minister, Workforce Development and Training, Michelle Wallace; assistant deputy minister, investment trade, Jana Schott; assistant deputy minister, Minerals, Petroleum and Geoscience, Jeff Kraynyk.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

According 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.

**Mr. Wharton:** I, too, would like to thank and publicly appreciate the hard work of the department led by the deputy minister as well. I know, for the one bill that the minister has introduced, the deputy minister and his team were quite help there—quite helpful in ensuring the information that we were looking for was answered. And I appreciate the correspondence that



was sent back to my office, and it was certainly helpful with respect to that particular bill. So I thank you all for that.

And again, it's been a pleasure to—it's a pleasure to see you again, and I hope that we can have a great discussion today, led by your minister.

Quick question for the minister: Can he refer to chart—the organizational chart on 19. The introductions were made. Just want to confirm that this chart is still as-is, dated April 1, 2025.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Red River North.

**Mr. Moses:** To the member opposite, I really appreciate the sincerity of which your gratitude for the staff. I share those comments and I think it's very, you know, it's very important for us to recognize the diligence, that it takes a lot of work—I mean, you're very well aware.

You know, going from transition of government is always a challenge on everyone: on politicians, but also on civil servants. And so it's important that we have that continuity of excellence and a continuity of experience to not only move files forward, but to really be able to deliver on those types of vision and the type of direction that you want to take in terms of being able to move things forward.

I know, certainly on this file, our priority is around: economic growth—economic development; investment growth; improving our landscape in the critical mineral file, as well as our work force development; our significant challenges.

\* (15:30)

And it's the work that we are dedicated to each and every day. And as well, it's the work that I think our team is really passionate about. And I think that's one thing, you'd probably agree, that I've experienced as well, that our team has a high degree of passion for this work and I think they do a tremendous job.

As referred to, page 19, Organizational Structure, the—as the member opposite alluded to here, yes, the organizational structure and chart is accurate there and I outlined the same assistant deputy ministers and deputy minister as I introduced. So the organizational chart on page 19 is accurate.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

For the information of all the members, I would gently request everybody to address the questions and answers through the Chair, please.

**Mr. Wharton:** I thank the minister for confirming that, and again, just to finish up on that, the—your OREs or other operating entities are Economic Development Winnipeg, Manitoba Development Corporation and Rural Manitoba Economic Development Corporation.

Also, your other organizations accountable to the minister, Apprenticeship and Certification Appeal Board, Apprenticeship and Certification Board, Mining Board and Surface Rights Board, that are also indicated on page 19.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton).

**Mr. Moses:** So thank you for the question.

The other reporting entities there that are listed on page 19 are accurate: Economic Development Winnipeg, Manitoba Development Corporation, Rural Manitoba Economic Development Corporation and other organizations accountable to the minister: the Apprenticeship and Certification Appeal Board, Apprenticeship and Certification Board, Mining Board and Surface Rights Board are all still accurate there as they are listed on page 19.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Wharton:** Some folks watching today may find that opening up on the numbers is—can be a little boring but obviously, it makes sense to go over the numbers and what makes the—this department tick.

So we're going to spend a little bit of time on actual numbers on the estimates of expenditures for '25-26, starting with part A, Operating. Essentially, there's a couple of areas here that I have a question on.

Number one, Administration and Finance. Right now, we're looking at \$6,009,000, I believe that reads. It's up approximately \$700,000.

Have—are these funded FTEs or is this an increase in overall staff? I guess I'm looking for an answer to that.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Red River North.

**Mr. Moses:** Honourable Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. It's important, obviously, as the member opposite highlights, that the work of staff and to understand the work that's going to be going on this coming year by the department.

Obviously, each role within the four sections that are detailed here have a very important function. Whether it is both the administration of finance, which

plays a key important role to make sure that we are meeting and living up to our financial obligations with respect to what our amounts are appropriated to us through the Treasury and making sure that we fall within those respective responsibilities, or whether it is our investment in trade branch, which has the responsibility to, you know, of course, work with a lot of partners and drive investment and growth, do a lot of that foreign direct investment work and business expansion through trade.

And you can see there those two specifically that I mentioned that there is the same number of FTEs, as well as in our workforce development and training. Now, with a consistent number of FTEs over-year over year—and obviously that team does a lot of the work of building up people's skills for the job market, the labour market and holding regional offices, doing the significant work to ensure that Manitobans have the skills to meet the jobs of the future.

And whether that is helping, you know, a person through—a young person find out what type of careers are available in Manitoba, whether it is some helping a person navigate the sometimes tricky world of applying for and trying to get a job that meets their needs and meets their skill set, or whether it is helping to make sure that we have the right number of skilled trade workers through our apprenticeship program.

The workforce development and training team does a tremendous job in the FTEs, are consistent year over year. And, furthermore, minerals, petroleum, geoscience team as well ensures that we have a robust not only inspection team, but that business unit, that critical mineral office that is working to deliver and dive into projects in a meaningful way with industry, make sure that those projects have the ability to get off the ground and make sure that government is supporting as appropriate, and also to make sure that we are doing our best to ensure that we are working both with the highest respected environmental standards and to First Nations.

And so to answer the member opposite's question, honourable Chair, yes; the FTEs listed there are funded. This increase to the dollar are part of normal changes and salary increases year over year. There's no change in the staffing complement year over year, but it's a change to salaries as part of the normal salary increases which happen from one fiscal year to the next.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Wharton:** And I thank the minister for that clarity. I do have another area here to that line where the minister had commented that there weren't any changes in the FTE complement. Would that not be a reduction of 4.5 FTEs under the Minerals, Petroleum and Geoscience line? Am I reading that wrong?

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton).

\* (15:40)

**Mr. Moses:** I want to just maybe seek a bit of clarity there as I think I don't have the—I think maybe the member opposite doesn't have the same line of sight on the information that I have there, because there's very clearly no change to staffing, no reduction as the member opposite suggested.

On page 37, as he mentioned, which states the departmental programming and financing operations, part A expenditures, has a total FTE count of 57 in '24-25, and 57 for '25-26. So just very clearly no change there on page 37 to our FTEs year over year. As I mentioned, it's 'stata' quo: no decrease at all.

The member also mentioned Minerals, Petroleum and Geoscience which I want to just clarify. I see here on page 45, and on page 45 we see in that area here a staff complement of 102 in '24-25, and the same 102 in '25-26. So there's no reduction in terms of the number of FTEs in either the 37, as the member opposite mentioned, or to Minerals, Petroleum and Geoscience, as the member opposite mentioned. So just to clarify the record, there has not been a reduction in staff there.

Maybe the member wants to redirect the question into another area, but just to be very clear, there's not a reduction in any staffing there. It's very clear that we want to prioritize some of these areas, continue to do the really good work of ensuring we have not only the ability to effectively running our obligation, our department, with meeting the obligations of finance and of our appropriation as given to our department but also deliver the mandate of our Minerals, Petroleum and Geoscience branch. They do significant work.

You can highlight the four areas that are mentioned within that branch, which is first the Manitoba Geological Survey. And they do the work which is very clearly to do that really important geological work, whether that is going out into the field and surveying Landsats and understanding what the geology looks like in Manitoba.

By the way, Manitoba has some of the most—some of the richest geology in anywhere in the country, with

a variety of significant deposits, and it's the geological survey team that has a geologist on the ground that can pull that data, track that data and then store it through their extensive core library that helps to collect and maintain and keep those records available.

The reason that those records are so important is because it helps to speed up some of those—that next discovery by keeping that long library of core samples available for government and for industry and public use, it ensures that the company or next explorer or prospector who wants to do work can review our core library, understand the samples that are there in the geological deposits that you might find in a variety of areas across Manitoba, whether you're talking about the Westman or eastern part of the—of Manitoba where you might find lithium or cesium deposits, understanding what are the potential for potash in the Westman region or even a lithium brine of some sort or understanding what that nickel belt looks like up in Thompson, you know, and the significant—continued significant potential it has for economic growth and for job creation in northern Manitoba.

That's one area there, and you can see very clearly there that we continue to maintain a strong workforce there and—as it's a priority area for our government as well as mining, oil and gas, which has, obviously, significant ability to grow in our area as we work with oil producers in Manitoba, in the Westman region, but also to ensure that they do the proper inspections of oil-gas pipelines across the province.

And that work of—in doing those inspections, has, I think, been certainly fortified under our government, and it's the work that we want to continue to do to not only ensure that we work productively and effectively with business and industry, but on the oil and gas side, that Manitobans can rest assured that they have a government that is going to ensure they have strong public safety and strong accountability when it comes to our oil and gas sector.

So I'll leave it there, but very clearly outlines some of the points there with very strong workforce in those areas. And if the member opposite has another question regarding that, I'd welcome it.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Wharton:** I thank the minister for that clarity.

Working off two books—working off the supplementary book '25-26 and working off the Building One Manitoba Estimates of Expenditures. So the book I'm quoting from is the Building One Manitoba book which, under part A, Operating, clearly tells me—and

maybe you can explain it to Manitobans and myself because I'm understanding, though, that it looks like there's a reduction. But what you're saying, if I go over to 'supplemeny' to the Estimates expenditures budget, that breaks it down further. Is that what you're saying?

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton).

A gentle reminder again to put the questions and answers through the Chair, please.

**Mr. Moses:** So I'm—want to address the member opposite's question, to clarify it for him. If I refer to the book that he is referring to as well, the Building One Manitoba, if I look at page 37, which I'm assuming that's what he's looking at—I didn't get a page number his last question, just to be sure, but that's the one I'm looking at for my response here.

So I am looking at that section under part A, Operating, and No. 4, where he's referring to Minerals, Petroleum and Geoscience, okay. So under this section, to be clear, this is a section on appropriations, this whole page, which is not a staffing page. This page talks about the appropriation amount, not staffing. So to be very clear, there's no change in staffing amount in any of the areas, including no change in staffing in Minerals, Petroleum and Geoscience.

\* (15:50)

This section's very clearly on, around the approach and—appropriation, which is very much for those Manitobans who are looking at home and trying to understand the term appropriation, this is very much the budget, the amount of budget we have in this section of our department to spend on that respective area.

And so the change that the member opposite is referring to is very much driven from our petroleum team, which has the same level of staffing as it had in the past, but is actually working very, very efficiently; and it's from specifically our petroleum area that does our petroleum inspections.

And I think as of last year, if the member opposite can recall around the issue we had with the Imperial Oil pipeline that went—was—went out and was not operating for a few months last year, we then took a few steps to really reassess how we can be doing that area of work a lot stronger as a government. And so we worked very closely with the assistant deputy minister responsible and other folks to dive in a bit about how we can do that in a stronger way and a more meaningful way, I think that would not only improve

our government services, improve quality of service to industry, ensure environmental enhanced—environmental safety and protection and bring that reliability that Manitobans are looking for when it comes to oil and gas products.

And so one of the initiatives that we did is to make sure that we have now—for the first time, I would say—a real concrete and strong process for ensuring that we have the documentation, written documentation, on inspections of oil pipelines by that inspection team. Not only are they doing that, but, in fact, we've fully staffed that area, which I would also flag was—had some vacancies under the previous government. And so by not only filling in some of those vacancies, and not only doing it in a more robust way, what we're actually able to do now is do it more efficiently.

And so that means an inspector going out and driving out and inspecting two or three different spots or different pipelines at one time. Instead of driving, doing one, and driving back to the office and doing another one and driving back, now we're able to go out and do a multiple inspections at one time.

That's led to a significant efficiency mark on the way we are operating as a government, and that is why you're seeing that change there, from the amount that it requires us to appropriate to that line of work while not only delivering the same, but I would say very clearly, better results, in terms of our enhanced and robust documentation for those inspections, but also the fact that we've got it fully staffed up and the team is able to do really meaningful work.

So I would argue to the member that where he's mentioning in page 37 of our Building One Manitoba budget, it is very clearly no change in staffing, and, in fact, we filled vacancies that were left vacant under the former government. Not only we—have we have a team that is delivering more robust and meaningful work in terms of the reports they're doing for pipeline inspections, but also they're doing it very efficiently.

And so that's why we're seeing that change there that the member is pointing to, and I'm very happy and proud of the work that that team is doing.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Wharton:** I thank the minister and the deputy minister for that clarity on percentage.

So 15.4 per cent, the minister is saying they become more efficient by reducing the—I guess the complement of resources to minerals and petroleum, geoscience by 4.5 per cent; hence the total amount, I guess,

increased in this particular line item. And we're going to move off it right away, but the minister had put on the record that they're being more efficient and better, yet it's costing another 15.4 per cent to run this particular area in part A.

So with that I'll move on to my next question, and the next question is, for the minister: Could he provide me with how many political staff are currently working in his office?

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton).

**Mr. Moses:** So I'm going to get to the member opposite's question around political staff.

I do want to just touch back on his earlier comment, because I found it a bit—I just wanted to touch on a point. It seemed like he was perhaps upset or perturbed somehow of—around government efficiencies. We're very—a government that cares very much about, you know, delivering on our mandates to Manitobans in the most efficient way.

I mean, I go around and talk to business communities and business leaders all the time who, you know, are very much concerned around how we can run the most effective government as possible, and we're trying to deliver on that commitment every day. Part of that is making sure that we have programs, policies, legislation that meets their needs—that meets Manitobans' needs.

And that goes from every department, whether you're talking about improving our health-care system after many years of cuts and chaos, whether that's improving affordability for Manitobans, whether that is making sure that we have an education system that gives young people the tools they need to succeed, or whether it is making sure that we have an economic development plan, a strategy that is the most effective. And in every one of those areas, we're looking for some of the most effective and efficient ways to operate that ensure that we're going to be responsible with that public purse.

And so it—this is what we're doing, and it's—find it a bit strange and a bit funny that maybe the member opposite was trying to tell Manitobans that we shouldn't be running an efficient government. I don't think that's the path forward. That's what we're trying to do.

And so maybe the member opposite wants to clarify his comments there, because it sure seemed like perhaps he was suggesting against trying to run

an efficient government. But maybe I'll let his comments stand on their own, and maybe he wants to clarify or maybe he doesn't.

But, honourable Chair, with respect to the question around political staff, I'll let the member opposite know that we have three political staff in our department.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Wharton:** Can the minister provide us what the title of the three political staff—are they separate titles, I would assume—and their duties as well, please?

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Red River North.

\* (16:00)

**Mr. Moses:** I appreciate the question around political staff from members opposite. I think it's important that we work as transparently as possible, and that's why I think it's very important for Manitobans to know that all political appointees and the three staff that I mentioned are appointed through OICs, or orders-in-council, which means that they had their names and titles published publicly as the order-in-council was released.

And so the information that member opposite is asking for has already been released publicly, available to his and to all Manitobans' disposal if they choose to find that information out. And I'm very happy with the team that we have and are working with as political staff.

We've got a director of ministerial affairs who is really, using a metaphor for Manitobans, a kind of a quarterback here, plays a real lead role and being able to deliver not only on the functions and priorities of government and the mandates given by Premier (Mr. Kinew) to each department, but also in a day-to-day role of making sure that we continue on with the important casework of responding to and staying on top of, working with Manitoba businesses, working with people who are jobseekers, working with folks in the mineral, oil and gas sector. And that's really that quarterback steering director role—really high-level role that that director of ministerial affairs takes.

We also have an executive assistant to the minister who takes on that very, very much a day-to-day role, a role of making sure there is support there for meetings and day-to-day events and the ongoing, you know, question period and these sort of day-to-day issues, which are, you know, very important to the lifeblood of any political—politician and minister in being able to ensure that the day-to-day operating and

functions and activities continues in a smooth way and that, you know, we have that strong connection with the activities that go on in and out each and every day.

Our team also has an assistant issues manager, an issues manager who is really working behind the scenes to evaluate and assess some of the important issues that might be coming up, whether it is upcoming issues in our economic development system or they're that—these are things that are coming up in the, maybe broader political landscape or global landscape, federal issues or issues that are happening at very much even on a local level. The issues manager also, you know, makes sure that we have the day-to-day updates and briefings with, you know, things that are very relevant for us.

And so we make sure that we work cohesively as a team, the political staff led by the director of ministerial affairs. And I'll certainly say that it's a strong team and that I'll take this opportunity, as the member opposite has provided the space to speak about this, to personally thank the political staff we have on team and very proud of the staff to have on my team, but also the political staff right across government. You do invaluable work ensuring that Manitobans' lives are better each and every day, and I want to thank you for it.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Wharton:** Just some clarity. I don't know if I missed it; I apologize if I did.

Director of ministerial affairs, executive assistant and there was a third one I'm—you had mentioned? I'm sorry, Minister, through the Chair.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton).

**Mr. Moses:** Yes, I have mentioned the third. It says (3) issues manager, and that's the role I was saying does a lot of behind the scenes work, makes sure that we have those up-to-date day-to-day briefing notes, keeps us aware of, you know, whether it's federal issues, local, civil, municipal issues, global issues as well. Obviously, as the member can appreciate, there's a lot been going on down south and at the White House.

And so navigating and understanding the impacts of some of those things is part of the role of some of our issue managers, and I know that they've done a good job in helping us better understand, navigate, be aware of the latest up-to-date changes, and seeing what it means for us here in Manitoba.

And so that role is one that really helps us do that behind the scenes work, preparing us and making sure that we have the information we need to deal with things as they come on a day-to-day basis, and making sure that, as I mentioned, this team does a lot of good work working together, and, you know, want to continue to show that appreciation for all those political staff people.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Wharton:** Certainly, would also like to extend my thank-you to all political staff, including my staff that is here today as well, joining us as well. We know that they do great work, and working as a team in sometimes a very tough environment. So, we—I, too, extend my thank-you to the staff.

Let's switch gears a little bit now, and I'd like to ask the minister, if I may, through you, Mr. Chair: Can the minister provide us an example of how he's expanding opportunities to the global marketplace, as he mentioned in his opening comments?

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton).

\* (16:10)

**Mr. Moses:** So I think it's an important question around expanding the opportunities for global marketplaces and then it's particularly important in terms of the landscape of economic uncertainty with our largest trading partner, the United States of America; add in even more uncertainty with China, the tariffs that they're imposing on our agricultural sector.

And so we've done—taken significant steps to ensure that we are meeting the moment in terms of business certainty by ensuring that we provide the right tools and some supports for businesses who are looking to diversify and expand into new markets with global trade.

And so I'll highlight a few programs and initiatives that we're doing, and so the first one I'll highlight is through the export support program. And that's a—gives the companies—Manitoba companies that have ability to go and receive support from the Manitoba government and use that support to go and have a trade—go to a trade show in an international market, visit international events and go on missions.

And these are the sort of resources that allow businesses to create new connections and new markets for their products and services. We're very excited about the program.

In '24-25, we were able to support 48 companies that were provided and approved for funding through this program. They attended 82 national and international events, trade shows and trade missions that really was helping them to form those valuable partnerships. And these companies here in Manitoba—Manitoba companies were able to expand their exports of their products into new markets—more diversified markets—which I assume is at the heart of the member opposite's question.

So that's a significant program. We rolled that out and actually went back, as that program is—as an 'extending'—an existing program, we went back in the landscape of the latest tariff threat and uncertainty and went with another round of funding so that more Manitoba companies and businesses could improve themselves and advance their businesses and grow in the new diversified global markets in the face of this uncertainty. So we did even more this year in face of those challenges.

A couple other programs I want to highlight for member opposite is our funding for Canadian manufacturers and exporters of \$1.5 million, and that's specifically to deal with some of the tariff uncertainty. So that funding is working in collaboration with CME to develop that made-in-Manitoba program, to work with manufacturers who export and give them the tools they need to find new and diversified markets.

It's going to help them mitigate some of the impacts of tariffs by working directly to find out whether they—how they figure out that becoming CUSMA compliant, getting their products to the United States, but also to help them be able to strengthen the supply chains right here in Manitoba so they're less reliant on the US supply chain, but also define brand new markets around the world.

So that made-in-Manitoba approach is—we're working in collaboration with CME on that at \$1.5 million, as well as through their critical mineral marketing, working in conjunction and partnership with MAMI, the Manitoba association—Mining Association of Manitoba. And so that funding is really did—help develop and put Manitoba on the global map when it comes to critical minerals.

As I mentioned earlier, we have a wealth of critical minerals here and fantastic geology, which I think is something that is even underexplored and has an opportunity to be a big part of our future economic growth in Manitoba.

And so to help market that, we are putting some of those dollars, you know, supports and working in partnership with MAMI to make sure that folks right across the world know about the opportunities to develop critical minerals, get products off-out of the ground, do so in a way that is respectful for—of First Nations—and environmental concerns, but also make sure that we're going to meet the needs of a growing economy, one that is more reliant on technology, on critical minerals, on rare earth elements and other really innovative technologies.

And we can be part of that solution here. We can be part of that future that relies more on critical minerals, and ones and critical minerals that are developed here in Manitoba, that puts more good jobs here but also respects our strong environmental standards and business standards.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Wharton:** I thank the minister for his comments as well.

I guess, just expanding on that a little bit, what countries has the minister visited or been in contact with with respect to foreign investment? Or again, most important thing is ensuring that Manitoba companies have the opportunity to expand in markets other than to the south. We know that global tensions are high when it comes to tariffs right now, so it's important for Manitoba companies to have a path forward.

So if the minister could provide Manitobans today with those countries that he or the department have visited with to ensure that Manitobans understand what path the minister and the government is taking, and then we'll talk a little bit more about investment as far as helping companies move forward.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton).

\* (16:20)

**Mr. Moses:** So we have done—pretty fairly significant amount of work, I would say, in terms of reaching out to global markets. And I'll also say that this is some of the work that we're done—doing within our department, although there continues to be ongoing work done by a lot of our partners, like Economic Development Winnipeg, RMED and others that I'll, you know, won't directly speak to, but I'll just provide some context around some of the things that we're doing directly out of our team here in Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation.

So, first, I'll highlight, as member opposite would know and we've talked about before, is our trade 'mishington' to Washington, DC, last year, which was a very good relationship-building event, which I think is already showing some fruits of its labour.

We also participated in a trade mission—federal trade mission to South Korea where we made good networks with the business industry there and also had some continued meetings with folks in Japan. Our team was there as well to strengthen those Asian markets.

Our team was also in Germany—in Hanover, Germany, at a large—in fact, one of the largest conferences—Hannover Messe; it's an advanced manufacturing convention. And there was a significant presence there, and I think it was very, very well received, our—not only our presence there, but the impact that it had being there.

The BIO—or BIO—which is the international bio-sciences and life sciences conference, took place in San Diego—the USA, California and so we had a presence there, as well, last year. That's the largest bio and life sciences conference in the world, and so it was a really important ability for us to not only get more global access to companies interested in investing and growing here in Manitoba, but also to reiterate Manitoba's position as one of the largest manufacturers of pharmaceuticals in the country and one of our—actually, I believe our largest export by volume in Manitoba—so it's a very important sector. We're happy to continue to have that presence there.

Also took part in some aerospace—Manitoba being the third largest aerospace sector in the country—participated in the Farnborough airshow in the UK.

And as well as—it's important to also note that we had really, really strong presence and meetings with many of our international partners from the ambassadors and high commissioners who we met with over the course of the past year.

And so some of those countries that we've had really terrific meetings with and continue to develop, I've actually had so many—some follow-up meetings already on, as a result of—some of these include ambassadors from Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, ambassador of Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, ambassadors from Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

We also meet with Czech Republic, and we actually have meetings upcoming in the next coming days with

more international ambassadors and partners to really expand our global presence as a province. And I think part of that relationship building is—goes to that saying: You've got to relate before you can negotiate. And so we're very much having extremely productive conversations and being able to tell that Manitoba story around our advantages.

You know, in this era and this time period of global uncertainty, knowing that Canada is a trusted partner, knowing that we have a rules-based society and that we want to work and build partnerships, is refreshing to a lot of international partners.

And that's a story we're really proud to tell; about being at the centre of the continent and a transportation hub, having vast geological formations with critical minerals, having access to tidewater through Hudson Bay and the Port of Churchill, having strong manufacturing presence and a really talented and well-educated and well-skilled workforce.

We're all such a great story to tell. We're happy to tell that with partners around the world because we know that's part of our recipe for growing businesses right here at home.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Wharton:** Just one follow-up before I turn it over to a independent colleague that's at the table that has a couple of questions.

So follow-up to the minister's comments, I also, too, had the opportunity to attend the bioscience conference in Boston, Massachusetts, and I will echo the comments that it's one of the biggest in the country—or in the world—and it's actually a—Manitoba is already on the world stage. And the word escaped me but it came back to me—because we have the largest support of medicaments, which was the buzzword we used around the department quite often, so glad to see that that's continuing.

I just want to know one other quick answer here. It's going to be challenging to be quick, but the minister had mentioned that they're already—we're already, and I quote, bearing fruits of our labour, when the minister put on a number of countries and jurisdictions on the record in his last answer.

Can he highlight one fruit of his labour that we've been able to look at to build our economy and partner with other nations?

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Red River North (Mr. Wharton).

**Mr. Moses:** So I appreciate the member's request for brevity in my response here so I'll deliver on that. But I will also just say, I maybe also mentioned UK as another ambassador relationship we had met with. There's also a few others that I think—you know, we've had so many meetings.

But I'll say this in very specific terms that there are certainly many fruits of these labours, and when we have one of them that we are ready to announce, I'm sure that the member opposite will be the first to know.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** I'd like to thank both the minister, of course, for being here and answering so many of our questions this afternoon, as well as my colleague from Red River North for allowing me some time this afternoon to ask some questions to the department.

These questions actually come from organizations who I've had the opportunity to meet with and discuss what to bring forward today, here in Estimates, so I'm just going to go one, two, three—go through them and hopefully get some answers relatively quickly as well—see how many we can get through.

The first question is: Given the growing demand for critical minerals, can the minister speak to Manitoba's current strategy and how it plans to balance the increased extraction with environmental and community concerns?

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Member for Tyndall Park.

\* (16:30)

**Mr. Moses:** I thank the member opposite for that question. It's really important, right. Like, we've got a lot of critical minerals here in Manitoba. You know, 30 out of 34 listed on the federal government's critical mineral list are here in Manitoba.

And so there's a lot of potential for developing those, and understanding how they might be developed in the future is really important. Our goal is to develop them in, you know, in a way that is not only respectful of First Nations, Métis communities and nations in our province, but one that also has the strongest environmental standards and builds community at the same time, and I mean build community by having buy-in of communities but also providing good jobs for First Nations and northern rural communities as well.



And our strategy that we launched last year—last fall, has the pillars around, you know, developing those critical minerals projects faster. That means working within our department to speed up our own permitting times and having the ability to work through projects in the most effective way, giving the most clarity to industries so that they understand where they need to go to get their product to the next stage.

Also working with building stronger supply chains, so that is, you know, those first-mile projects: transportation, getting—how do we get those goods to market, but also how do we make sure that there are more avenues for us to add value to our critical minerals before they leave Manitoba.

I would point to things like Port of Churchill. Leave—last year, critical minerals went out of the Port of Churchill, and we're going to do more of that this year. It's going to be a significant win for driving our economic growth here through supporting critical minerals here in the province.

The third pillar is making sure that we really double down on our commitment to working with First Nations, with the Métis, Indigenous partnerships and building that reconciliation into projects from the ground up.

My conversations with First Nations on this file have been, obviously, very important and very central to our focus. By doing so in a way that is—involves and encourages meaningful engagement and consultation not just with us as government—because that is, you know, central to our focus—but encouraging industry to have those conversations and engagement with companies on the—at the earliest stage possible helps First Nations and Métis and communities get more engaged early on in the process and make sure that they're supported and understanding these projects have the potential to benefit their communities.

Obviously, focus on northern jobs, very important, as we did with a—you know, you saw first-hand, I was talking about the Lynn Lake mine opening up. Huge amount of construction jobs in that region and 450 ongoing jobs for lifespan of the mine—that's going on 30 years—is significant for a rural and northern community, and that strong environmental focus.

So to make my answer short, I want—and I know the member opposite wants to, you know, to get a few other questions in—so I just want to highlight one in particular way we're really balancing that, and that is our Mining Advisory Council. And I think this really gives us and helps to give us as government really strong advice. The council has representation from

government, from Indigenous organizations and from environmental-focused groups, from academia—that's, like, post-secondary institutions—municipalities and labour, as well.

Their guidance and their—those conversations of bringing people together is really great, because not everyone has the same perspective, but we all share in that same goal of finding ways that critical minerals and mining operations can benefit us.

And if we have that focus and we can bring together those people and am—had continued, meaningful dialogue, that is a sort of bridge building that helps more projects get off the ground and makes sure that they have a benefit for the entire province.

So that Mining Advisory Council has already had its first meeting. We met a few months ago, and we'll continue to have a meeting—I think we'll have future meetings this calendar year and ongoing. And it's a really strong way to show that we are serious about partnership and working towards an inclusive critical mineral sector.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

Just a gentle reminder to all members to put the questions and answers through the Chair.

**MLA Lamoureux:** I thank the minister for his answer.

I was hoping, honourable Chairperson, that the minister could outline what specific environmental safeguards are currently in place when it comes to mining, prospecting and exploration, particularly in protected areas such as provincial parks or caribou habitat.

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

\* (16:40)

**Mr. Moses:** I thank the member opposite for that really important question. Obviously, it's important to balance the concerns around impact to environment or to wildlife, when it comes to any industrial development or opportunity.

And so I take those concerns to heart. I've had a lot of good conversations with folks and Manitobans who have raised concerns around what they might be perceiving as impacts to communities and to wildlife in particular, to operations happening in parks. These are very important issues that we work in collaboration with, not only on a minister-to-minister level, so myself and—*[interjection]*

Minister of Environment and Climate Change (MLA Moyes) and I work very closely together when it comes to these files, as well as ministers from across the board, and I think that also extends very deeply to department staff who, with every project, requires those—that work they're proud to go through. The hands of different departments, including wildlife, including heritage, including fisheries and, of course, environment who review these projects before they get permitted to move forward.

The largest review around these—before it goes to get a permitted review—is The Environment Act licence and that's a significant step. And so some of the accommodations that might take place, if there are any concerns around impact to caribou or to around Beamer [*phonetic*] park.

And I'll highlight one, you know, I know the—I've met with folks who were very passionate about the boreal woodland caribou and the impact that—they're very sensitive to disturbances and noise. And so for projects that even have a chance of impacting that, there's accommodations made and mitigations that come along with permit for those operations to go ahead.

As an example, could be that operations can't go on during certain months of the year, right, during particularly sensitive time for caribou. Could be that there's a certain buffer around a known path, or a known area that's sensitive to caribou. Or it could be a—you know, that you're taking special care to be aware of the surroundings and the operations.

So these sort of accommodations are attached to the permit of operating for companies. And so our department, as much as we are working to ensure that companies have the ability to move projects forward, we do so in a—with an approach that keeps a close eye to how do we make sure that environmental standards and the impact to wildlife is mitigated as much as possible.

And I think that really goes to—just briefly, I'll tell you that it goes to our story that we can tell as Manitobans. When we try to market this around the world, right, we don't want to—we want to market this as the highest quality nickel or zinc or copper anywhere you could find in the world. In order to live up to that, it means us making sure that we have those really high standards in place.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**MLA Lamoureux:** I'd like to ask the minister: What steps are taken to ensure transparency and community

notification when mining claims exploration permits are issued, especially in or near residential areas or recreational lands?

**The Chairperson:** Order, please.

Could you please speak up? Thank you.

**MLA Lamoureux:** I don't get—often get told to speak up louder. I will project.

What steps are taken to ensure transparency and community notification when mining claims or exploration permits are issued, especially in or near residential areas or recreational lands?

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

**Mr. Moses:** Honourable Chair, I appreciate the comment from the member opposite, and it's important that we, you know, do that notification and consultation with the appropriate groups.

So we primarily focus our consultation with the relevant First Nations and Métis communities who are in the area of any operation and includes drilling and other exploration at that stage.

We also, you know, if those operations are in a park and there is a cottage community nearby in the proximity, we'll also notify the cottage association, for example. That would be also something that happens. And I'll also flag that for quarries when it comes with quarry operations. We also have the process now of notifying the RMs as well.

So these are just some of the ways that we send a notification and communication to communities across the province to ensure that they're aware of the operations. And I think that certainly our efforts are to be as, I'll say, transparent as possible.

\* (16:50)

And it also goes to how do we build, you know, more buy-in for these projects. And I think, certainly, we want more Manitobans to understand the details of these projects and make sure that they understand how they'll impact and support these projects moving forward.

So that's some of the work that we do there on the notification piece, and I'll leave it like that and let the member ask another question.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**MLA Lamoureux:** Thank you, Minister, for your answer.

How is the province ensuring that communities closest to mining projects, particularly in northern and Indigenous areas, are benefitting directly through employment, training and infrastructure investments?

**Mr. Moses:** So, honourable Chair, I'm glad I have a chance to respond to this, because it's really important that as we do these development projects, that we are ensuring that Manitobans have as much benefit as possible. And some of that benefits, you know—as these projects are in oftentimes in northern communities, in primarily First Nations or Métis or Indigenous communities, it's important that we know that the benefits of some of that economic activity is going to really move the needle in terms of economic activity for those communities.

So there's a number of things that we're doing to ensure that local communities, First Nations, Métis, benefit from these projects. And so I'll point to a few of them.

First, I'll point to some of the training that we're doing to support local communities to build up skills to take on some of the work that happens as a result of mining projects and mineral develop and explorations projects. So two partners that we work with is the University College of the North, as well as our northern sector council.

You know, I was up in Thompson earlier this year at the Linkages conference and had a chance to connect with folks, both from the northern sector council and from UCN. And they talked about some of the partnerships that they're doing to develop and invest in skill development for particularly First Nations people who live on-reserve or in the North to take advantage of those job opportunities.

One of the programs I can think, and it's very specifically, was one to help First Nations people on-reserve get the skills to do drilling activity. And it was a program that went over a few weeks where they came in and learned in class and got hands-on experience, as well, and gone through the—of what it's like to actually do drilling work.

And after the program was done, I think just about every one of them got a job; if not, they were getting offers before they finished and completed a program because employers were excited about the opportunity of hiring a workforce that has an interest in it and has

that connection to a local community. UCN does similar work, as well, to develop the skilled workforce.

We also work with other departments of government, like Transportation and Infrastructure, to ensure that as these projects are getting online that we have the infrastructure needs—we're aware of those infrastructure needs.

And so where there needs to be improvement to different roads or highways, we take that into consideration. I'm very happy to work collaboratively with my colleague, the minister from Transportation and Infrastructure, to try to improve local infrastructure as it would assist both local community, First Nation, but also with industry, to get those projects online faster and more effectively.

We also encourage and are very strong in encouraging companies to work in collaboration, consultation, do that consultation work, with First Nations. And that's where, to my earlier point to the member opposite, was that we encourage early conversation with First Nations. Part of that is to encourage them to do the work to set up those sort of agreements and do that consultation so that hopefully there can be an exploration agreement or an IBA, an impact benefit agreement.

And I think that's really significant. And one example, one very concrete and real and impactful example of this, is the work we did in Lynn Lake with Marcel Colomb, the Alamos Gold project. You know, they have signed an impact benefit agreement with—that's meaning Marcel Colomb First Nation has signed an impact benefit agreement with Alamos Gold. That means that they're going to have impact and benefit economically from that project and share in some of its success.

And so, you know, that's something that we think is really, really critical and important to having a long-term success of these projects moving forward, and I know that's something that we're encouraging companies in all parts of Manitoba who are in the critical mineral space to do.

The last one I want to highlight is around protocol agreements. And so these are the agreements around how we work in consultation with First Nations. I was up in Lac Brochet earlier to sign a protocol agreement with the First Nation there. And that's a really significant milestone about how we're going to relate and how we're going to do consultation work on critical mineral projects with them.

I was up there with Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures (Mr. Bushie), as we signed that a few weeks ago, and it's one of those important steps that sets us on a pathway to ensure that local communities, First Nations, the Métis, benefit from these projects moving forward, and it's the right approach for us as Manitobans.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister.

**MLA Lamoureux:** Minerals also include valuable resources in stone, aggregates and sands.

Can the minister please share what the government fee is per ton for each product and speak to the fee increases over the past 20 years?

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

**Mr. Moses:** I'd love the member opposite just to provide a little more clarity on the question. Is it—you wanted to understand the fee per ton on sand and—

**The Chairperson:** Order, please.

Hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

## ROOM 255

### FINANCE

\* (15:10)

**The Chairperson (Rachelle Schott):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Finance. Questioning will—for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye):** Thank you to the minister for giving us this opportunity today.

I'm going to start off today focusing on school taxes and taxation generating revenue for funding schools in our province. It's something that is of high importance in my constituency and I know for constituencies across our province. It's something that Manitobans are concerned about, not knowing where the increases are going to end for school taxes.

So we've seen a 17 per cent increase to school taxes in some school divisions, and in the Winnipeg school divisions, homeowners are seeing a \$200, \$332

increase to their tax bills and a much higher increase in some other communities across our province.

Homeowners were paying \$150 million more last year and another \$180 million more according to the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) spring budget this year. So many Manitobans are bearing the effects of the change in school tax structure.

I had served 12 years myself on local municipal council, and I know that municipalities are at the forefront of the school tax questions each fall.

So can the minister today tell us how much more school taxes may be going up for homeowners this year, and—two part to that question—how he's going to safeguard Manitobans to see an end to the tax increases that school divisions across our province have been able to impose on property owners?

\* (15:20)

**Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance):** Welcome to the committee. It's good to have an opportunity to talk about a lot of the good work that our government is doing when it comes to either making life more affordable or investing in education.

So the question is focused around education taxes and school taxes, and I think this is an important moment to talk a bit about education investments and where we're at overall as a province.

And, of course, very proud that in our last budget our government brought forward \$67 million in new investments to support our school system. That represented an over 4 per cent increase in the level of funding to school divisions in Manitoba, and that builds on a prior budget increase which, again, was far in excess of the rate of inflation.

And those two increases that we provided were, unfortunately, coming after many, many years where Manitobans had a government that was not investing adequately in education. And, in fact, we know year over year, school divisions were not getting increases that reflected their costs, and I recall, you know, challenging discussions with school divisions about some of what that—the outcomes of those funding cuts and what that meant.

In St. James it meant, you know, the need to get rid of an international baccalaureate program, which was helping our best and brightest in west Winnipeg to have opportunities that may not otherwise be afforded to them in our corner of the province.

That's one example of what happened as a result of the underfunding that those divisions experienced after many years of PC cuts to education. That left them in a very challenging position.

And so, fortunately, you know, our government has ensured that school divisions are being funded in a way that reflects their needs, again, in excess of inflation. We know that school divisions, one of their biggest costs are of course FTEs, and year over year those costs were going up. And yet, under the last government, they weren't seeing those increased costs being reflected in funding increases to help them do the important work that they do.

That set the stage for, I think, clearly, a real challenge for divisions that I think they were very happy to see our government responded to with some significant changes and increases to the scope of their funding.

Of course, beyond that, we responded to another area where the last government had left Manitobans falling behind when it came to education, and that was ensuring that we were investing adequately in helping our young kids to succeed in school. And we know that one of the biggest barriers to kids getting ahead was just simply the lack of access to a nutritious breakfast at the start of the day.

And so, you know, we responded to that by bringing in a \$30-million universal school nutrition program that now ensures that all kids in Manitoba have the ability to start their day with nutritious food that will help to ensure that they can succeed and become the most that they can be. Again, year over year of us failing to attend to that challenge left a lot of kids falling behind.

So proud—really proud of the work that our government did to respond to that and make sure we're supporting those kids to become, again, the best that they can be and to support their success and growth in our education system.

You know, speaking about further investments in our young people and responding to challenges that Manitobans are experiencing after years of being left to fall behind under the former government: child care. We made some really important investments in not only continuing to grow access to child-care spaces, but extending access to affordable child care. And we extended \$10-a-day child care to be all year round, not just during school days, and what that meant for families, it's going to mean an extra estimated \$800 per child.

And so that is a significant improvement to the affordability of child care for those families who rely on that to be able to get to work and help their children develop and grow. So another, I think, really exciting and important investment that we made after years of, again, falling behind under the former government.

You know, we're talking about investments in education, and broadly the critic is asking about really what it comes down to is funding for schools.

Look, we're not only responding to those core funding lapses; we're not only responding to the lack of support for kids who need it; we're not only responding to the lack of access to all-year-round affordable child care, but we're also making incredibly important commitments to develop new schools.

And I was so proud to, along with the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and our team, announce 11 new schools that we're going to be developing to make sure kids around the province can get access to the facilities they need, and more to come in my next answer.

**Mr. Narth:** And I look forward to actually hearing an answer to that question. I'll maybe add to that to make sure that we have complete clarity.

My question, honourable Chair, to—for the minister—is to elaborate on the funding formula that the minister foresees bringing forward to Manitobans around school funding, education funding and the burden on school tax—municipal school tax.

\* (15:30)

And what I'm getting at with that is that Manitobans are concerned that there is not going to be a ceiling on school division taxation on their property. They're concerned that programs will be available to the neighbour's children and not theirs because the Province has put the burden of taxation onto the individual school divisions.

In a constituency like mine, I represent Manitobans that are served by five different school divisions. That means that the neighbour's children go to school within a different division than theirs. Some school divisions are very mindful of representing the tax burden on ratepayers, and therefore haven't increased their rate. Parents and their properties have not seen an increase like we saw in Hanover School Division, but neighbouring school divisions have substantially increased their rate of taxation. So they're concerned that that's going to mean that different services are provided to different children as a result of the tax structure.

So could the minister clarify the funding formula and where he foresees that formula settling so that we can avoid the effects of school divisions setting their rate depending on their own division's budget and not the concerns of all Manitobans?

**MLA Sala:** So, you know, again, I alluded to this earlier, but I'll repeat it: One of the most important things that we need to ensure here is that our school divisions are adequately funded.

And there's an important story here to be told through the level of funding that school divisions received under the former government, whether it's in 2021, when they received a 0.7 per cent overall increase; '21-22, a 1.56; or '22-23, 2.92. We can see that, year over year, the former government set up a very challenging situation for school divisions where, as I mentioned earlier, school divisions were forced to make tough decisions along the lines of, you know, the concerns that the member opposite just raised there about things he hears in his community.

Certainly, you know, Manitobans deserve to have access to a great quality education and their kids deserve good opportunities, but when you fund school divisions at these levels, you can't expect kids to get those opportunities. This is a clear pattern of underfunding that set up a real challenge for school divisions.

And, unfortunately, that challenge extended not just to the executives within those school divisions, but extended to the kids that they were serving. That's the clear record that the former government has when it comes to providing adequate funding.

And so, again, how do we minimize the need for local governments like school divisions to go out and, you know, raise taxes? How do we ensure that they do that at a minimum level? It's by ensuring adequate funding for school divisions.

And that's exactly what our government has sought to do. Again, whether it's through the 67 million new dollars we committed to with our most recent budget, which represented a 4 per cent increase overall, or again with our previous budget, which once again provided funding that for years had not been provided.

So that's the most important piece here: is beginning with and ensuring that school divisions are supported adequately by the provincial government.

And I think—I'm proud to say that, you know, our Premier (Mr. Kinew) has been very clear about wanting to make sure that our government delivered on that and, as part of that, deliver on our other broader

commitments like the universal school nutrition program, which is signed, sealed and delivered.

We said we were going to do it and, you know, that's a \$30-million investment and we are doing it and showing again that we're placing a significant focus on providing divisions with the dollars that they need, and again, are turning the page in terms of years and years of underfunding that left divisions in a very difficult and challenging place where they weren't able to serve their youth as they needed to.

We've turned the page on that, unquestionably, with adequate levels of core funding that are finally, again, turning the page on many years of underfunding.

So that work beyond proper core funding and how we, you know, how our government has chosen to approach supporting school divisions, we've also continued to do other important work, as I said, when it comes to education; in relation of, for example, the development of new schools.

So we knew that that was a major significant pressure that was, you know, Manitobans were facing and that the last government failed to deliver on. They talked about bringing in new schools but there was never any budget for doing—for actually developing new schools. So, you know, the Manitobans heard about some commitments but there was actually never really a plan in place.

We've done that. We brought forward a plan. And I'm happy to say that we brought a plan that will help to control costs and keep costs to a minimum through the good multi-year planning we did and through our work to ensure that those schools are designed in a way that there is a standard design that will help to control costs over the next many years, will therefore minimize cost pressures resulting from the development of those new schools.

And that's another thing, again, that I'm proud to say our government is focused on, is not only funding school divisions adequately, but also ensuring that as we move forward in getting the job done, in doing what needs to be done, is serve students in this province. We're doing it in a way that, again, in the—in terms of that new capital and those new schools, we're doing it in a way that's going to protect the public purse and that we're going to make sure that those schools are delivered in a way that keeps budgets tight while still ensuring we're meeting the needs of students in those divisions.

So, again, that reflects the top-level work our government is doing to support keeping costs low for Manitobans, funding school divisions properly after many years of underfunding and moving forward in a way that ensures we control costs through multi-year planning and doing that good work of budgeting responsibly and delivering for Manitobans.

**Mr. Narth:** Thank you to the minister for his response.

I'm proud to say that that was the goal of our previous PC government, is to adequately, centrally fund schools across our province. And I'm also proud to say that I've been able to attend grand openings of schools in my constituency that were initiatives under the previous PC government.

Unfortunately, with the last year of leadership of our province under NDP direction, we've seen a cut or halt to all schools that were proposed, so no grand openings to attend right now and many long-term promises, which are okay if we can see them come to fruition.

But my concern is that the minister is speaking of central core funding—adequate, as he has stated—adequate central or core funding for education and schools across our province. But homeowners, property owners across our province are seeing significant school tax increases on their property tax roll and they're concerned where that'll end, like I had stated in my last question.

\* (15:40)

So if the minister is saying that the path forward is adequate central funding, does that mean that the NDP government has a goal to adequately fund education centrally and that will inevitably eliminate property tax funding for school divisions. And the goal of the NDP government, in turn, would be to centrally fund education and eliminate property taxation for school divisions.

**MLA Sala:** I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the question.

I just want to start by speaking to something that the member opposite referenced, and I think it's important that when we're on the record that we lay facts down. So just in response to his comments: there were absolutely no cuts or halts to any planned school openings and I'll say that because, again, there were no plans for actual school openings. It was all make-believe. There was no budget. There was no actual specific, you know, appropriation that was focused on

enabling the opening or the development or construction of new schools.

It really is important, when we're here, that we speak honestly with Manitobans about, you know, what happened. And I can say, without any question, that there was no budget allocated for the purpose of building these schools. And so you can't stop something that never started.

I am proud, though, that our government actually has done the work and is moving forward with the important work of building new schools.

And I'll just maybe take an opportunity, since we're here and talking about schools, to read out the list of 11 new schools that we're planning on developing in the next few years: Devonshire Park school; Prairie Pointe school; Meadowlands school; Brandon southwest school; Brandon Division scolaire franco-manitobaine school, shout-out to the minister from municipalities; Ste. Anne regional high school; Bridgwater Lake school; Neepawa regional high school; Highland Pointe school, Winnipeg northwest high school and a new Division scolaire franco-manitobaine school in St. Boniface.

So you see, we're building schools across the whole province, and that's something that we know we needed to move forward with. And again, I'm proud that we're doing that in a way that demonstrates fiscal responsibility while still moving the needle forward in helping, you know, to ensure that our families in Manitoba have access to great quality schools, where they can be proud to send their kids and help their kids to succeed.

So you know, that, I think, reflects the focus of our government. We continue to invest in education, to do that in a responsible manner.

You know, when it comes to the funding schools and funding approaches, one thing I want to highlight that our government moved quickly to deliver on a commitment that we made which was to not send cheques to millionaires and to instead ensure that we're funding our education system adequately. We've delivered on that commitment to stop doing that. We did that with our changes to the education and property tax system, again, that are going to ensure that dollars are going to help students succeed.

In terms of our government's affordability measure here—look, the \$1,500 education property tax rebate is something that we know is going to save significantly greater proportion of Manitobans more money than the former government's approach. And the

Department of Finance, the fine folks that are supporting the—have done really good work in looking at what are the impacts of these changes. And what I can tell you is that the \$1,600 rebate, once that's in place, will continue to save almost 80 per cent of Manitobans more money than they would have saved under the previous government's education property tax rebate.

So that, ultimately, reflects the facts and where we are. Again, we're focused on ensuring that hard-working, regular Manitobans are getting the help that they deserve. We know that, in many instances, especially for low-to-mid-value-home owners, there's going to be a lot of Manitobans that won't have to pay any school taxes at all, because this approach will see them getting significantly more than they did under the former government's approach.

So, you know, again, this shows the focus that our government is bringing on not only reducing costs for Manitobans, especially those who need the help, more mid-value-home owners who are going to, in many cases, not have to pay school taxes at all. That's a great thing and that's building on a lot of other affordability measures our government has taken, focused on helping Manitobans to lower their costs.

And so that work continues. Again, you know, in addition to the \$1,600 rebate, there's a long list of other affordability measures. We're going to continue to ensure that our schools are funded adequately to do everything we can to support our divisions to do their important work. We're committed to that and that's what the member opposite and their team can expect from us over the coming years.

**Mr. Narth:** Unfortunately, that didn't give Manitobans too much clarification. But around school completion under the previous PC government and what has been seen—grand openings under the current NDP government—just for clarification, 14 new schools were completed during the seven and a half years, nine schools were in the works, which the minister had listed many of those schools that work had been done to see construction start.

So now the minister's claiming that those schools are initiatives under their government. Unfortunately, the communities know that that isn't true.

So circling back to properly or adequately centrally funding education in our province and what is to be expected for a funding formula, the minister had promised that we would see a new funding formula for education this year. Now we have seen silence.

So would the minister be able to clarify, maybe, what the foreseeable funding formula would look like, and along with that, if education, as the minister claims to be trying to achieve a adequate centrally funded system, why not increased central funding, reducing the need for school division taxation and eliminating a \$1,600 rebate?

Instead of collecting the taxes from the ratepayers unproportionately and then issuing a rebate, wouldn't it make more sense for an increase to central funding, eliminating the need for school division taxation and the need for a rebate?

So would the minister be able to answer that, along with clarity for Manitobans on when we can expect to see a rejuvenated funding formula for education?

\* (15:50)

**MLA Sala:** Thanks to the critic for the question.

So, you know, the critic's asking about what our approach is. Our approach is going to be to make sure that we fund education adequately. Again, something that hadn't happened for many years.

And I think that's a, sort of, symptom or reflection of the overall approach that we saw from the last government when it came to funding and supports for all manner of really important social investments and investments that help to move Manitobans ahead. I think it also spoke to their short-sightedness in terms of budgeting and planning and, you know, that short-sightedness in terms of these—the long-term challenges that they were creating for school divisions through that.

But that was in keeping with their failure to plan in a number of respects, and that's something that we saw emerge through the MNP report that was done shortly after we got in. We hired a respected independent accounting firm to come in and do a review of the former government's fiscal planning and the decisions that they made that led to a \$2-billion deficit that they left Manitobans with. And what they found—again, and this is something I've, you know, I've shared in the House and I'm happy to share here again today—is that they made decisions that constituted what was characterized by them as, quote: high budgetary risk.

And I think that was also reflected in their failure to do any long-term planning. They did not have a long-term vision for how they wanted to move Manitoba forward, and we saw that in all areas of government decision making, but also when it came to



education. They made deep cuts year over year over year that really ultimately impacted kids more than anyone else. You know, and that was in addition to the various things that they tried to accomplish in education; for example, their disastrous attempt at trying to move forward with bill 64, which was basically unanimously rejected by the entire province.

So they, you know, they failed to do long-term planning. That was reflected in short-term decisions that ended up impacting divisions, creating a lot of challenges. We knew we had to respond to that with adequate funding, and so that's something we've focused on.

I'm very proud of the work that's been done by, first of all, you know, my incredible colleague that's now passed, Mr. Altomare. We miss him every day. He did amazing work in coming in and helping to start that important work of moving us ahead on education. And, of course, that work's now been picked up by our new Minister for Education who continues to do that important work.

Look, there's no question that, you know, core funding and increases to it were incredibly important. We've done that. We've invested in a universal child nutrition program that's helping to move our kids ahead.

And we're also making other important investments. When I think about—you know, one beautiful portion of the budget here, page 67, talks about some of the important work we're doing when it comes to education in First Nations. And there's a beautiful quote in here on page 67: Education got us into this mess and education will get us out of it, by Judge Murray Sinclair.

And I know that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and our team were really inspired by him and his focus on education, and I think we see that manifest in some of our investments. For example, our recent budget invested further in education in Indigenous excellence: helping to train more language teachers, land-based curriculum, treaty education, an Indigenous Academic Achievement Grant and Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools program.

So, again, not only are we investing in ensuring divisions have the money they need, we're investing in a universal school nutrition program that's helping to ensure that all kids can succeed. We're investing in new schools; and I can say, you know, the member opposite keeps—continues to go back to this statement and trying to suggest that the last government had, in

any way, any type of a real plan for moving forward. Having something, quote, in the works, doesn't really add up to much. There was no budget, and so that equals no plan.

So we're getting that done, too, and, you know, again, we're doing—we're moving forward with new schools across the entire province, doing that a way that's fiscally responsible. This is why Manitobans sent us to government because they knew that they could count on us to get the job done.

And that's exactly what we're doing. We're proud to be moving forward with better funding for our schools, keeping life affordable, ensuring families have access to the schools they need, ensuring our kids have full stomachs when they start their day and we're doing all that while lowering education property taxes with our \$1,500, now \$1,600, education property tax rebates.

**Mr. Narth:** I think it's important that Manitobans know that the financial audit that the minister refers to had substantial error and the firm themselves that—made note that a lot of data was missing from the report provided by the Province and that it didn't include a lot more than public information.

But I think the larger concern—I don't want to dwell on this the entire time, and I will move on, but circling back to where the question had started that communities across my constituency and across the province are seeing that one side of the street, property taxes, as a result of school division taxation, has seen double-digit increases while families on the other side of the street may not have seen an increase at all.

So moving forward, is the minister prepared to say that Finance and Education will put a cap on the increase that school divisions are able to impose on property taxes, or that central funding or core funding of education in our province will be brought to a point where school division taxation will no longer be necessary?

So can the minister, mainly—the main part of the question—commit to putting a cap on school division taxation increases?

\* (16:00)

**MLA Sala:** Well, I do think it's important to respond to some of the criticisms we heard from the member opposite of MNP and the work that they did. Look, they're a highly respected independent accounting firm. They've done a lot of really great work in this province and abroad, and I think Manitobans trust

what they have to say when it comes to their assessment over decisions by the last government, and we'll take their word for it over the word of members from the PC team.

Look, they discovered some very concerning decisions that were made by the former government. We look at how did we get to a \$2-billion hole. Well, one of the main drivers of that was, again, if we talk about planning and poor planning—and this is what MNP laid out in their work—we can see that they made significant high-risk decisions, for example, when it came to their budgeting around Hydro profits.

So, somehow, while Hydro profit net income tends to hover typically between 100 to 200 million a year, that budget that was released by the former PC government before the election budgeted well over \$500 million in Hydro profits, which would be well beyond the norm. And then, on July 28, when they reported to Manitobans about the fiscal status, as governments do, what they reported was status quo; nothing to see here. What's the problem with that? Well, we were months into a summer season where it was clear that we were not going to get anywhere near the type of water that would be needed to support a \$550-million Hydro net-income projection.

That's just one example of the kind of decision making that MNP identified as being concerning. There were also other commitments that were made that were not reflected in the fiscal result reported to Manitobans on July 28 that that report speaks to. So there was, clearly outlined by MNP, a pattern of decision making that was fiscally irresponsible and that failed to plan over the long term. Those aren't, you know, that's not accusations that I as a member of government is throwing towards the PCs; that's the statement made by an independent accounting firm.

And so, you know, we will, again, state here very clearly that we trust in the good work that MNP did. They're an independent firm and we know that they do good work, and I don't think we should be suggesting otherwise here in the Legislature or accusing them of bending the truth to serve one party's interests or another's.

The—that thing that they laid heavily into, again, in that report, which they outlined, was the failure of the last government to plan adequately, and again, I'm glad we're talking about schools here, because that's a perfect example, where the 'gast' government talked about the, you know, this idea, this notion that they were going to be building schools, but it was make-believe;

there was no dollars attached to it. There were no actual—again, no real plans of any kind there.

And, you know, coming out of that MNP report, they leaned heavily into the importance of suggesting that governments need to make sure that they do that multi-year planning. And we took their advice seriously, and out of that, our team—that was one of the key drivers of why we did multi-year planning; and we did work that hasn't been seen in this province for at least seven and a half years before we came in, where we were looking ahead, genuinely looking at what we thought our cost structure was going to be and planning accordingly. And it was only through that multi-year planning that we were able to come out and develop a plan that is now included within our capital plan itself to build 11 new schools.

So you see it like government that doesn't plan, no schools being developed. Government that does plan, 11 new schools actually in a capital budget. That's a core distinction that Manitobans can see, sort of. You know, it's very clear what they were left with after seven and a half years, and it's very clear that we're doing that work.

And that's something we're really proud of, to have listened to that advice that MNP rightfully brought forward about the importance of good fiscal planning, multi-year planning. We took that advice to ensure we didn't repeat the mistakes that the former government had made; mistakes that ended up costing Manitobans in a variety of ways, and we're delivering.

And, you know, I think that this is going to continue to be a major focus of ours, to be fiscally responsible while we plan and deliver on commitments made, and that's exactly what we're doing and we're going to keep doing that for Manitobans.

**Mr. Narth:** I think Manitobans, through that response, can hear loud and clear that there is no cap to taxation under an NDP government and there is no cap on the amount that school divisions are going to be able to tax homeowners and ratepayers across our province.

That's concerning because that also leads into the ability for this government to adequately centrally fund education. If the minister was confident that he and his government have the ability to adequately fund education centrally, then it should be a pretty easy response to say that in the future, there isn't going to be a demand on—a financial burden—or, include a financial burden on property owners as a result of school division taxation.

And, to be clear, the increase in the deficit that the minister speaks of was a direct result of the NDP deciding to add more than \$700 million of spending after they formed government. And the last full fiscal year under the previous PC government, we saw a \$373-million surplus. And that was part of the audited public accounts.

The minister clarified—or tried to state claim for Meyers Norris Penny's report, and I've got the utmost respect for the respected firm, Meyers Norris Penny, within our province. So my question had nothing to do with the capabilities of Meyers Norris Penny, just that his government didn't provide Meyers Norris Penny with the information to allow them to provide an accurate and full depiction of the state of the finances.

And in the limitations of review section of that report—I think I'll read it into the record—it says: Further, the findings are limited by the following factors: MNP was only provided access to publicly available information. Access to Cabinet and Treasury board minutes or confidential briefing material provided to members of Cabinet to support Cabinet or Cabinet decision making are protected under the Cabinet confidence and were not made available to Meyers Norris Penny.

It goes on to state that interpretational differences of fiscal responsibility and accountability: the definitions of both fiscal responsibility and fiscal accountability differ in literature, resulting in opportunity for varying interpretations.

So the firm that's provided this, and it goes on—I think this is—not think, this is public information; that this report is accessible to all Manitobans and I encourage them to review the notes on that report after the comments that the minister had put on the record, because that does raise questions not only for me, but I'm sure many other Manitobans.

It was the direction of this new NDP government that decided to run a \$2-billion deficit, and now a \$1.9-billion deficit. So we can clearly see that the deficit continues to grow and without an answer to my last question, it's clear to see that the minister is unwilling to cap taxation of local school divisions. So fundamentally, if the minister claims that their government is going to adequately centrally fund education, it should've been an easy response.

\* (16:10)

So my question now is regarding the burden on agricultural properties. This is something that was of high importance to our agriculture industry across the province. And what certainty can the minister provide

to the agriculture sector and agriculture property owners that taxation won't increase on those properties moving forward?

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

**MLA Sala:** So, you know, I'm glad to continue talking about the MNP report—I'll talk about that all day; I love it. So I'm excited that the critic continues to dig in there because it's unfortunately not a lot of great reviews for the work of their team when they were in power for seven and a half years.

This is effectively a quote from the MNP report, and I'm happy to provide it verbatim. I don't have it right in front of me, but what it clearly states is that beyond the decision that I alluded to regarding the failure to disclose the Manitoba Hydro—the reality of the case there, that when they came forward to Manitobans on July 28 with their Q1 update, the report also flags that after Budget 2023 was released, several projects, capital and operating, were approved in-year that MNP estimated could be valued at \$1.6 billion, after a budget was released in an election year.

And that was not reported when the team went out to tell Manitobans about where we were at fiscally. So I don't know how much a finer point I could put on that, but that is, like, a real lack of transparency at best and I don't need to say what it is at worst. Very concerning to know that before an election, we were effectively not telling Manitobans really where we were, and Manitobans found out the hard way after the election about the reality of our fiscal situation.

And again, it's black and white. We saw a number of major expenditures and really bad planning culminate in a \$2-billion deficit, and I don't know how it's arguable. This is what Public Accounts, audited by the Auditor General, told Manitobans with clarity—that we had a \$2-billion hole.

And MNP is—pretty solid argument as to how we got there and it has to do with, again, making major, major commitments after a budget was created, along with really poor planning and the lack of prudence when it came to budgeting for Hydro and otherwise, where we really blew away and exaggerated the type of revenue any informed Manitoban may expect us to have when it came to hydro profits.

You know, we talk about—the critic also mentioned a deficit number or tried to ascribe a deficit number to us this year, which isn't true. I need to maybe speak to that just briefly.

Very proud, first of all, that we took that \$2-billion deficit number that we were left with. The following fiscal, building on our first budget—we haven't seen Public Accounts come out yet, but it's looking like that's going to land at about 1.3, and that means we'll have cut that deficit that we were left with by a third. And then our budget that we just released posted a \$794-million proposed deficit. That is the actual number that we posted.

Now, one thing I'm very proud of is, you know, we've seen in recent discussions that our team has had with institutional investors and credit rating agencies who we met with, with a—the privilege of meeting with, not last week but the week prior. We went out for almost the entire week and spent that time talking about our plan with credit rating agencies—Moody's, DBRS, S&P. These are folks that know a thing or two about government budgeting and they tend to check the details.

And, you know, those conversations were very positive conversations, and the overall message we heard was that our plan is credible and that they feel that the work that we did and multi-year planning to understand our cost structure over the next many years will position us well relative to our target that we set, which is to ensure we deliver a balanced budget in the final year of our mandate.

So, you know, that \$794-million deficit we posted this year, that reflects progress: \$2 billion, cut it by a third, \$1.3 billion. Again, we'll see where Public Accounts lands. Hopefully that'll go down even further. This year, 794—more progress.

And, you know, what the member alluded to shows—what he's referenced there was not the deficit number that we printed, but it was our attempt at ensuring that we do what the former government didn't do, which was to be transparent. And what we did is we printed what we identified through support from Deloitte, an analysis that they did about a worst-case scenario, a 25 per cent tariff scenario, which, thankfully, we're not in that environment any longer.

But that tariff-contingency budget that he alluded to showed, again, the worst-case scenario. We're not there, but what we wanted to make sure is we showed Manitobans what they might expect in that environment and that we're ready to respond to it if needed.

**Mr. Narth:** I'd like to thank the minister for that response, although it didn't answer any questions around school taxation on agriculture properties. But we'll try to land

on that. Unfortunately for Manitobans, all that they have to go on is track record.

So we saw our province's credit rating continually being downgraded under the previous NDP government, and then, fortunately for Manitobans, they saw fiscally responsible Conservatives at the helm for seven and a half years, leaving the last full fiscal year with a \$373-million surplus, and that was in audited Public Accounts. The \$2-billion deficit was, again, as a result of the spending that the NDP found to be necessary.

But, moving forward, like we had said, on education, and I'd like—circle back to the burden—potential tax burden on agriculture properties. I hope that what the minister is claiming does have some credibility with us moving forward to seeing future provincial budgets, because Manitobans deserve it.

\* (16:20)

I also have had the opportunity to experience a ribbon-cutting at schools that were funded and built and opened under the previous PC government. Unfortunately, members of the current NDP government haven't had that experience, and it's a great, heart-warming experience that I hope the members on his side of the House one day have the opportunity to experience. But unfortunately, I think it's going to be under a significant debt burden or the next time we have a Progressive Conservative government in office.

So that's unfortunate for members of his government, but like I said, hopefully there is some credibility in those statements that the minister put on the record, and Manitobans can enjoy sensible and credible investments into our education system.

But a concern that many Manitobans have, many Manitobans that not only provide economic strengths to our province, contributing a significant portion to our GDP, but also feeding Manitobans and people around the world, are our agriculture producers. Unfortunately, agriculture producers under the previous NDP tax model had been bearing an unnecessary burden of the tax structure. And that's the model that this government, under this Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), has, again, adopted, or rekindled, however you'd like to say it.

But I'd like the minister to be clear with Manitobans on the future plan. Right now, there hasn't been much talk around education taxation for agriculture properties other than a current 50 per cent rebate which was a carry-over from our previous PC government. But Manitobans, as they've seen significant increases

on their personal property taxes, they're not confident that they won't see the same undue burden on agriculture properties.

So I think producers across our province want to hear from the minister what his plan is and the plan moving forward for tax structure—school tax structure on agriculture properties.

**MLA Sala:** So farmers are no different than any other Manitobans, of course, in that they continue to experience affordability challenges. And I'm really proud that our government has continued to focus in ensuring that we make life more affordable for them as well.

And I think about some of the things we did right out of the gate with our fuel tax holiday that we brought in that was—benefited not only, of course, Manitobans driving their—Manitobans who live in our urban centres, but it also benefited folks living in rural communities. That includes producers who benefited in a huge way, including on farm gas, from a fuel tax holiday that lasted an entire year.

Now, very proud that when we brought in a permanent 10 per cent cut to the fuel tax, that we made sure that we extended that on farm gas as well, because we know that, again, producers continue to face those same challenges when it comes to energy affordability, and our government recognized that.

And, you know, we're proud to be a government that governs not only for one corner of the province, but for the entire province. And I'm proud that our, you know, our Premier (Mr. Kinew) and our Ag Minister continue to remind us of that and continue to place a lot of focus on rural communities and responding to needs in our rural communities.

Speaking about affordability, a thing that we like to rejoice a lot about in the House is our Crown land freezes. I think about when we were in opposition about, you know, what I heard when I spoke with ranchers and producers, about what that meant for them, what it meant for their families. How the increases that the former government were putting on their backs—with no warning had come forward with significant increases to their costs of operating—were going to threaten their ability to continue family farm operations. That there was significant risks that that was introducing to the family farm in Manitoba.

And I know that, you know, the last government didn't seem to appreciate the impacts. We saw a lot of ranchers organizing in response to that, farmers, producers saying, hey, this is going to be very damaging—including changes that were made in regards to unit

transfers, preventing producers from being able to keep that Crown land in their—within their business and to be able to benefit from the investments that they may have made in that Crown land that was contiguous to their property that made for a significant risk to their retirement plans. They had a piece of Crown land beside their land that they were—had invested in and that they were reliant upon. That represented part of the value proposition that they had created over many years of working very hard.

For some reason, and I never understood why, the Conservatives just dug in and really went hard at producers, made their lives more expensive and threatened the family farm. And, again, that was a surprise to a lot of us, but I think that reflected a policy that was focused on, I guess, extracting every single dollar they could from everyone in the province, whether it was farmers or whether it was ratepayers—hydro ratepayers. Like, where they took a lot of really concerning measures to increase hydro rates in ways that Manitobans will never know if those rate increases were needed, because they never went to the Public Utilities Board.

You know, we talk about producers and their importance and the work that they do in our province. Our government stands with them and we look at the investments we've made in reopening MASC offices—or, in opening MASC offices. We committed in this budget to opening two new MASC offices that will help to ensure that 94 per cent of MASC clients will be within a 60-minute drive of the closest MASC service centre. We know that the former government closed a lot of those.

We also wanted to make sure that in the light—in light of the current environment that producers are in with, you know, facing tariffs not only on one front, but two fronts with the Chinese tariffs that are being applied on pork and canola, that we reflected that and that we responded to that with significant investments in business risk management programming like AgriStability, AgriInsurance. Because we're committed to ensuring that producers are taken care of and that we're thinking about the kind of challenges that they face. And not only the challenges that they face, but we're thinking about how do we continue to grow the pie and expand opportunities for them.

And I think about the investments that our Premier (Mr. Kinew) and our Ag Minister made in regard to GATE, which is a very exciting, very forward-looking investment by our government to help create more opportunities for farmers in Manitoba to bring their

incredible products to market, not only here, but also beyond.

**Mr. Narth:** Unfortunately for Manitoba ag producers that do have significant concern about the agriculture burden that a change in the school tax structure would have on their bottom line, this minister wasn't able to provide any clarification.

And what the minister was able to do is, I think, take some speaking notes from the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn), which I'd like to take this time to clarify some of those, starting with the gas tax holiday that they brought forward.

\* (16:30)

It was a result of amendments brought forward by opposition that expanded the delivery of the gas tax holiday. And these were recommendations to make the legislation fair and equitable for more Manitobans, and that did include a small effect on agriculture producers, but I would hope that the minister doesn't feel that that was a substantial impact for Manitoba agriculture producers because fuel tax didn't exist on farm fuels previously and it only had on gasoline.

So as a producer and knowing that the minister is not an agriculture producer, so may not be aware, but on a farm, the only gasoline engines are a farmer's lawn mower and maybe his kid's dirt bike. So the impact of a fuel tax holiday for agriculture producers was limited at best. So, like I said, the amendment brought forward clarified the fuel tax holiday and made it more fair for more Manitobans, but did not have a direct impact on agriculture producers.

What did have a significant impact on agriculture producers is the change to the school division tax structure that the previous PC government had brought forward, something that I had asked the minister clarification on: if there would be a continued 50 per cent rebate or if that would be expanded for agriculture producers or eliminated. And I think the lack of answer is going to be concerning for Manitoba producers.

To add to that, again a speaking note from the Ag Minister that we've heard time and time again in question period is Crown land lease rates and a freeze to those Crown land lease rates. Just so that the minister knows, and hopefully he can pass that along to the Agriculture Minister, just how few farmers function with Crown land lease—Crown-leased land. It affects a small portion of mainly ranchers in the Interlake and the Dauphin constituency.

So if the minister wants to represent the concerns of agriculture producers across the province, opening two more MASC offices to provide services that agriculture producers now do together with their agronomous Crown lease—Crown land lease rate freeze and the gas tax holiday don't even amount to a fraction of the relief that the change to the property tax structure under the previous PC government had provided.

So again, if the minister can put on the record clarification on what a tax structure for school taxation looks like for agriculture producers and property owners moving forward—this year and moving forward.

**MLA Sala:** I'm very happy to have the opportunity continue speaking about the important work that we're doing to support our producers and to respond to the risks and the challenges that they're facing right now.

And you know, it probably won't surprise the member to hear that right now, the biggest worry that we're hearing and that our Ag Minister hears on the ground is regarding tariffs and the impacts of those tariffs. That's what's on the mind of producers in Manitoba.

And, you know, when we talk to producers and we listen to their concerns, I think one of the biggest questions they have is: How is it possible that the individual that's leading the PC Party thanked Donald Trump for tariffs?

And we can laugh about it, but you know, last week in the House, one of the things that shook me—I know it probably shocked, well, I don't know how many folks on the other side of the House, but on our side of the House, I think we were kind of blown away to hear that the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) doubled down when it came to talking about what he said in that podcast, where he thanked Trump for the tariffs.

You know, he went on to clarify that he was thanking him for his interference in a sovereign country, which really wasn't much in the way of a clarification. It was, I think, even more concerning for the average person to hear. And I would wonder what, you know, the producers that the member speaks with would say about that when he opens up those conversations, about the fact that the leader of his party was thanking Donald Trump for interfering in our country's sovereignty.

That's just—that's not even a question; that's what we all—we heard—all of us heard him say in the House last week when he, again, doubled down on his thank you to an individual that has created untold amounts

of uncertainty and worry for producers and their families.

That's got to be a heavy burden, I would imagine, for members of the PC caucus that operate in rural communities who have to explain why the leader of their party is thanking Trump for making threats against their livelihoods. Man, that's a tough thing to explain. I don't know how they do that or how they rationalize that.

It doesn't seem as though the Leader of the Opposition actually believes that there's even anything wrong with what he did. He seems to think it's fine to invite interference by Trump—maybe even other world leaders—in our sovereignty if it helps him to achieve what he thinks is the right outcome. That's scary for the average Manitoban to contemplate.

And, you know, in this environment, I'll say our government doesn't thank Donald Trump. We say no thanks to the chaos that he's created for Canadians, frankly for people around the world, and the massive economic uncertainty he's created for so many people who worry about their jobs, their businesses, our communities. It's just still a shock to me.

So, you know, we're here talking about what producers care about. Well, right now they're worried about tariffs, and I think if, you know, the member opposite really wants to talk about what our government is doing when it comes to ag producers, well, we're responding to their biggest worry, which is the tariffs that Donald Trump is threatening on them and the tariffs that China has applied to them.

We're responding directly to their core concerns, whether it's through increased investments in business risk management programs to make sure that if this year turns out to be a challenging year for them, that they know that they're good because their provincial government has had their back.

\* (16:40)

We've thought about the real challenges that they're facing and we've dealt with them and responded to that with real investments, that we've responded to real concerns they had about reduced access to MASC offices where very real services are being provided by the provincial government. They—last government cut a bunch of those offices. They made it harder for farmers and producers to access those incredibly important services. We're responding to that.

Those are the things that I know when I speak with our incredible Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn),

what he's hearing, the worries he's responding to: those are the worries. And what has our government done? We've responded to those concerns, and that is exactly the work that I think producers want to see a provincial government doing.

We're moving ahead in keeping their costs more affordable, by responding to the Crown lease increases the former government brought in. We're reopening new MASC offices that the former government slashed and cut because they didn't think they were needed. And on the absolute single biggest concern of the day, we are responding to those and we are certainly not thanking the person who's threatening their livelihoods.

**Mr. Narth:** It's clear to see to Manitoba ag producers—and I don't want to dwell on agriculture in our time here in Estimates, so we'll move on here shortly, but it's clear to see under three attempts to get clarification on the tax structure for agriculture properties and school taxation that the minister wasn't able to give any clarity or confirmation that there wouldn't be an increase to agriculture property owners.

But we did hear that instead of a commitment to property taxes and a reduction or limitation of where property taxes are able to go, instead of that, the minister said that in lieu of property tax increases for all agriculture producers, we're getting—agriculture producers are getting two more MASC offices, the commitment to freezing Crown land dues and a reduction of 10 per cent of gas tax on gasoline. So that is in lieu of a limitation on agriculture property taxes.

So the minister had also mentioned that the real concern wasn't property taxes for ag producers, but instead it was the threat of tariffs, which I don't disagree; it's a real, it's an immediate, it's a current threat on the feasibility of agriculture production in our province.

So I thank the minister for leading us into this question, and hopefully as a result of the leading answer for the previous question, the minister will have a lot to put on the record for Manitoba agriculture producers, because there's a lack of commitment to increase in tax—property tax increases.

So I'd like to hear from the minister what type of stability is the Manitoba NDP government able to provide agriculture producers in light of a looming trade war, or a current trade war in some aspects; and if ag producers continue to see pressure from canola tariffs, other commodity tariffs that's going to either reduce demand on our Manitoba-Canadian products or reduce the price of those commodities, what exactly

is this government and their budget able to provide Manitoba ag producers?

Because we all know that ag stability is funding in partnership with the federal government, and it's a program that's administered by the provincial government but funded by the federal government. We also know that ag stability, if we were actually caught up in a trade war that saw a complete collapse in commodity trade for products like potatoes, canola and many of the other products, including beef and pork, that are heavily dependent on foreign trade, what are the means that this minister has and what would the programs look like to support ag producers in the event of complete collapse of those markets?

\* (16:50)

**MLA Sala:** The critic is talking about tax structures and impacts on producers, and I'll remind him that tariffs are a giant tax on producers as well. And the proposed tax that his leader is supporting is a 25 per cent tax by Trump on producers or, in the case of China, 100 per cent on canola meal and oil, and 25 per cent on pork.

So we know that, you know, those are new taxes that are threatening and are impacting producers. And on the American side, of course, we know that the Leader of the Opposition seems to be thankful in some bizarre respect for those tariffs, those new taxes being applied to farmers in Manitoba. We know that this is having a serious impact, of course, a dangerous impact on our agriculture producers, and we're fighting to stop the imposition of those tariffs.

And we're here to support, and we've got a very great relationship with producers in Manitoba. We've got a great relationship with KAP, and I know our minister responsible for ag has worked hard to foster trusting, good quality relationships with producers. And I think that line of communication and the—that trusted relationship that we've built has resulted in us having a clear line of sight on the priorities from the community, one of which, of course, was ensuring that we're responding to the threats of the moment, which are these tariffs. And this budget allocated, again, for business risk management, \$141 million to support that.

I did hear the member opposite suggest that that's federally funded. I'm not sure if you're aware, but it's not federally funded entirely; it's a 60-40 split. So the Province of Manitoba does carry a significant cost associated with providing that assurance to our farmers.

It's a very big investment, and as I said, it's to the tune of about \$141 million. Not insignificant by any stretch.

You know, beyond providing that support, one thing I want to flag is we're facing a two-front trade war here, as the member probably is aware. And that's the message that we bring to the federal government when we have our discussions, that they need to ensure that Manitoba, as well as other western provinces that have significant levels of ag production, that we are—that those challenges that producers are experiencing right now are recognized, and that Ottawa doesn't forget about this corner of the country. And we work really hard to ensure that our interests are raised at every opportunity, and that the federal government knows that this is a two-front trade war and it is having a significant impact right here in our province.

And, of course, we recognize that two-front trade wars also facing folks on our eastern Canadian seaboard as well, who are having their fisheries be impacted by that same threat. So we're really bringing that message and ensuring that, again, the feds are aware that we need to see supports directed to help our farmers, help our producers to weather those challenges and that we—we're going to stand with them in doing that work. And I think that's exemplified in that \$141-million investment.

You know, further to the important investments we've made to help farmers through these challenges and our continued focus on ensuring that Ottawa understands the risks that are being created, the tariff contingency budget we brought forward, I think, was important in that it showed not only are we ready for a worst-case scenario, and here's what we understand—again, according to expert support through Deloitte—that we can expect as sort of the bigger picture impact, but we also were explicit in that commitment, in that tariff contingency budget, that we would support farmers and producers and we specifically allocated, in the event of that worst-case scenario, dollars to support farmers. Again, showing that our government doesn't end at the Perimeter; we're a government that's focused on taking care of all Manitobans.

So you take into account the fact that we reflected their interests in that budget, you take into account that we've put dollars aside for business risk management—real money, big money to make sure that we reflect the challenge of the moment—you could see that ours is a government focused on, again, taking care of the people who make food in our province and who take care of all of us.



And that we're doing the opposite of what the members opposite wanted to do, which was to thank Donald Trump for imposing new taxes that are going to create massive challenges for the beating heart of our provincial economy. We will never thank Donald Trump for placing taxes on Manitobans.

We know that these are significant risks to their livelihoods, and we're going to continue to invest as required to make sure that they help—they can navigate these challenges, and we'll do that together.

**Mr. Narth:** I'll make my question short to give us the opportunity to ask some more important questions. The minister had led to my next question: that we're seeing a \$1.1-billion budget in their tariff budget, but yet no actual concrete commitments as to what that's going to provide for agriculture producers, since we were talking of that. The minister talks of a commitment, but no clear examples. We see that things as simple as a PST commission were cut from this government's budget for small-business owners who collect the taxation that drives our government services. And we don't see any commitment to a cap on the school division rates for homeowners, regular families across our province.

So I think that it's clear that this government is failing us on all fronts: the homeowners; the regular Manitoban that works hard to feed their families and provide a good home for their children and the families; ag producers who feed Manitobans and Canadians; and the businesses that are generating the taxes.

So could the minister—one simple way would be to commit to something that made a difference to regular Manitobans, and that was indexing of personal income tax under our previous government.

So let's think, you know, theoretically, that one day the NDP can deliver a balanced budget. I don't know if that is possible, but in the event of that happening, would the minister commit to reinstating indexing of the personal income tax?

**MLA Sala:** Want to make the most of our time here, so I just—maybe I'll speak to the first part of the question, which is about the tariff contingency budget.

And, again, I—as I outlined earlier, that tariff contingency budget was printed because we wanted to be transparent with Manitobans about what the worst case tariff scenario would look like if it were to be applied. And that was the context that we were operating within when we were developing the budget. We were facing a real 25 per cent across-the-board tariff environment.

And so I think it showed prudence—in fact, many layers of prudence—that we went out to get clarity from a trusted independent accounting firm, Deloitte, who had a very sophisticated model to help us understand what the potential impacts may be so that we could go out and prepare accordingly and make sure that Manitobans had the benefit of knowing where things may go.

And, you know, that outlined significant need for new investments to support businesses, as I outlined earlier. And I'm proud of this, that our government didn't leave ag producers to the side of this; we highlighted that right in that tariff contingency budget, that we thought about them. We thought about the impacts that they're experiencing and we highlighted that in that contingency budget.

And then, beyond that, we've showed, again, further layers of fiscal prudence by proposing, in the event that we needed to go there, a significant lift to a revenue contingency budget, which we set in our core budget at \$200 million, which is above and beyond what is normally held in place. And the reason we did that is because there is, of course, uncertainty in the environment we're in.

So, you know, just to wrap, in the final seconds I'll say we've planned prudently, we've planned transparently. That's why Manitobans sent us here, and I think the results are showing. And I'm proud to keep doing the work together with this team.

**The Chairperson:** The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

## CHAMBER

### HOUSING, ADDICTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS

\* (15:10)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness):** I do.

I am incredibly proud of these investments and plan outlined in our Budget 2025 that will address the challenges that many Manitobans are facing with

regard to housing, homelessness, substance use and mental health.

Our government will be making significant strides over the upcoming year to focus on initiatives that support Manitobans in need of shelter and critical supports to enrich their lives and make a brighter future for them.

The department's proposed 25–2025-26 budget reflects a core expenditure of \$734 million, which is an increase of \$58 million from the 24—from the 2024-25 budget.

The 2025-26 Housing, Addictions, and Homelessness summary budget is set at \$854 million.

As noted in Budget 2025 speech, Your Way Home, strategy will invest over \$70 million and increase the number of social and affordable housing units in the province and provide significant resources to end chronic homelessness.

I am extremely proud of our strategy and I want to thank all of those who took part in creating our strategy. It has been an honour and privilege to work with so many folks who led with such compassion and love for our relatives and put them at the centre.

\* (15:20)

This is a stark contrast of what we saw during the members' opposite time in government.

For seven and a half years, members opposite stood by while Manitobans set up tents in our parks, our bus shelters and on our streets year after year. They could not work collaboratively with others to support our relatives who needed it the most. The then-premier, Heather Stefanson, and the member for Fort Whyte worked to sell people's homes out from underneath them. They sold hundreds of homes on Smith Street and allowed 100 more—hundreds more to be sold off at Lions Place. They even boarded up hundreds of Manitoba Housing social units.

Our government's taken a different approach. Our government heard Manitobans loud and clear when they said, no more. For the first time in more than a decade, Manitoba Housing has acquired one property and leased a second property to house encampment residents. One renovation—when renovations are complete, these properties will also become part of Your Way Home plan, providing transitional housing with wrap-around supports to people experiencing homelessness, giving them a purpose, a sense of hope and a place to belong.

As part of our government's overall strategy, I am pleased that we have hired Tessa Blaikie Whitecloud to join our team. Tessa, for many years of experience working in this sector and has helped—has many years of experience working in this sector and is helping to inform our government's development and strategy to prevent homelessness, working across departments and with Indigenous partners and community organizations to ensure our work makes a difference for generations to come.

Successfully addressing chronic homelessness requires significance—significant investments in the supply of social and affordable housing. I'm pleased to share with all members that are—as a result of provincial funding there has been more than 1,600 units or beds of social and affordable housing under development in Manitoba since we took government in October of 2023. That is a significant milestone and something to be celebrated.

I want to share with Manitobans that these projects include the redevelopment of the Rubin Block in partnership with Fisher River Cree Nation and the multi-stage redevelopment of the Market Lands site along the University of Winnipeg—along with the University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation and CentreVenture. I look forward to many more announcements to come.

As critical as it is to add the—add to the supply of social and affordable housing, it's just as important to invest in maintaining and improving what we have. I want to take this opportunity to put on the record, honourable Chairperson, that the new PC leader wants to keep selling homes out from under Manitobans.

Right now, he is delaying Bill 12, a bill that will protect the investment that Manitobans make in social and affordable housing from being sold. Members opposite could pass this bill today if they wanted to, and I question members opposite in their delaying Bill 12. Whose home do they want to sell next?

We want to protect our social and affordable housing investments that taxpayers have invested in, which is why this bill is so important. We are a housing—we are the Housing Department, and this is our responsibility, which is to provide social and affordable housing to those who need it the most.

I want to assure Manitobans that our government supports keeping our homes affordable. Last year, our government rolled out a new funding model for non-profit housing providers whose original funding agreements have expired. So far, we have provided funding

for 56 projects, ensuring that 2,264 units continue to be part of the social and affordable housing supply here in Manitoba. Budget 2025 commits to a further \$4.4 million to this initiative.

Our government will continue to invest in upgrading Manitoba Housing units. In 2024-25, we undertook more than 600 capital projects in 88 different Manitoba communities, a stark contrast from the previous government who sold off and put up boards and refused to maintain and keep our Manitoba Housing affordable and equitable and accessible to Manitobans.

While some projects are still under way, I'm pleased to report that looking at areas outside of Winnipeg, we successfully completed 284 housing projects. These projects had a combined value of \$36.5 million, representing a 22 per cent increase compared to the 2023-24 total of \$29.9 million.

Also in Budget 2025, we have increased funding for the repair and maintenance of Manitoba Housing portfolio by \$10.5 million, of which more than \$5 million will go toward the repair of 270 vacant units, which have been boarded up due to the lack of investment by the previous PC government. We will not take that approach. We will ensure that Manitoba Housing stays deep—stays affordable and accessible for those who need it the most. Again, honourable Chair, a stark contrast of the hundreds of units boarded up because of the neglect of the members opposite.

Our government is committed to fostering a compassionate and inclusive system of supports that empower individuals facing homelessness and mental health and substance-use challenges in a way that will build resilience and actively—and achieve safety, stability, wellness and belonging and, essentially, hope for a future, a future with a warm place to call home, people to support them and build their skills and confidence. People that struggle in our province need to—need access to dignified housing, mental health and substance-use supports, and our government is committed to providing Manitobans with the support they need to enjoy a quality of life and a sense of belonging in their community. Our department is working with community partners to move forward on developing more withdraw management and treatment capacity in—and options so Manitobans can have the supports they need for their substance use.

Last April—last month, April 15—I had the privilege of standing with Minister Fontaine and noted Manitoban, Scott Oake, to announce our government's commitment of \$1.5 million to support the construction and start-up funds for the Anne Oake Family Recovery

Centre. This centre will provide addiction support to women while also supporting their children, which will build a healthier community for women and their children: \$1 million to support capital construction costs, start-up funding of \$500,000 to support our commitment to expand detox beds and our treatment options so Manitobans have the support they need to overcome addictions. This investment is consistent with our government's investment and life-changing services like the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre.

Over the next year, our department will be working with other departments, such as Justice and Family, and service providers to increase the number of mental health workers to improve access to resources while reducing the burden on emergency departments and police to address the needs of Manitobans.

I'm pleased to share with members around the table that we are actively pursuing the 'establishment' of a supervised consumption site, which will include wrap-around supports and critical drug testing and harm reduction services to support individuals with safe and non-judgmental care. Manitobans sent us here with this mandate to ensure those with substance use disorders get connected to the supports they need, such as primary health care, housing, mental health supports, addictions and treatment—

**The Chairperson:** And the minister's time has expired.

We thank her for her opening comments.

And just a gentle reminder that we must refer to other members by portfolio or constituency.

Does the critic have an opening statement?

**Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler):** Yes, I do.

**The Chairperson:** The honourable member for Midland—sorry, Morden-Winkler.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** As the MLA for Morden-Winkler and as the official opposition critic for Housing, Addictions and Homelessness and mental health, I carry a great responsibility but I do not take lightly. It is my duty to hold the current NDP government accountable for the decisions they make and the policies they implement, especially when it comes to issues that touch the lives of so many Manitobans so deeply.

Housing, mental health, addiction services are not just a—line items in a budget. They are pillars of community well-being. When these supports are weak or missing, people fall through the cracks, and it is our collective responsibility together as legislators to make sure that doesn't happen.

Every Manitoban deserves access to safe housing, timely mental health care and addiction services that are compassionate and effective and help them to recover.

\* (15:30)

As critic, I will scrutinize the government's actions and advocate for solutions that reflect the needs of families, front-line workers and those with lived experience and those that are needing help right now. I will ask the hard questions. I will demand transparency, and will always keep Manitobans at the heart of everything I do as this critic for this portfolio.

No matter your background, your income or where you live in our province, your well-being matters and I see you. I am here to represent all Manitobans, to ensure your voices are heard and to push for results that make real—a real difference in people's lives.

I want to speak to the urgent need for real, sustained action in these deeply connected areas that I speak about: addictions treatment and recovery, mental health supports and the fight the end—fight to end the homelessness in Manitoba.

Addiction isn't just a moral failing; it's a health issue. It demands a compassionate and comprehensive response. That means ensuring timely access to treatment, investing in long-term recovery supports and walking with people on their journey to healing. Without this, we continue to lose too many lives, and too many families suffer in silence. One life lost is one life too many.

Mental health is just as important as physical health. For too long it's been overlooked and underfunded. We see that currently right now; it's underfunded. We need these systems that are accessible, effective and rooted in dignity, especially for those facing trauma, those in poverty and those with the weight of addiction. No one should have to wait months or travel hours to get help—the help they need.

And none of this can be addressed without tackling homelessness. Housing is a basic human right. It is foundation from which people can heal, grow and contribute. They all work together. We must move beyond temporary fixes and focus on long-term sustainable housing solutions with wrap-around supports.

As a critic for these vital areas, I'm committed to advocating for every single Manitoban who deserves better, because behind every statistic is a person, a family and a story. We can and we must do more. We need to not be attacking each other. I want to

encourage that—the minister opposite to focus on the Manitobans that need her help. We need to focus on solutions for all Manitobans.

It is time for the government to move far beyond empty rhetoric and take meaningful action and measurable action. The people of Manitoba deserve better than just a band-aid solution or underfunded programs and political posturing. They deserve leadership that treats housing, addictions and homelessness and mental health as necessities and urgent crisis situations.

To those who continue to fight for change, front-line workers, advocates and individuals who—with lived experience: I see you and I will continue to stand with you. To urge—I will urge the government to listen and act and fulfill responsibilities to the people of Manitoba. The cost is—the cost of inaction is too high, and the time for change is now, and I am so pleased to be here to represent those in need in Manitoba.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 24.1.(a) contained in resolution 24.1.

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

Would the minister like to introduce her staff?

**Ms. Smith:** So I'd like to introduce Charlene Paquin, who is the DM of Housing, Addictions, Homelessness, Mental Health. Prior—can I give a little introduction? *[interjection]* Okay. So, prior to Charlene joining as my DM, she was—she became the deputy minister at the end of March of this year, so it's been amazing to work with her. She brings such a wealth of knowledge; she's just slid right in and become a really essential part of our team.

Charlene spent over 20 years with the Province of Manitoba. She started her career as a policy analyst and spent 15 years with Families, including as an executive director of employment and income assistance programs, and assistant deputy minister as—of EIA, or for EIA; disability programs and early learning and child care.

Charlene also served as the Manitoba Ombudsman before taking on the role of the Civil Service Commissioner, and she was a deputy minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage and the associate clerk for public service transformation. Trans—yes, transformation.

And then over the past three years, Charlene was with Deloitte Canada, where she had worked with government and public sector organizations with a strong focus on human social services. Ton of knowledge that Charlene brings to our—to the DM position.

And then next we have Carolyn, who is ADM of Housing, and Carolyn started with the Manitoba government in 1999 and joined Manitoba Housing as a senior policy analyst in 2004. And then since then she's served as a—on a—in a variety of leadership roles within the corporation, including housing delivery, portfolio management, strategic initiatives and operations, and she's been the chief executive officer of Manitoba Housing and assistant deputy minister in the Department of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness since 2023.

Carolyn also sits on the board of End Homelessness Winnipeg. She's a graduate of the University of Manitoba; she has a bachelor of arts in economics; bachelor of social work and a masters of social work. And she's married and a proud mother of two daughters, one of which I've gone to watch dance in Folklorama, so—and she's a master braider, I would say. So I want to thank her for the work that she does in our department, because she also brings a wealth of knowledge and makes my job easy.

And then next I have Caroline [*phonetic*] Stecher. Caroline [*phonetic*] joined us in—Carolina, Carolina, sorry. Carolina Stecher.

Carolina joined us in November, and again brings a wealth of knowledge; has worked in the government for quite a while. She's a director of ministerial affairs. Prior to joining Housing, Homelessness and Addiction in January of this year—no, it was November. Was it January? Okay, because there was a—oh, yes. She was a director in Labour and Immigration. Carolina has over 20 years of political and organizing experience, working as an assistant to a city councillor, a Member of Parliament and working in a—as an adviser to several Cabinet ministers in the previous Doer and Selinger governments.

Carolina also has worked in the non-profit, charitable sector in community engagement, and as a senior researcher and writer for a major funder in Winnipeg. She's got extensive organizing experience

and holds a bachelor of arts from the University of Manitoba.

So I want to say thank you three for joining me and for the work that you do in our department. Miigwech.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Thank you very much to the minister for introducing her staff. It's always nice to know who we're with in the room, and just to discuss and things, it's just really nice. Thank you.

I would like to introduce Mark Stewart, who is here on my behalf to—he's the director of issues management and here to assist me this afternoon as well.

\* (15:40)

**The Chairperson:** In accordance with subrule 77(15), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner with questions put on the resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Again, I just want to say thank you for the opportunity to come here and ask questions today. As the critic, it's such an important thing, and I'm very honoured to be able to do this job.

So I would like to start with a couple—one really quick question: Can the minister confirm that the organizational chart in the supplemental Estimates is complete and up to date?

**Ms. Smith:** Can the critic just elaborate—or is the critic referring to the organizational structure of the Department of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness?

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Yes, the organizational structure on page 18.

**Ms. Smith:** I want to thank the critic for that question. And, yes, the organizational structure is current and up to date. [*interjection*]

**The Chairperson:** The honourable member for Morden-Winkler.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Thank you, deputy Chair; I will try to make sure I wait for you—sorry.

A question for the minister would be if the minister could list the positions and the political staff that she currently has working in her office—the name and the position.

**Ms. Smith:** So I've already introduced our deputy minister, Charlene Paquin. We also have Maria Gonzales,

so I'm just going to introduce her. I have a little bit of a bio; asked all my staff for bios, because I thought it was important to introduce all these folks since you do work with them, and Manitobans should know who these folks are that are working for them as well. I'm just going to see if I got a little bio from her. Okay, I don't have a bio for her.

So Carly's [*phonetic*] the executive assistant to Deputy Minister Paquin. She's been working with the deputy minister's office since the creation of the Mental Health Department in 2021.

And Carly [*phonetic*] actually just came back from a maternity leave, so when I came, I think I was with Carly [*phonetic*] for maybe, I don't know, maybe a month—well, maybe three months and then she was off. She had a little boy, so it was nice to see her come back after having her baby. She's been such a joy to work with and to have as part of our team.

So prior to working in our department, she was the—with the Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care office from 2017 to 2021, and she was their correspondence secretary, and she was there totaling eight—she's worked eight years with the Province of Manitoba. And then before joining the Province, she worked with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority as their administrative assistant within the communicable diseases unit. She also enjoys working in the administrative field at the Legislative Building here.

And then Karen—Karen also works in the DM's office, and she's the DM senior adviser to the—on Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, and has been supporting the deputy minister's office for nearly a year. Karen provides direction and support to the administrative staff in the minister's office and also the deputy minister's office, as well as departmental staff at all levels. She's such a pleasure to work with. She brings such great energy, always happy, and I would say all of our staff in our department have really great hearts, and that's why they work in this department. So that's the same for Karen.

Karen comes with a social work background. She's done lots of senior policy analyst positions, and she's been with the government of Manitoba for over seven years. She's focused her efforts on mental health and addictions policy and program development.

And then Ritu. Ritu works in our front—in my office, in the front. So if you come into my office, you'll be greeted by Ritu. Always with a smile, lots of energy, very nice to work with, and she began her career with the Province of Manitoba in 2016 and she

began in the Department of Families in 2017. She transitioned to the Legislative Building as a correspondence secretary for the minister of the Crown Services.

And then since then, she's held several positions, key positions, including office manager to the deputy minister of Crown services, and assistant to the minister of mental health and community wellness. So she's carried on in my office, following the formation of the current provincial government in October 2023.

Ritu assumed the role of assistant to the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness and, like I said, she's been such a delight to work with. Lots of skills and, you know, anything that's needed, she's right there and gets done. In this capacity, she manages my calendar, oversees the co-ordination of public servants within the office. And, yes, she has a strong connection with the public. She's embraced a similar role—approach in a role, prioritizing warm professionalism and effective communication.

\* (15:50)

And our office is, like, really fast paced, so she's someone who, you know, has rose to that challenge. We get lots of calls, lots of emails, lots of requests for the minister to attend different events. So she's navigating a lot within the office, and she's—yes, she's such an amazing staff member, too.

And then Stella [*phonetic*]. So Lyca [*phonetic*] is what we call her. Again, another—

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

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Thank you for—I love to hear stories about people that we work with; that's great.

Can the minister tell me about which political staff—about the name and position, including the last name, if possible, please?

**Ms. Smith:** Sure, I'm just going to continue—I didn't get through our staff in our office, so I'm just going to continue 'til I'm done these folks. Just a few more.

So, yes, Lyca [*phonetic*] is—she's worked as a public servant for 18 years, and before joining us here at the Leg., she worked with the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage. She served in the deputy minister's office of Mental Health and Community Wellness. She later transitioned to the role of correspondence secretary for the minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness.

Following the formation of the current provincial government, Lyca [*phonetic*] was appointed as a

correspondent secretary to myself. And in this role, she manages my mailbox, which, again, is—could be very challenging, because we get, I don't know, hundreds if not thousands of emails a day. She works closely with the intake co-ordinator, so all of the correspondence that comes in from, whether it's housing, mental health, addictions, homelessness, they're navigating all of that. She monitors a—case-work from the general public. She also fills the responsibilities of the office manager when needed, so if Ritu's away, then she is covering that position. And she's, yes, very enthusiastic and very—again, has a heart of gold.

And then we have Rachel Bradburn. So Rachel comes from Siloam Mission, and she has been working on the front line. She was on their—she was their—one of their drop-in workers and then moved into one of their housing first team members. And she's someone that comes from lived experience. She's lived in Manitoba Housing herself. She's helped house a lot—a ton of people but she's also worked with our most vulnerable population. And she's also someone who's worked with tons of folks with substance-use disorder, mental health needs and, you know, she's just brought a ton of—wealth of knowledge to our team.

And then we have Mina *[phonetic]*. Mina *[phonetic]* also comes from Main Street Project. He was doing many different roles there. He's someone who has—I think he's got his master's degree, and he's a newcomer to Canada. Not sure how many years he's been here, but he's worked with a ton of folks and has a wealth of experience, and has, again, helped house a ton of people.

We were just at Main Street—or, Siloam—pardon me, Siloam Mission for their Easter dinner and we were helping serve meals there, and both Rachel and Mina *[phonetic]* had come to that, and everybody misses them. Like, all the folks that were there receiving meals there just couldn't give them enough hugs, and so it just speaks to the impact that those two have had on the folks that use the services there. And many have been housed but still come back because that's their community, and yes, it's just wonderful to have those folks in our office.

And then we have Jorge *[phonetic]*. Jorge *[phonetic]* has been such an amazing asset to our office, as well, and he's the special assistant to myself so he comes to events with me, he does some of the writing, he comes to a lot of meetings, he helps co-ordinate, as well,

meetings—stakeholder meetings. And he's, again, someone who contributes greatly to our team.

And I can't say enough about these folks.

And then in my next—I'm going to run out of time—I'll get into the political staff.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Again, I appreciate all the information. I do think it's important for us to honour those people who have worked really diligently with communities that are—that we're here to help and serve, and it gives us a better, you know, it gives us a better perception and idea of what we need to do. So I think that's so important. So thank you for sharing that.

I appreciate the minister's bios about her civil servants. Will she take under advisement to provide us with a list of political staff and positions, as I have many questions and I just would love to just get to some of the things that are really important on my mind.

**Ms. Smith:** So I will—so Tessa Whitecloud Blaikie is—or, Blaikie Whitecloud—as I had mentioned before, has joined our team as a special adviser to homelessness. She's been working on the encampment strategy that our department has developed with my leadership in terms of making sure that folks are getting housed with the supports that they need, something that I, in my opening statement, had said it's been a long time coming.

The previous government was boarding up Manitoba Housing, was selling off Manitoba Housing, was not investing in any housing, in fact, never built any social housing in their seven and a half years of being in government.

So we're taking a different approach in terms of making sure that we have someone who's advising us that comes from the sector that has the knowledge, that has the developed relationships, that is able to, you know, make those connections and bring folks together.

We're also pretty proud of the collaborative teamwork that we've been able to establish, not only with Tessa but, you know, working alongside whether it's Main Street Project, Siloam Mission, Salvation Army and many other service delivery organizations—Sunshine House—that have come to the table to provide those supports.

And I know the critic, in their opening statement, was saying how critical it is to not only provide four walls, and I know in the media last week that they had commented on, you know, our 67 units and said how

important it was to make sure that there's wrap-around supports. I couldn't agree more, and that's exactly what Your Way Home does.

\* (16:00)

And, you know, we were sent here with a mandate from Manitobans that clearly said, enough of seven and a half years of not providing those supports and not providing social housing and continuing to leave the boards on those units; that we want to see clear investments but we also want to see folks being supported in their housing so that they're successfully housed and that they're getting the supports that they need so that they can live a successful life and have a sense of hope, a sense of belonging and some skill building.

We, for far too long, heard from the sector—and Tessa, you know, was in that sector. I remember when I was the critic and I was visiting the many different shelters and hearing from these folks. They would house folks, not have the supports to provide the wrap-around supports because they had a previous government that didn't invest in those supports, so these folks would not stay housed or they would go into Manitoba Housing and because there were lots of cuts, whether it was tenant service co-ordinators that were cut or security that was cut, folks were not staying successfully housed.

You know, on the advice of many of the service providers and folks that are on the front lines in Manitoba Housing and our great CEO, Carolyn here. As soon as we got elected, we took their advice and we invested back into tenant service co-ordinators and helped support those folks that were so desperately needing those supports, that were on those front lines doing that work each and every day with so little supports. And I'm going to talk about that more, but I want to get to Noelle.

Noelle DePape is a policy manager and she's been doing some amazing work, as well, on Your Way Home and helping to advise that and working, you know, with a team approach. And all of these folks that I've mentioned, whether it's Jorge *[phonetic]*, Rachel, Carolina or Noelle, they've all been a great political team.

And we have, like, such a great, you know, deputy minister and ADM and so many others that contribute, whether it's civil servants—I want to shout them out because we can't do this work without our civil servants. For far too long we heard that they were not being treated very well. And when we came into this

position we wanted to make sure that they knew that they were seen, that they were valued, that they were heard and that we were taking their advice because their vices—their advice is valuable and the work that we do is the work that they send us here to do.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** I want to just say also that I've had the opportunity to get to know Tessa Blaikie Whitecloud as well and she is—she definitely has a heart, and her goal is to help everybody she can. So that's just so admirable, as well as many of her team, I'm sure.

So I just wanted to say, good work for—good job on the work she's done, before she came—became part of the government. Also, and hopefully now she continues that. So I'm very happy to hear that she's, you know, consulting with us because it's so important to have somebody like her on the team and I think that's great.

I just would like to ask the minister if—we know that other jurisdictions are seeing success helping to break the cycle of violence, homelessness and addiction through evidence-based programs in correctional facilities, like the Therapeutic Living Units in Alberta.

And just wanted to know, what is the total spend on mental health and addictions support for individuals in correctional facilities, and what amount has been dedicated to opening such a unit in Manitoba to make our communities safer and to help those with those, like, those health concerns as well here in Manitoba, to give them hope and a future?

**Ms. Smith:** What I'd like to just share is we take a cross-departmental approach, so we've been working really closely with Justice, and I really want to lift up our Justice Minister and their team as well for the work that they've been doing, because we've seen a decrease in crime stats here in our province. And it really shows the work that, you know, the Justice Minister is doing, the police are doing, service delivery organizations, those on the front line that are working with the very folks that we're talking about that have specific support needs.

And we've been working, whether it's with Justice; whether it's with Families; whether it's with Health, whether it's with Education, getting kids fed in school, you know, ensuring families don't have to worry about sending their kids to school with lunch or breakfast, that they can worry about spending their dollars on getting their kids fed supper, and their lights on at home, paying other bills. Whether it's looking at the barriers to why people are becoming homeless, the



prevention work. We've been doing a lot of work on that.

We know that there's kids that come out of care and go into homelessness. We've been working with Families on that, and how do we ensure that kids have a place to live, whether we're working with Spence Neighbourhood Association and AMC on that project here on Isabel and getting those units up and—so that those kids have, you know, the supports that they need.

Folks coming out of incarceration, so they have IDs so that when they come out they have access right away; they don't have to apply for their IDs, that they have access to their IDs, which is a huge barrier for a lot of folks. And then making sure that, you know, there's more housing on line. Your Way Home talks about that very thing.

You know, housing is the biggest barrier, and coming out of seven and a half years of a government who didn't invest, that sold off within seconds hundreds of units. And I think about 185 Smith, and one of my staff live in there, Mina [*phonetic*]. I've gone into that building; beautiful, beautiful, beautiful building, and I think about those folks, and I had the opportunity to speak to some of those folks who were displaced, and actually became homeless because of the selling off of that building.

\* (16:10)

How fortunate, or unfortunate, it was that, you know, those units were lost and the government just put those monies back into revenue and didn't reinvest them and buy some other housing or even think about just keeping that and making sure that those folks were supported and kept housed.

Whether it's, you know, our Manitoba Housing taking 20 per cent of our housing and making it Housing First and making sure that folks have wrap-around supports, we are making those investments to make sure and ensure that folks that need the support of housing to stay housed. And the revolving door, the recidivism, stable housing is a part of that and making sure that people have the proper supports and that they are supported is a huge part of that. And they now have a government that is providing those supports.

For far too long, as I alluded in my last answer, organizations were banging on the previous government's door saying, like, we need supports for folks because we're seeing folks become—you know, going to jail or becoming homeless or going deeper into their addictions. And they felt they didn't have adequate

supports to support these folks, and they were banging on their door, asking the PC previous failed government for more supports to help these folks. And it felled—fell on deaf ears. And these folks, the homelessness population, continued to rise; folks fell deeper in their addictions; more housing continued to be sold off; more boards continued to be put up on our own social and affordable housing, our Crown jewel. Shame.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** I just want to just ask—I'll ask that question again in maybe a different way if the minister didn't understand it. But I was asking about addictions treatment, specifically what they're doing in—for those that are struggling with mental health and addictions that are incarcerated.

Could the minister please explain to me or tell me what they're doing currently for those individuals? And if she doesn't know, can she take it under advisement or as an undertaking to get that information to me?

**Ms. Smith:** Again, I will reiterate that our government is taking a whole-of-government approach. We work across departments; we're working with Justice; we work with Families; we work with Health; we work with any and all departments because we believe that Manitobans deserve the support that they need. Whether it's my department or another department, we will make sure we walk across, you know, the hall to go and make an appointment with one another, talk to one another, to see how we can best support folks.

When I think about the prevention and, you know, folks coming out of incarceration, I remember when I was teaching and I was working in this program called cruising to success, and I was working with level 5 car thieves. And these were youth that were—they didn't see any hope. They owed, like, two, three hundred thousand dollars because they had stolen a whole lot of cars.

And in our program, we had worked with them on really looking at how do we change our behaviour; how can we take some of the skills that we have and put those skills into practice in becoming—whether it was an electrician, because some of them were hot-wiring cars and they were dealing with wires, or whether it was, you know, they were very inventive, these youth, and they had a whole ton of skills.

And part of my program—the morning was education and the afternoon was alternatives. We would teach them life skills, how to go shopping, how to make a budget. Some of them we were transitioning

back into school. Many of them didn't have connection with their families; they were kids in care, so we were helping them connect with their families.

So I think of that work and connect it to this work because a lot of folks that are incarcerated often, you know, maybe don't have the connection, don't have the skills. And what our Justice Minister is doing is he's creating pathways for folks to change their behaviour, to get connected to skills, to get the supports that they need prior to leaving incarceration, but also—and I don't want to speak for Justice because this actually isn't a Justice—this is a Justice question that you asked, but I just want to speak generally because this is interrelated to the work that we all do.

We all support people coming out of Justice, so in terms of, like, housing and when folks come out of incarceration, are we helping to support folks. And when we talk about our navigation centre, you know, having folks supported in there, because we've met a lot of folks that are in encampments that have been there for three, four, five years, that came out of incarceration because they weren't supported and they were just kind of dropped off at a certain point, and we want to make sure that we're supporting and meeting people where they're at.

And it's really about partnerships. I think about our trip to Houston, when we went to Houston and we met with those folks out in Houston, we looked at their model, how they were reducing recidivism rates through stabilized housing, through supporting people, meeting them where they're at, providing the wrap-around supports. Whether it's the Edmonton police that came down and met with our department and a whole other bunch of folks that are on the front lines and shared their model that they're doing in Edmonton to support those folks that are unhoused and getting them the supports that they need.

But it's a whole-of-government approach. It's not a one-department approach. It's looking at the barriers, looking at pathways into homelessness and how do we get in front of those in terms of prevention and working collaboratively and, again, whether that's with Justice, whether that's with Health, whether that's with Families.

And, I mean, I'm just saying those ones because we work really, really close with those folks, but certainly Justice is doing an amazing job in terms of working and making sure that folks are getting the support they need. But that's a Justice question.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** I'm disappointed that we can't get some answers and that the minister doesn't know what they're doing in—for addictions and mental health supports in correctional facilities in our own province. And it's, to me, those parents or those—whoever have children or loved ones that are struggling with addictions, they need an answer for that. I think it's important that we don't just talk about housing, and we need to talk about the real situations that are happening to our loved ones.

Another question I would have: Would the minister—what percentage of individuals are living in correctional facilities that are connected with the life-saving and life-transforming opioid antagonist therapy medications that are used for opioid use disorder? In case the minister's not sure what that is, this is a world-renowned, evidence-based program that is allowing medication—sorry, immediate connection anywhere, anytime to life-saving OAT medication for those with addictions.

My question would be: What is currently being budgeted for this program in Manitoba?

\* (16:20)

**Ms. Smith:** While my staff is looking that up, I just want to take an opportunity to talk about evidence-based approaches and how much I agree with that and how much we should be taking that approach. And as the member knows, evidence-based approach is what experts are, you know, pointing to when we look at supervised consumption sites.

And when the member was doing their opening statement, they referenced, this isn't just a moral failing, as if referring to people who do—who use substances as if they were using them—as if they were morally failing because they were using substances.

And I just want to say to that member that these folks are not morally failed folks. These are folks who are struggling. There's deep-rooted issues why people use drugs, and for that member to say, isn't just a moral failing, is referring to these folks as if they use substances because.

And I want to go back to Pallister because those were words that were used in this House, in the time of their predecessor. And, you know, I would hope that that member, being the critic, would not be looking at folks who are using substances in that way, because these are folks who require supports, who look at that critic for their support. And that member also said, these are folks who fall through the cracks, that they need to get the supports that they need.

So getting the supports that they need and falling through the cracks, would a supervised consumption site not catch these folks? Someone who is falling through the cracks would essentially need a supervised consumption site to save their life.

And I know that member, when they were at the consultation in the community, that someone had asked them: How can someone get treatment if they're dead? And the member could not answer that question. And the member was asked that question again in this House, and that member could not answer that question.

So there are people dying in this province right now from toxic drug supply, and that member says there are people falling through the cracks. There absolutely are people falling through the cracks, and these folks need to get the supports that they need, to get to a supervised consumption site so that they can get led to the resources that they need, whether that's treatment and recovery, whether that's primary health care, whether that's—you know, we're making sure that we're getting folks' drugs off the street, and education. We're taking a four-pillared approach.

These folks need to have folks who believe in them, that are non-judgmental, that aren't using these words: moral failing. Because certainly these are Manitobans that deserve to be respected, that deserve for this not to be stigmatized even more. Members across the way, you know, call a committee that is in Swan Valley helping to clean up used needles—the crack commando committee. Like, how dare they?

And that member across the way sits there and allows that rhetoric to be used in this House when these members are community members that are simply trying to help their community.

So I'd ask that member, does that member agree, you know, that the members that are in Swan River helping to support these members, whether it's getting them STBBI tested or cleaning up used drug needles, because certainly when their government was in—when the PC failed government were in government, they were handing out 200,000 needles without any disposal plan in 2022, or—yes, 2021. And then 2022 was a further 300,000; 2023, 500,000 without any disposal plan. Our government learned of that; we put in a disposal plan. We are working with the regions.

And certainly, you know, members opposite said, for far too long, it's been underfunded. Well, we've stepped up to the plate and we're funding.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Just to set the record straight, I did say addiction is not a moral failing; it is a health issue. That is what I said, so I just wanted to clarify that.

It's disappointing that the minister opposite is making things up and saying things that are not true. I was hoping to come here in good faith and just have a good conversation about how we could work together and find out information about what's happening in our—

**The Chairperson:** I'll just remind the member we can't imply that other members are meaning—or meaning to mislead others or lie. So I'd invite a reframing.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Sorry. I did correct the speaking that I did say, so I hope that people are listening and will hear the—what I truly had to say about that.

Again, I will say I'm disappointed in the things that are being said today. I was here—I'm here on good faith, again, to—I want to do the best I can as a legislator here in the province of Manitoba. I want to do my critic role to the best of my abilities, and I'm not able to do that when the minister opposite won't even help me to answer a question. It's disappointing and I—it's—breaks my heart, actually, because there's people in our province that need to hear some of these answers, especially parents or loved ones that are struggling in addiction. I think they need to hear some of these things.

So I'd like to ask another question. One of the questions I do have is, can the minister tell me—can you tell me from the Sunshine House how—organization—how many people were connected through that program—that organization—to mental health and addiction services after using the overdose prevention site specifically. How many people—I would like to know a number—that were connected—that they have proof that they were connected to mental health and addiction services.

\* (16:30)

**Ms. Smith:** And I just want to go back to the previous question. My staff have pulled up the answer to the prescription question for those incarcerated.

So in—from October 2023 to March 2024, there were over 1,000 unique clients, so 1,076 people were administered OAT—that's everyone, so not just Justice. And then in '24-25, 1,524.

And again, the questions that the member opposite is asking are Justice-related questions. The Justice Minister was in Committee of Supply for three days. I would have hoped that these questions would have been given to the critic in Justice for the critic to ask

the Justice Minister in their time in Committee of Supply. I'm sure they would have got the answers from the Justice Minister. We are, again, in Housing, Addictions, Homelessness, a mental health Committee of Supply and not in Justice Committee of Supply.

And going to this next question around MOPS, I just want to list—lift up the Mobile Overdose Prevention Site provider, Sunshine House. They are doing such tremendous heavy lifting. They've been doing this for a very, very long time, and, you know, we've—we rallied to keep them going. They had knocked on the previous government's—PC government's—door asking for government support to keep this life-saving support going—site going—and, of course, their door was slammed in their face, basically. Previous PC failed government did not take a harm reduction approach, did not support them.

And when we came into government, we, of course, stepped up because we recognized these are, again, life-saving measures. These are helping people stay alive. And certainly we saw how valuable that was just a few short months ago on, I think it was Main and Logan, when there was over 10 people who had overdosed and they were overwhelmed. They couldn't keep up. Thankfully, first responders came and were able to support them, and not one of those folks succumbed to their overdose, thankfully.

And it's traumatic work working in this field, you know, supporting these folks each and every day. I want to also lift up those folks that are having to do this work, whether it's the North End Women's Centre or the West Central Women's Centre. Many of these folks that they're there to support women and their needs, whether it's with parenting skills, whether it's, you know, to support them coming out of domestically violent abusive relationships. They never thought that they would be doing this work that they're doing, and this is why it's so vital that we continue to invest in these kinds of services, but even more, why we need to open up our supervised consumption site here in our province.

And I know members opposite continue to spew this rhetoric that it's enabling, that we're just going to be having people come in there and we're going to be providing, you know, drugs to people. That's not accurate. What's accurate is we are going to be connecting people to care. We are going to be saving lives. We are going to stop or limit the transmission of STBBIs here in our province. And, more importantly, it's going to be connecting people to relationship and leading

them onto a path of recovery and treatment, something that is long overdue.

We've seen too many people in this province succumb to the toxic drug supply, and we heard from Manitobans in 2023 knocking on doors that they wanted to see people connected to services through a supervised consumption site, and that's exactly what we're on the path to do.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** It's interesting how the minister can talk about, you know, how it's long overdue that we need treatment and recovery, but yet they put almost \$6 million into a drug injection site and only \$1.5 million into treatment and recovery. It's disappointing to hear that.

But again, I wanted to ask the question. My question wasn't answered by the minister. So I'll ask a new question.

Can the minister tell me how many nurses and doctors are employed at the OPS at Sunshine House? Again, of course, we know that every single person who works in these organizations is doing such an important work for it—to help save our loved ones. And I appreciate what they do as well, and I just want to make sure that we give them what they need to do their jobs and to protect them from the emotional and the mental health that they have to go through to do what they're doing, so to give them that support.

So asking questions that I'm asking today is because I care and I want to make sure that we can support and do what we can for those front-line workers and for our loved ones that are in addiction.

So, yes, if she should answer the question about how many doctors and nurses are on—are in OPS at the Sunshine House.

**Ms. Smith:** You know, I don't know how to even, like, where to go with this. Like, the critic says, you know, these drug injection sites and then she wants to give them supports but on the other side, it's—I'm just confused with where the member opposite stands on this. Does the member opposite support supervised consumption sites?

And I just want to let the members opposite know that during Committee of Supply, in Executive Council, that their leader actually said that they would use the correct terminology, which is supervised consumption site. So I don't know if that's been, you know, communicated with the rest of his caucus or not, but the correct terminology is supervised consumption site.

People are using it under the supervised-supervision of people who are trained in the case of someone overdosing and it having to be reversed or, you know, they're not using alone. If medical staff have to be called in, in the case where maybe they wouldn't be able to. But there has never been one case across Canada where anyone has ever overdosed and lost their life in a supervised consumption site. And that is evidence-based. We've 'drun' cross-jurisdictional scans of all the supervised consumption sites in all of Canada.

And we are taking a different approach here in Manitoba. And I know the members opposite like to talk about, you know, this continued support and front-line support. We are trying to give these folks actual front-line support. So give them the support is giving them a supervised consumption site so they don't have to continue to do all of the work by themselves. They can't continue to do what they're doing. They've told the previous government that.

We are behind, so far behind, seven and a half years behind because of what the previous government did. They did not take a harm reduction approach. We are trying to play catch-up. We are trying to clean up the mess of the previous government, unfortunately, and we've lost too many lives in this province. It's—you know, we've continued to put services into the system and MOPS has told us and MOPS has told the previous government: there's a supervised consumption site that needs to be stood up in Manitoba. Experts have told the previous government, of which they took out of the report that was written by experts.

\* (16:40)

So in 2023, there were 33 referrals that were made; in 2024, MOPS had a total of 65,000 visits, and of those visits, people used substances 10,743—or, 45 times; and of those instances, only 72 resulted in overdose. So those were all reversed; no one lost their lives; there was no deaths. Over 50,000 snacks and coffee were supplied—again, you're building relationships, you're having coffee with these folks, you're sitting with them while they—after they've done their substance and making sure that they're okay.

And, you know, these are—a lot of them are peers that have—that had substance use disorders that now are helping others see that it is possible for them to come through their substance use and that they can do it, they can change their life around; and that there is hope; and that if they can do it, that they can also do it.

So this is a valuable service that MOPS is providing, and I know that Aboriginal Health and Wellness, their mobile primary health-care van is also, whenever MOPS is out on Hagen or Logan and Main, that they're also going and providing primary health care to folks. So they're also adding services to support them as well.

And as a government, we're going to continue to support them because we see the value in their work and, again, I want to just uplift those that are on the front lines doing this heavy lifting.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Just a quick word about the treatment and recovery side of this situation and of our loved ones that are dealing—or, suffering this—the health crisis of addiction: I would like to ask the minister what she would say to someone, a front one—front-line worker that is having to—that works at a RAAM clinic that has to turn someone away because they don't have room or space for them. And then the next day or the next weekend, they see that person's name in the paper that they've passed away, and it's devastating.

And I've had conversations and phone calls and I don't know what to do or say to try to help, but it's devastating because they're in tears because they have no way to help people that want help. They don't have any recovery available or treatment spaces available.

So this is a big thing; we need to make sure we talk about this. It needs to be—they—we need to have a conversation about it. That person—and she asked me, what would you say to somebody who was dead? I don't want to ever have to have to—that person to ever get to that point. And we should all not want that; of course we don't want that. And that's why we need treatment and we need these spaces.

Currently, my question would be right now, is I didn't get question—or my question answered about the nurses or the doctors, but my question now would be: What is the wait time for medical detox right now? If somebody wanted to walk off the street and get help, what is the wait time for those spaces?

**Ms. Smith:** So while my great team is looking for that—those answers to your question, just have a few comments that I want to make.

The member asked me what would I say to a RAAM clinic staffing member, and I've visited several of those RAAM clinics and talked to many of those front-line workers. And I've also talked to many of those workers that are on the front lines doing unsupervised consumption.

And, you know, I was in this House on that very side that that member is sitting on, asking the government that failed, the PC government that was on this side, daily: what were they doing to support Manitobans as they were dying in our province? When a report came out that said a supervised consumption site was needed in this province to save lives, to help take the pressure off of RAAM clinics, to help take pressure off of front-line organizations, to help support the very people who were struggling with their substance use disorders, to help save lives in this province.

The government of the day did nothing. Were they supporting families? Were they supporting those that were on the front lines that were saying we need help, we need support? They didn't support Mobile Overdose Prevention Site, who were going and supporting those folks to keep them alive, to help make sure that the toxic drug supply that they were potentially putting into their body that could take their life, that they were okay; and if they did overdose, that they could reverse it; and if they couldn't that there was someone there that they could call to make sure that they got help.

The government of the day, the PC government, was not taking a harm reduction approach. They were not supporting those folks.

So they now have a government that is not only supporting, but they are providing housing for the very folks that—that member opposite was a part of, that government that they ran for, and they can't run from that—their government's record because they were putting people into homelessness. They were pushing them into deeper addictions. They were allowing organizations who were not trained to provide the supports that they were having to provide to folks that had substance use disorders on a daily basis—sometimes it's hundreds of reversals—to do that work before MOPS was provided the support that they were provided.

And we wrote letters to the federal government to get them federal funding, because the Province would not come to the table to support them. And shame on the government that day. That was horrible that they would allow their own members in their own province to die of overdoses and do nothing.

And I know the member is smiling, shaking their head over there and, you know, it's—that was horrible when that was happening because mothers were coming to us, fathers were coming to us, foster parents were coming to us and they were defenceless; they couldn't do anything. Like, so many family members—and

these were Manitobans that were losing their lives, and there was so little resources in this province to support those folks that were using because the government of the day, the PC government, would not take a harm reduction approach. They would not meet people where they were at.

And for them at that time, it was a moral failing of anyone who was using substance uses. And that was shameful, because that was stigmatizing people who were using substances. They wouldn't come forward for support. They delved deeper into their addictions. They wouldn't even seek help because of what the government was doing. Their former leader threw a report on the floor as if it was nothing. And those were from experts, people who, you know, work tirelessly to put that together.

And, again, so if members opposite want to talk about, you know, harm reduction approach, there's lots I can talk about.

\* (16:50)

**Mrs. Hiebert:** I'm still disappointed that we can't talk about the questions and what we need to do to change what's happening in our province right now. We need to focus on the communities, we need to focus on our loved ones who are in addictions and who desperately need our help, rather than sitting here and smashing previous governments, smashing people in this room; it's not necessary. We need to talk about fixing and helping the situation and doing all we can do to help our loved ones get free from addictions.

I can answer the question for her. I talked to a mother of a young girl who—just a couple of weeks ago, and she said her daughter is in desperate need of treatment and recovery services, and the wait for her daughter is three to six months. So that's what I'm asking. I'm asking again, how long is the wait time? How long are people waiting for medical detox spaces, non-medical detox spaces?

I'm asking for any answer right now. I just think it's time that we talk about what's not being done here, and not by others previously, but actually what's not being done right now by the current government. It's disappointing. It's our loved ones, it's our community and loved ones who are suffering because there's no additional treatment dollars out there.

So my question again is—I'm going to ask it again—to ask, you know, what is the wait time for recovery and addiction services right now for treatment spaces?

**Ms. Smith:** I know that member wants to run away from her government's record, but you can't run away from a record where you had seven and a half years of not taking a harm reduction approach. When you—when we clearly have to catch up to something that the previous government never provided. When you have front-line service providers who are providing a service that they were never meant to provide. When they were banging on the previous government's door, saying, we need a supervised consumption site, we need more supports because we can't handle the amount of overdoses that we're having to reverse, when that isn't even their job.

So when the member says, we just want these questions asked, well, we can't answer these questions without talking about what wasn't provided because we're having to play catch-up.

So what I will tell the member opposite is, you know, withdraw management services detox, the wait times have decreased by 44 per cent since we have taken government. And we're taking a balanced approach; we're not going to take the approach that the previous government took, where it was one way only. Didn't meet people where they were at. They were okay with people, you know, dying on our streets, living in bus shacks, living in encampments, not getting the support in housing that they needed, not even getting housing because your government was selling—when you were in government, you were selling off housing.

You were firing staff, you fired front-line staff that were there to actually support folks. So if someone was struggling with an addiction and they were a tenant service co-ordinator, and they were there to support someone with an addiction and could lead them to the resources that they needed, those folks weren't even there because your—the government that you're—you were—

**The Chairperson:** I'll just invite the minister to direct comments through the Chair.

**Ms. Smith:** Thanks for that correction, Chair.

So when the previous failed government was in government, they were slashing, cutting and, you know, decimating services here in our province. Whether that was in the health-care system where folks went to get their supports, whether that was in housing where you stabilize people, whether that was taking a harm reduction approach, those services were decimated.

And, like I said, I know that member wants to run away and not be a part of that previous government's record, but you can't be a part of a team or a—you know, a party and come into it and think that you're going to be absolved from anything that happened before you came, because you ran under their banner. You ran under a party that used, you know, billboards that refused to search a landfill for people who were dead, who were deceased. So, deputy—or, Chairperson, like, we can't pretend like these things didn't happen.

So when the member opposite talks about experts—like, the experts are folks that were in the health-care system that were fired from the previous government. The experts are those tenant service co-ordinators that were fired under the previous government. The experts are those that are working in MOPS that are each and every day reversing overdoses or supporting those that are using so that they don't overdose, who are ensuring that they are getting clean supplies so that the STBBIs are not spreading here in our province. And the experts are in our health-care system, which, you know, members opposite like to pretend like they did nothing to, and these are the very people who are supporting our folks on the front lines.

So we will continue to, you know, build up our services here in our province. That's what Manitobans sent us here to do. They sent the previous government a strong message that they were no longer okay with what they were doing, whether that was putting people into homelessness, decimating the health-care system or allowing people to die in our streets.

We're not going to take that approach. We're going to support, meet people where they're at, get them the supports they need and ensure that we get our supervised—first supervised consumption site opened up here in our province.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** I came here today to do my best job that I could do in my critic role. And I can only do what I can do, working together with the person—or the minister across the aisle with me. And it's disappointing to be able—to sit here and ask heartfelt questions and not have an answer.

To the mother that has that child that's in addiction, to that front-line worker in tears because they can't help and they don't have a space for recovery for their friend who they know needs that space because there's no space for them, I just want to tell you that I'm listening to you, and I'm not going to sit here and talk about things that are not important, because you

are important. The things that you are going through every day with your loved one, advocating for your loved one for recovery services—they're important. And these are things that we need to talk about. We need to be sitting here and talking about what we can do every single day to help that mother, that daughter, that child, the father who needs that addiction services, those supports. That's what we need to be doing.

And that is what I'm going to continue to do, over and over again. I'm going to say every single day, treatment and recovery, treatment and recovery, especially when there's such a vast difference between the current government's perspective on what balance looks like; almost \$6 million on addiction—a supervised consumption site; I'll correct myself there with that saying.

I don't mean to be disrespectful; that's just—I didn't realize that that was, you know, the way we should be saying it. But either way, it's a consumption site.

But the vast difference between the \$1.5 million for treatment and recovery and the almost \$6 million for a consumption site; it just doesn't make sense in

my brain at all. I've got a loved one who went through recovery, and he told me straight out, he said: I wouldn't be here if there was a site like that around me. And his life is so valuable to me. I couldn't imagine living my life without my husband. He's amazing person. He has such an amazing life, and he affects all of us in such a huge way. And it's just—he is my inspiration.

And every single mother I talk to who needs—who has a child who's looking for, you know, spaces for recovery, that mother is my inspiration. They're the heroes. They're advocating for treatment. They're 'advercutting'—advocating—

**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., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.



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