



Second Session – Forty-Third Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 20, 2025

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Jewish Heritage Month

Hon. Mike Moroz (Minister of Innovation and New Technology): Honourable Speaker, I rise today to recognize and celebrate Jewish Heritage Month, the time to honour the rich history, enduring contributions and vibrant culture of Jewish communities across Manitoba and Canada.

The Jewish presence in our province dates back to the 1870s, when Jewish immigrants first arrived seeking freedom, opportunity and safety from persecution. They brought with them strong values of family, education, faith and community, and they helped build this province, brick by brick, business by business, generation by generation.

From establishing early congregations in Winnipeg's North End, to opening shops, clinics, schools, theatres and shelters, Jewish Manitobans have long been woven into the very fabric of our province. They have contributed as teachers, doctors, artists, entrepreneurs, jurists and public servants, shaping our cultural, economic and civic life.

Jewish Manitobans have played a pivotal role here in the people's building as well, serving as members of this Assembly: members such as David Orlikow, Saul Cherniack, Maitland Steinkopf, Sidney Spivak, Izzy Asper and Jim Carr all served with distinction. The Honourable Anita Neville, the first Jewish Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, continues to do so.

Jewish Heritage Month is also a time to reflect on the importance of standing against anti-Semitism in all its forms. The Jewish community continues to face threats, discrimination and hateful rhetoric, here and around the world. It's our collective responsibility as

legislators, and as citizens, to ensure that Manitoba remains a place of safety, inclusion and respect for all people of faith and from all backgrounds.

Honourable Speaker, we recognize that so many came to Canada seeking a better life. They came to Canada to escape generational persecution and, in many cases, came as survivors of the Holocaust. Our government is committed to preserving and honouring that history. And we are proud to work with experts to mandate Holocaust education at our K-to-12 system.

The fight against all forms of racism and intolerance begins in the education system. By teaching today's young people about the wrongs through the past, we can ensure that our future generations are well equipped to push back against racism, hate and discrimination wherever they see it.

Let us also take this time to celebrate the joys of Jewish life: from the wisdom of the Torah to the beauty of Hebrew music and dance; from the traditions of Passover and Hanukkah to the simple blessing of the challah shared with family and friends. These are gifts that enrich our shared culture and deepen our understanding of one another.

Honourable Speaker, today, throughout the month of May and beyond, let us say thank you to Manitoba's Jewish community for their resilience, their leadership and for their continued contribution to this province we all call home.

Mazel tov.

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): I rise today to celebrate Jewish Heritage Month as an opportunity to honour the rich history and invaluable contributions of Jewish Manitobans in our province.

It was in the 1870s when Manitoba's first known Jewish residents settled in the province. Shortly after, 300 Jews arrived in Winnipeg after fleeing persecution from the Russian Empire.

In just a few short decades, more Jews would begin fleeing persecution in Europe and, ultimately, the Holocaust.

Since these beginnings, Jewish communities have been able to establish deep roots in Manitoba, helping to build our province and see future generations thrive.

However, it cannot go without saying that Manitobans are deeply concerned with the increasing rise in anti-Semitism within our communities and across the country.

While we recognize Jewish communities for their resilience, we must do more than expect people to be resilient in the face of hate. We must combat hate itself.

Let us all work together to ensure safety and security for everyone. May we continue to honour the centuries' worth of contributions that Jewish Canadians made to our beautiful province and country. And may we strive for respect, peace and understanding of all Manitobans.

Thank you.

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

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

Leave has been granted.

MLA Lamoureux: May is Jewish Heritage Month. During the month, we are given opportunities to learn about and recognize the contributions of Jewish Canadians to Canada's social, economic, political and cultural fabric.

Let us be grateful for the information shared with us throughout the year from organizations including the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg, the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, The Winnipeg School Division, Red River College Polytech, plus the universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg.

For those who may not know, there are many events throughout the month. Some include the Winnipeg International Jewish Film Festival, a women's circle hosted by Chabad Winnipeg, Gray Academy student art exhibits and many others at the Rady Jewish Community Centre and temples throughout our city.

I encourage everyone to check out these events and don't forget to support one of the many local Jewish-owned businesses.

In closing, Honourable Speaker, I echo many of the thoughts that have been shared here this afternoon, and we need to make sure we continue to raise awareness and spread education about the anti-Semitic crimes that continue to happen.

We are friends, allies and we stand with the Jewish people of Manitoba.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Further ministerial statements?

Family Doctor Day

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): It is my pleasure to proclaim May 19, 2025, Family Doctor Day.

Our government is thrilled to celebrate the family doctors working in our province. They are the foundation of primary care in our communities and are often the first point of contact in our health-care system, providing compassionate, comprehensive and continuous care to Manitobans throughout all stages of their lives.

Family doctors diagnose and treat illnesses and injuries, promote disease prevention and good health and co-ordinate quality patient care and wellness for Manitobans.

They don't just treat symptoms; they build relationships, often relationships that span many life's—of life's milestones. They know their patients; they know their stories; they celebrated births or cancer remissions and have comforted grieving patients as they face difficult losses.

They don't just serve as physicians, but as trusted advisers, advocates and champions of community well-being.

Family doctors are foundational to Manitoba's health-care system. The ongoing relationship between a family doctor and their patients and communities is consistently associated with lower hospitalization rates, emergency department use and rehospitalization.

We are actively, as a government, working towards improving timely access to family physicians in our province, no matter where Manitobans live, to reduce administrative burdens that they face and to create sustainable models that allow for doctors to do what they do best and what they love to do: care for people.

* (13:40)

And we're making it easier for Manitobans to see a family doctor. We have added over 168 net-new doctors to the front lines of our health-care system. And by working with local amazing family practitioners like Dr. Amanda Condon, we've taken steps to open new minor injury and illness clinics.

We've opened extended hours primary-care clinics, making it easier for Manitobans to get access to primary care. Manitobans now even have access to online booking for same-day appointments, walk-ins, along with those extended hours during evenings, weekends and holidays. We've created flexibility to increase access for Manitobans and for family practitioners to provide care.

These investments will help ensure more timely access to care for patients, reduce pressure on emergency departments and support family doctors in delivering high-quality, patient-centred care.

At the same time, Honourable Speaker, we are focused on building the next generation of health-care providers. Our government's investing \$13.4 million to train 20 additional doctors by expanding residency seats, helping more medical grads complete their training right here in Manitoba, including in Brandon.

We're grateful for the work that family doctors do across our great province, and we're working to ensure that new doctors are supported right from the start. In partnership with Doctors Manitoba, we've started the New to Practice Program. It builds strong mentorship networks and fosters collaboration among physicians in their first five years of practice.

Now these are just some of the initiatives that we are taking to support family doctors in Manitoba because we know how vital they are to Manitobans. We value their knowledge, expertise and their ability to create connections with our communities.

We're grateful for the care and compassion they bring every single day of the year, so the least we can do, Honourable Speaker, is celebrate them on Family Doctor Day and lift them up for everything that they do.

Today, I'd like to take a special moment in the Chamber here to welcome some guests. For the first time ever in the college's history, they're here with us to celebrate Family Doctor Day. The Manitoba College of Family Physicians, thank you for joining us. We appreciate you folks.

We have Dr. Karen Appel, assistant professor in the department of family medicine and president of the Manitoba College of Family Physicians; Dr. Ashley Bhullar Rehsia, chief medical officer at Deer Lodge Centre and secretary of the Manitoba College of Family Physicians; Dr. Mandy Buss, the Indigenous health lead for the department of family medicine and a member of the College of Family Physicians of Canada's Indigenous health committee; Lisa Goss, CEO of the Manitoba College of Family Physicians;

and Staci Bailey, the director of operations at the Manitoba College of Family Physicians.

Honourable Speaker, let's make sure that we celebrate family physicians every single day of the year because every single day, they're working to make sure that Manitobans have the best outcomes and the best health-care system in our great province.

Thank you.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Yesterday, May 19, was Family Doctor Day, and on behalf of all of my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative caucus, I just want to say thank you to family doctors practising across Manitoba for everything you do for our communities and for your patients.

We know that our family doctors are the first person that we go to most of the time, and they are the beginning of our health-care journeys and our strongest advocates as we navigate different parts of the health-care system.

Dr. Nichelle Desilets, the incoming president of Doctors Manitoba, is herself a family doctor, and she made a really important comment a couple of weeks ago at Doctors Manitoba's annual awards gala.

She said—she was speaking to those just starting their academic journey towards a career in medicine, and she made the comment that family medicine is not just a backup plan; it is, in fact, a great first choice for medical students planning their careers.

Family doctors are at the forefront of calls to move to more team-based approaches to primary care. They work alongside nurses, pharmacists and allied health professionals to deliver comprehensive care to their patients.

And they practice in a variety of settings. Some of those settings are incredibly challenging: remote fly-in communities, in rural towns, in clinics throughout our communities and yes, some family doctors will even still make house calls.

Family doctors also come to the table with important solutions to help our health-care system improve. For example, family doctors have long called for a reduction in physician administrative burden. They know that there are better ways to be spending their time than on paperwork. They know they need to be spending time doing what they do best, and that's caring for their patients.

And that's why the previous PC government worked with Doctors Manitoba and other stakeholders to

establish a taskforce to reduce physician administrative burden, that issued its final report and recommendations late last year.

So on behalf of my colleagues and the opposition caucus, I want to once again say thank you to family doctors for playing such a pivotal role in our health-care system and for being the bedrock of many of our communities and the first point of contact for so many of us when we need help.

Thank you.

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

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

Leave has been granted.

MLA Lamoureux: Yesterday, May 19, is known as Family Doctor Day. Family physicians are the foundation of our health-care system. Without them, our ERs, walk-in clinics, they would be very—even more so—overrun with patients seeking care for health needs that could be prevented or treated in a doctor's office or by a pharmacist.

Family doctors are a trusted partner in a patient's life. All people, especially persons with chronic conditions and seniors, with access to a family doctor have better health care—health outcomes and fewer hospitalizations, with—which results in lower health-care costs for everyone.

Now, sadly, many Manitobans do not have regular access to a family physician. Family medicine needs to be supported and sustained through investment, recruitment and retention.

And by supporting them with team-based care, which includes social workers, occupational therapists, knowledge keepers and other health-care professionals, through this we will build equitable, accessible, wraparound, team-supported primary care here in Manitoba.

In closing, Honourable Speaker, I'd like to thank those who have joined us today in the gallery and all family physicians throughout our province.

We appreciate your compassion and dedication to your patients and all your advocacy work.

Thank you.

* * *

The Speaker: Prior to members' statements, I have a couple of things to take care of.

First, I would like to ask that members direct their attention to the table where our hard-working Journals clerk, Vanessa Gregg is celebrating 20 years of dedicated service to this Assembly, officially starting with the Legislative Assembly on May 17, 2005. Vanessa, with her encyclopedic knowledge of all the art in this Chamber and her infectious positive attitude, quickly became a fixture in this building.

She became a manager of the visitors' tour program in 2007 before joining the clerks as Journals clerk in 2022. Vanessa is universally respected in the Assembly and has built strong, lasting relationships with every single office she works with.

We thank her for 20 years of dedicated service and look forward to many more.

Congratulations, Vanessa.

And now, on a somewhat sadder note, it's another last day for one of our pages, Ayla Embury-Hyatt. Ayla just graduated from the University of Winnipeg Collegiate and is looking ahead to an exciting new chapter. This fall, she will be attending the University of Manitoba to pursue a degree in forensic psychology, with the hopes of minoring in political science.

She is incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have served as a page. Before joining the page program, she was uncertain about what direction she wanted to take her future. But through her experience in the Chamber and beyond, she found clarity and purpose.

One evening, while working a law committee shift, she listened to presenters and MLAs speak passionately about the issues affecting Manitobans. That moment touched her deeply and inspired her to one day help mothers and children through family law, using the insight she gained here to create meaningful change in her community.

Throughout her time at the Legislature, she was constantly learning. Every single day brought something new. She is thankful to everyone who has supported her journey, especially the Chamber staff who always brightened her day with smiles and good humour, and to her fellow pages, whose thoughtfulness and fun spirit made every shift enjoyable.

*(13:50)

As she reflects on this past year, she feels proud of how far she has come. She leaves with valuable skills, unforgettable memories and a heart full of gratitude. She hopes to cross paths with everyone again in the future.

And Madelaine Bayly: Madelaine will graduate from the Dauphin Regional Comprehensive Secondary School this June. She is now set to attend the University of Victoria in the fall where she will be part of the faculty of social sciences. She hopes to obtain her bachelor's degree in political science and plans to pursue a career in law, which means she spent more time debating with her dad than the average person.

Turns out that that was just early training. Madelaine is always been passionate about the law, politics and justice issues during her time as a Legislative page. She has been inspired by all of you, listening to your debates, asking questions and observing your committee work, which demonstrates to her that you are all motivated by your dedication to Manitoba and our democracy. From this experience, she has developed a deep understanding of how our provincial government works and how it shapes our society.

She would like to give heartfelt thanks to everyone at the Legislature who's supported her throughout this year.

Thank you, everyone.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I also have some introductions in the public gallery.

We have with us from the Down Under Club of Winnipeg on their 75th anniversary: executive team members Peter Munn, Margaret Munn, Charlie Powell, Sam Dawson, Jenny Gates, Brian Hydesmith, and regular members Jacqueline Cassel-Cramer, Arthur Cassel-Cramer, Dennis Woodford, Janet Woodford, Judy Powell, Elizabeth Hydesmith, Pam Sabourin, Henry Lemanski, Leon Badali and Brad Robertson, Manitoba's chief of protocol, who are guests for the honourable member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Schott).

And we welcome you all here today.

And we have seated in the public gallery from Pine Creek Christian School, 20 students under the direction of Eric Martin. The group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Agassiz (Ms. Byram).

We welcome you all here today.

And we have seated in the public gallery from a home-school group, 30 students under the direction of Kaitlyn Einerson.

And we welcome you here today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

The Speaker: We will now move on to members' statements.

The honourable member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton).

An Honourable Member: Transcona.

The Speaker: Transcona.

Brett Enns

MLA Shannon Corbett (Transcona): Honourable Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to come before you today to recognize the exemplary work of Brett Enns, the Transcona Legion Branch No. 7.

Brett is born and raised in Transcona and still lives in the community. Growing up, Brett had an uncle who was in the military and was at Juno Beach. Brett heard about the stories of his uncle going through France with the military. The more stories he heard, the more stories he wanted to hear. It made him want to join the military. When Brett tried to enlist in the military when he was younger, he was unable to as flat feet are a real thing.

Brett joined the Transcona Legion Branch No. 7 five years ago because he wanted to give back to the community. He wanted to help veterans and their families. His responsibilities are many, and he is currently the Sergeant-at-Arms and oversees the float and memorials.

Part of his role is to inform the community about events happening at the Legion, but he also posts about the various days to remember our veterans and important dates. Brett shares poems that were written to honour our fallen heroes. He takes the time to honour the veterans who have been killed in action. He shares their stories. He ensures that they will never be forgotten.

Brett, along with another Transconian, Peter Martin, helps to arrange No Stone Left Alone. This is a ceremony at the Transcona Cemetery where students place a poppy on a veteran's grave. Last November, there were over 615 students who participated.

One thing Brad [*phonetic*] is—Brett is passionate about is Homes for Heroes, a comprehensive supportive housing program that provides wrap-around

support for veterans. Brett is part of the group who is advocating for a housing village near the Transcona Library.

You will see Brett wearing red on Fridays for Remember Everyone Deployed to remember our warriors so far away.

Brett is the guy that everyone calls to help. With the support of his family, he gets to be that guy. That is who he is: a person who wants to get the job done and leave the world a better place.

Honourable Speaker, I would ask that we please rise and honour Brett Enns for his dedication and commitment to the Transcona Legion Branch No. 7.

Sue and Rich Nowell

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Today, I rise with a heavy heart to speak about the profound loss felt in my constituency of Lac du Bonnet.

As wildfires tore through our region, they brought devastation, fear and heartbreak. In the midst of this, we tragically lost two beloved members of our community, Sue and Rich Nowell. They returned to their home in an attempt to rescue their pet but were overtaken by the fast-moving flames.

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Their final moments were filled with love and selflessness, true to the lives they have lived. They were devoted to their family, animals and, of course, the community.

Sue and Rich leave behind their sons Ryland and Emmett, as well as Sue's older son who lives out of province. To their children, family and friends, I offer my deepest condolences on behalf of the entire constituency of Lac du Bonnet. And our entire community grieves with you.

I want to take this moment to recognize and thank the first responders, firefighters, volunteers, municipal leaders, specifically Reeve Loren Schinkel, Mayor Jack Brisco, their councils, the emergency response teams, Parks branch and EMO who have worked tirelessly around the clock to protect lives, homes and livelihoods. Your dedication, bravery and selflessness have not gone unnoticed.

To our community volunteers from near and far, people who continue to show extraordinary kindness, stepped forward to care for those forced to flee,

offering warmth, shelter, food and the reassurance that no one was alone: You are the very best of us.

Thanks to these incredible efforts, some of the evacuations have now ended. Families have returned, but many have not. As we step back into our homes, we do so knowing that home is more than walls and a roof; it's the people who stand together in hardship, who lift each other up when the weight of loss feels too great.

The Lac du Bonnet constituency is strong. We grieve, we heal and we move forward, together.

We thank you with all our hearts.

Down Under Club of Winnipeg

Mrs. Rachelle Schott (Kildonan-River East): Honourable Speaker, I am proud to rise today to recognize the 75th anniversary of the Down Under Club of Winnipeg. One of my Kildonan-River East constituents is a member of the Down Under Club, and he and other members join us today in the gallery. I request that their names be entered into Hansard.

The genesis of the Down Under Club of Winnipeg goes back to World War II, where after the war, many of the Australian and New Zealand air crew who trained in Manitoba returned to marry their Canadian sweethearts, which led to the formation of the club.

From unexpected and uncertain beginnings, the Down Under Club of Winnipeg has become an active, long-standing and popular group here in Winnipeg and throughout Manitoba.

They make wooden toys for children, donate them to the Salvation Army and fundraise for local charities. The club has also raised and donated more than \$40,000 to international disaster relief—oh, my goodness—\$40,000 to international disaster relief for causes close to our collective hearts.

The lifeblood of the Down Under Club of Winnipeg is its members, and the club is committed to providing a welcoming social hub for expat Aussies, Kiwis and their Canadian families and friends, and we are proud of their efforts to foster Australian, New Zealand and Canadian relations.

I invite all of my colleagues in the Chamber to rise and join me in acknowledging this huge milestone for the 75th anniversary of the Down Under Club of Winnipeg.

* (14:00)

Janine Lodder

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize a remarkable community leader from my constituency. I would like to welcome Janine Lodder, who has joined us here today. Janine has been an active volunteer, supporter and champion for the community of Carman.

Among her many efforts, most notably, is Janine's 10 years serving as the chair of the Carman and Area Foundation. In a decade of her involvement, she has helped the foundation grow significantly, totalling over \$4 million since its inception. This year alone, the foundation handed out over \$194,000 in grants to 49 local community organizations.

Through her work with the foundation, Janine has been involved with local fundraising efforts, such as golf tournaments and the annual spring gala. I attended the gala event this year, and I was incredibly moved when the Clearwater Memorial Playground received special recognition, and you could see and feel the reaction from over 400 attendees, as this project is a place of recognition and remembrance to the terrible tragedy that occurred in Carman 15 months ago.

Janine is now retiring after a decade of serving as chair of the foundation. But knowing Janine, I know she will continue to be an active cheerleader of the foundation and the amazing Carman community. You can't mention Janine's name in town without someone talking about how incredible she is and how lucky the town is to have her.

Thank you, Janine, for everything you have done for the foundation and for the community of Carman.

Corydon Community Centre

Hon. Mike Moroz (Minister of Innovation and New Technology): Honourable Deputy Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the hard work and dedication of the many volunteers who work to keep the Corydon Community Centre at the very heart of River Heights.

Established in 2011, as an amalgamation of the Sir John Franklin, River Heights and Crescentwood community centres, the Corydon Community Centre is constantly changing and adapting to the needs of the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Formed in 1922, the Sir John Franklin Community Centre has been hosting recreation and sporting events for over 100 years, in spite of having to relocate several times within the community.

The River Heights Community Centre was founded in 1946 as nothing more than a little hockey shack, before growing into its present form through crowd-funding and city and provincial grants.

The creation of the Crescentwood Community Centre in 1945 would not have been possible without the many generous volunteers, who not only raised the necessary funds, but built the first official building almost entirely with volunteer labour.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, today the Corydon Community Centre carries on the proud legacy of volunteerism that has served our community over many years.

Under the strong leadership of a dedicated volunteer board and a handful of determined staff, the Corydon Community Centre provides a wide range of well-being, recreation and sporting activities for people of all ages. And sports like baseball, basketball, gymnastics, hockey, soccer, softball and tennis provide the Corydon Comets with ample opportunity to bring champion—bring home championship hardware. And they do.

Honourable Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me now in thanking the centre's many volunteers, their board of directors and their dedicated staff for their ongoing efforts to bring our community together.

ORAL QUESTIONS**Education Property Taxes
Increase Concerns**

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): I want to start off with recognizing the Winnipeg Jets on a great season and great playoff run. Didn't way—end the way we wanted, but we love you and we thank you.

On that note, we and all Manitobans are sending their—our thoughts and prayers to Mark Scheifele and his family on the passing of his father, Brad.

Also, sadly, this weekend, there was another passing in Manitoba sport community as the Oak Park Raiders coach and Pembina Trails trustee Stu Nixon passed away. Our hearts go out to the family and the entire community.

Honourable Speaker, as the official opposition, it is our job to ask questions, and Manitobans have the right to know. However, last week the NDP government did not do their job, and they did not answer any questions. We have presented evidence over and over again in this House showing that Manitobans are

paying more on their education and property taxes under this NDP.

Will the Premier finally admit today that he was wrong and he misled Manitobans when he falsely claimed, and I quote: one hundred per cent—

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): The Winnipeg Jets accomplished something remarkable this year. They came in first place in the NHL, cementing something that we've always known: they're the best team in the league.

And I think everybody watching the game was just blown away by Mark Scheifele's performance. Your province is behind you, and we join you in grieving your late father.

I also send my condolences to the family of Stu Nixon as well as, you know, the folks in Lac du Bonnet, who I had the opportunity to speak to, who are grieving a loss there, as well.

When it comes to folks across Manitoba, a hundred per cent of Manitobans are better off today because you've got a government that adequately funds education. On top of that, we've also taken—we've brought inflation down by cutting the gas tax, and now we're taking a further step by ensuring that you get a \$1,500 tax credit off of your property taxes. The good news, Deputy Speaker, is that's going to go up to \$1,600 next year.

Mr. Khan: Once again, Manitobans, you heard it here. This Premier believes you are better paying more taxes under his NDP. The province is better when you pay more taxes under this NDP.

We've seen it over and over again, that families have tabled evidence where their property taxes have gone through the roof under this NDP. Yet, this Premier doubles down by—with his false talking points. Clearly, the truth and facts do not matter for this Premier, nor his NDP government.

Facts do not lie, honourable Deputy Speaker.

Will the Premier admit today that following in the footsteps of his mentor, Greg Selinger, and increasing taxes is not the right thing to do for Manitobans?

Will this Premier reverse his decision and lower education property taxes?

Mr. Kinew: The member opposite was part of the Heather Stefanson government that Manitobans

shudder when they think back to. One of the big reasons why is because education was cut year after year—teachers leaving.

We've, under this great Education Minister, improved funding. That makes everybody—a hundred per cent of Manitobans—better off. And the numbers speak for themselves. There's more than 600 additional educators in the classrooms with your kids and grandkids right now, because of those investments.

Now, when it comes to affordability, \$1,500—way more than the members opposite ever saw—the biggest tax refunds and tax credits in history have happened under this government. It's the school trustees who set the taxation rates. You have the opportunity to go to the ballot box next year if you're unhappy what's happening this year. But when it comes to the members opposite, we'll do our part and beat them at the ballot box every single chance we get.

The Deputy Speaker: I would caution the Leader of the Opposition. The truth and facts—when we say that truth and facts do not matter to the Premier, that implies that someone could be lying. So I'd just caution the use of language.

Mr. Khan: Manitobans, once again, you heard it. Under this NDP government, this Premier believes that a \$3-billion deficit under his NDP is a good thing. That this Premier believes if you pay more education property taxes, that's a good thing. And now he is blaming the school trustees and not himself or his failed Finance Minister.

The Premier has budgeted to steal hundreds of millions of dollars from you hard-working Manitobans. He can deny it all he wants, but the devil is in the details and, clearly, this devil is the NDP.

Speaking of details and numbers, the NDP, on page 8, clearly state that they are taking \$182 million from hard-working Manitobans by increasing their education property taxes.

* (14:10)

Does the Premier have the audacity to stand here and falsely tell Manitobans that he's not increasing their education property taxes?

Mr. Kinew: Honourable Speaker, it's pretty clear that the member opposite can't read a budget. Nothing he just said there bears any semblance to what's going on in the books this year.

What happened with the deficit? They, in a desperate bid to try and get re-elected, made all sorts of

promises and ballooned the deficit to \$2 billion. Manitobans saw through that and handed them their walking papers.

We came into office and we started saving you money right away by cutting the gas tax. Now we've brought in a \$1,500 tax credit. If Manitobans want to understand further confusion from the member opposite, just look at what he said there. We don't set the property taxes; the school divisions do.

So, again, if he wants to run for school trustee, go ahead and do so. But the only person in this House who ever stole anything is the member opposite, who stole the PC leadership from Wally Daudrich, who actually got more votes.

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

Mr. Khan: Honourable Deputy Speaker, the Premier obviously has not read his own budget. On page 8, it clearly says a \$182-million increase. And his own members in Public Accounts just passed last week that \$300-million surplus was left for him to spend when the PC government left—\$300 million. His own members passed that at Public Accounts.

The Premier is getting mad, it's clear to see that. And when the Premier gets mad, he bullies everyone, just like he bullied the member from Fort Garry.

If the Premier won't say it's wrong and reverse his decision, will the member for Lagimodière (Mr. Blashko) stand up and defend his constituents? His constituents are seeing double-digit increases in the property education tax.

Will the member for Lagimodière stand up and do the right thing today?

Mr. Kinew: Again, you know, the PCs are the only party in the world who would say that the person who got less votes actually won their leadership contest.

I know that Wally Daudrich, the person who emerged on the wrong side of that fiasco—imbroglio, you might like to say—was a little surprised that he wouldn't get the nod as a consolation prize to run in Spruce Woods, the upcoming by-election. He said, and I quote, I was hoping—referring to the member opposite—that because I got more votes than he did, it would've gone a long way to help bring the party together again, end quote. Makes sense to most people who voted in the PC leadership, too.

But when it comes to affordability, we're taking real steps to make you better off. When it comes to health care, there are more people working on the

bedside today. The only place where we see less and less is when it comes to the common sense department of the PC caucus.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: If we can stop the clock, I would just like to direct all honourable members to the public gallery where we have seated from a home-school group, 30 students under the direction of Kaitlyn Einerson.

Thank you for being here.

* * *

The Deputy Speaker: And before we go back to the Leader of the Official Opposition, I would caution him from drawing the Deputy Speaker into debate.

Mr. Khan: Honourable Deputy Speaker, when we talk about common sense, let's look at some simple numbers.

In 2024, education property taxes for a family that was living in Lagimodière was paying \$1,000. In 2025, under this NDP, this same family living in the constituency of Lagimodière is paying \$1,700. That's an increase of \$700 under this NDP government.

Will the member for Lagimodière stand up and defend his constituents, or will the Premier continue to add false narratives to this Chamber here today?

The Deputy Speaker: Could we stop the clock?

So I'd just like to point out to the Leader of the Official Opposition that, while he may want to ask members from the opposite side to comment when the members are in the Chair, that is drawing the Speaker into debate. So I would ask that he not draw the Deputy Speaker into the debate while I am in the Chair.

So, with 19 seconds, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Khan: I was merely asking the Premier if he could comment on why he thinks it's fair to increase the taxes of the people living in Lagimodière.

Mr. Kinew: You know, the majority of PC Party members would agree that Wally Daudrich would have figured it out by now.

But when it comes to the PCs coming here and talking about your taxpayer dollars, why don't they address the very shameful chapter of those ads about the landfill. Like, who in the PC Party of these elected officials thought it was a good idea to run ads attacking the families of the victims of a serial killer?

It's, like, one of the worst crimes that's ever been done in Manitoba history, and they tried to take advantage by running ads. And here's the thing, Manitobans: You actually paid for those ads. Because of the \$650,000 the PCs spent on those ads, they applied for a rebate and they got about 160 grand of your taxpayer dollars back.

So, with the final question he clearly does not understand he's about to pose, would the member instead switch, stand up and explain if he's going to return 160 grand of your taxpayer dollars that were spent on those disgusting advertisements.

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

Mr. Khan: I'm asking questions about this NDP government and how this government has increased education property taxes in Manitoba; how this Premier is making life harder for Manitobans. The Premier wants to dodge, duck and deflect any questions and any accountability.

So I'll ask him here today: Will the Premier stand up and tell Manitobans how much—how much did he and his NDP government increase education and property taxes the last two years? Spoiler alert, honourable Deputy Speaker: it's \$330 million. That's the increase under this NDP government.

So I'll give the Premier one last chance: Will he stand up and apologize to Manitobans for increasing their taxes by \$330 million?

Mr. Kinew: See, I'm so happy to come to work every day and to explain the good work that we're doing. We cut the gas tax; they charged it every single day. We've staffed up more than 1,500 workers on the front lines of our health-care system, after they fired them. We've added dozens of police officers after 55 cops left the front lines under their watch.

So I'll give the member opposite one more chance, because he's on thin ice if he has to face a leadership review in the next PC convention. Again, 160 grand of your hard-earned money. On this side, we're giving it back: \$1,500 this year; \$1,600 next year. His party is keeping a hundred times more of your taxpayer dollars for those landfill ads. Will he return that money? They've said that they're sorry for the ads, but apologies are empty words without restitution.

Will they return the money to you, the taxpaying public, and maybe compensate the families who they attacked with those terrible ads?

Education Property Taxes Increase Concerns

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): A hard-working family living in a 1,600-square-foot house in the Winnipeg School Division reached out to share their NDP tax hike bill. This family is now paying \$3,300 in education property taxes. They are watching today.

What does this minister have to say to the family that has seen a 55 per cent increase in their education property tax bill this year?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): We're proud to share that we're making life more affordable for Manitobans. We did that in our last budget and in this budget.

Though it started out, of course, with our gas tax cut—the entire year, we offered that gas tax holiday—we also brought in personal income tax cuts that are saving money for Manitobans across the province.

* (14:20)

Our last budget, we brought in a \$1,500 education property tax but-credit; it's going to lower your costs of education property taxes—and our recent budget raised that to 1,600 bucks.

We are doing the work of making life more affordable for hard-working Manitobans.

The Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Midland, with a supplementary question.

Mrs. Stone: This family also shared their 2024 tax bill, which they paid \$1,100 in 2025. With the rebate, they'd be paying \$1,800 in education property taxes. That's a 55 per cent tax increase. However, adding insult to injury, there was no \$1,500 rebate added to the bill.

This NDP was sloppy with their rollout, and now this family, along with many other Winnipeggers, are missing the rebate from their bills.

How many other homeowners are missing their rebate from this NDP government?

MLA Sala: Well, we're doing that important work of making life more affordable for Manitobans. We brought in that \$1,500 rebate; we increased it to \$1,600.

And while we're doing that, of course, we're properly funding our education system for the first time in many, many years. We're doing that important work. We brought in, of course, the universal school nutrition program. And, of course, that's part of our

work of doing the important work of funding education and supporting our kids.

What did the members opposite do with education dollars? They wrote cheques for billionaires. They gave out million-dollar cheques to folks on Bay Street.

So while they gave out cheques to folks working on Bay Street, we're going to do that work of handing out food to those kids who need it in our province; we're supporting them. We're funding education while we make life more affordable.

The Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Midland, with a final supplementary question.

Mrs. Stone: This wasn't only sloppy, but this minister should be embarrassed, because to add even more insult to injury, this family received an NDP insert claiming the government was saving them money. A three–\$3,300 education tax bill, a 55 per cent increase and no tax rebate is not saving this family any more dollars.

This minister should be embarrassed with the sloppy rollouts on education property taxes.

Why is he targeting hard-working families in the Winnipeg School Division with his tax hikes?

MLA Sala: One of the biggest tax threats Manitobans face is the Trump tariff tax. And guess who supports the Trump tariff tax, honourable Speaker? The leader of the members opposite. That is by far the biggest fiscal threat Manitoba, Canada faces. And we know that the leader of the members opposite champions those tariff taxes on Manitobans and Canadians. That's shameful.

To my critic, what I would offer—the main city in their riding, Carman: 97 per cent of taxpayers are going to be better off in Carman.

Will the member go back to her community members and apologize for fighting against their best interests?

Property Taxes—Increase Concerns Homeowners Affordability Tax Rebate

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): As Manitobans receive their property tax bills, they're noticing a trend: what the NDP government says and then what happens are two different things. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) and his ministers talk and talk and talk, but tax bills are going up and up and up.

Why is this Minister of Finance misleading Manitobans when Manitobans are paying higher property taxes than ever before?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Honourable Speaker, as the Premier stated earlier, we do not set divisional tax increases; that happens at the school division level.

But we are responsible for making life more affordable, and that's exactly what we're doing with our \$1,500 rebate, now a \$1,600 rebate, that is lowering the costs of those education taxes, because that's what this team is focused on: reducing costs for Manitobans.

And, of course, we're not only reducing the costs of your education property taxes, we're also reducing the costs of your energy. We brought in a fuel tax holiday, now a 10 per cent permanent cut to your fuel taxes. Pair that with our hydro rate freeze.

This team's doing the work of making life more affordable.

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

Mrs. Cook: No member of the NDP seems willing to stand up and represent their constituents. We've heard from constituents of the member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz) reaching out to share that their tax bills have gone up dramatically.

Why is the Minister of Finance hiking property taxes by thousands of dollars for constituents of the member for Waverley?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, jacking up hydro rates on Manitobans in BITSA bills, doing it in new and creative ways that Manitobans have never seen. That was their approach: they raised costs on Manitobans in ways that weren't transparent, weren't clear. That's their MO. They also, of course, increased costs on renters, Manitobans who need help more than anyone else. They jacked up taxes on renters by \$175. That's their record.

Their record is one of making life more expensive for Manitobans; ours is one of making costs go down. That's something we're going to keep focusing on every day because we're working for hard-working Manitobans.

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

Mrs. Cook: This morning one of my own constituents reached out to me, near tears, because the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit is missing from her bill, and the only solution this NDP government can

offer is that she has to claim it at tax time. But, in the meantime, she needs to pay this full amount.

How did the Finance Minister botch this rollout so badly, and what is he doing to ensure that Winnipeg taxpayers get the tax credit they're entitled to today?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, again we're continuing to do that important work of making life more affordable. Our last budget brought in 25 ways to save in 2025. We know how important it is that we continue to do the work of lowering costs for Manitobans, and that's something we've done, of course, when it comes to energy, when it comes to school taxes, and on and on and on. The members opposite made life more expensive.

Now, I know that the leader of the members opposite might not think that a \$1,500 cheque is a lot, and that's because he got a \$500,000 cheque from the former leader. That's a lot bigger.

But for the average Manitoban, \$1,500 is a lot of money. We know that means a lot, and we're going to keep doing the work of lowering costs in Manitoba.

Education Property Taxes Increase Concerns

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It's unfortunate that the Finance Minister to—is too busy standing on two sets of books in order to answer any of the questions coming from our side of the House today.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, I have heard from the River Heights families that the NDP tax hikes are making it hard to plan for their own finances.

Will the Minister of Innovation and New Technology (MLA Moroz) break the silence from his NDP colleagues and stand up for his constituents? Has the minister shared his concerns with his Cabinet colleagues?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Admittedly having a hard time sussing out what the question was there, but I'm really grateful for the opportunity to keep talking about the important work we're doing to make life more affordable.

Which is very different from what we saw after seven and a half years under the members opposite, when they made life more expensive for almost everybody—renters, everybody on their energy bills was paying more, and, of course, farmers. We had producers' costs going up because, what did they do? They jacked up the cost of Crown leases. There were

no Manitobans that were spared their work of making life more expensive.

What are we doing in every corner of the province? We're working to make life more affordable.

The Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, with a supplementary question.

Mr. Ewasko: I see the seatbelt light is on again in the rest of the Cabinet on the NDP side, Deputy Speaker.

One River Heights family shared with me that they are being charged hundreds of dollars more. They're being charged hundreds of dollars more, yet this NDP Cabinet call that affordability and hope, by gaslighting Manitobans, that Manitobans are going to start to believe it, honourable Deputy Speaker.

Why is the member for River Heights, a minister, letting his Cabinet colleagues tax his constituents so aggressively?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, again, it's great to get up here and be able to talk about the long list of things we're doing to make life more affordable for Manitobans. Whether it's our Homeowner Affordability Tax Credit, it's our 10 per cent permanent cuts—cut to the gas tax, whether it's the fact that we keep making life more affordable for renters who, again, had their taxes increased by \$175 by the members opposite.

What Manitobans can have confidence in every single day is that they chose to send us a government to this building that was going to focus on making their costs lower, and that's exactly what we're going to keep doing every single day.

* (14:30)

The Deputy Speaker: And with a final supplementary question, the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet.

Mr. Ewasko: Deputy Speaker, Jon Gerrard is listening at home today. Another family that was better off under the 50 per cent PC rebate, on the road to equitably funding education.

Why is that member, the member for River Heights (MLA Moroz), putting party before constituents and talking points before facts?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): With the member for Lac du Bonnet asking a question in question period, I figured I'd stand and address the most important issue in his constituency today.

I want to issue a thanks for all the folks who helped with the evacuation in Lac du Bonnet RM, the town, the RM of Alexander. Our hearts are with those who lost the family members. And being there in the community was really something: to be able to speak to that family directly, to be able to speak to evacuees directly, to be able to go to the Wildfire Service and thank the firefighters, to thank the people flying the planes, to be able to thank the COs who were offering trauma supports to those people who are dealing with what they've seen on the front lines. I even met the person who rescued the black bear.

There's one thing I didn't see in Lac du Bonnet last weekend that I'm very, very happy to update the House on. One thing we didn't see in Lac du Bonnet was anyone playing politics.

Government's Buy Canadian Policy Contracts Issued to American Businesses

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): While the Minister of Public Service Delivery talked about a buy Canada plan, his Cabinet colleagues were negotiating to send millions of dollars to Texas and California.

Why is this NDP government sending taxpayer dollars south, and when will they finally get on board, do the right thing and support Canadian businesses and jobs?

Hon. Mintu Sandhu (Minister of Public Service Delivery): Our government care about our businesses here in Manitoba. We care about Manitobans. We are listening to Manitobans, and we are listening to businesses here in Manitoba, unlike members opposite who want to be the first–51st state. That will not–never going to happen.

The member from Midland, only thing–her concern was the budget is good, but why are not we giving money to Elon Musk? And, on the other side, the Opposition House Leader only thanked Trump for the tariffs.

So, again, we will take no lessons from them.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: The–

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Guenter: Yes, unfortunately, for the minister and for Manitobans, there was no answer there.

The only ones in this Manitoba Legislature who have given government contracts to American com-

panies in the middle of a trade war is this NDP government.

We have now learned that the Minister of Innovation and New Technology was signing multi-million-dollar deals with American tech firms just days after Donald Trump applied tariffs on Canada. I table just two to show the hypocrisy of the Kinew government.

How many millions of untendered dollars has this NDP government sent south of the border?

MLA Sandhu: Our government is reviewing all the contracts and government policies to make sure we are getting the most benefit for Manitobans.

I have heard from many people who are looking for a way to help. Manitobans can look online at our support local, buy local website to find local businesses in Manitoba here.

Honourable Speaker, as I said earlier, we are reviewing every single contract that we have with the United States.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: And with a final supplementary question, the honourable member for Borderland.

Mr. Guenter: Not good enough, Speaker, absolutely not good enough.

This NDP government gave multi-million-dollar untendered contracts to American firms in the middle of a trade war. This is an absolute betrayal of the Manitoba taxpayer.

Where is this government's buy Canadian policy?

MLA Sandhu: The member of Borderland thinks Canada should be 51 state, which is not going to happen, okay? The member from Midland thought Budget 2025 was so amazing, her only complaint was we aren't giving a rebate on Tesla to Elon Musk. And worst of all, the Leader of the Opposition said thank you to Donald Trump for bringing this horrible tax.

Luckily, Manitobans have rejected the PC–failed PC government and elected a team that will always stand up for our people, our jobs and our economy.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

Universal Screening for Learning Disabilities Request for Government to Support Bill 225

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): The government's recent policy directive on literacy screening does not go far enough. Unlike Bill 225, it does not require that parents be notified of screening results.

During second reading, members of this government agreed with Bill 225, emphasizing that it's important to engage parents in the education process and that it is crucial for identifying and addressing learning challenges. I table this.

Does the minister agree with the bill and her government colleague, and if so, why is the Minister of Education refusing to adopt this idea?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Thank you to the member opposite for the question and the opportunity to get up and speak about the very exciting announcement that we made just a few weeks ago about introducing universal early screening tools into schools across all of Manitoba.

And to correct the record, it actually is the case that in working with school divisions in implementing this fantastic new announcement, part of that directive is absolutely going to be for schools to communicate with parents in developing the plan to address whatever needs are identified during the use of that tool.

So I couldn't agree more with the member opposite that communication with parents is at the forefront of our education policy. Very excited to work with her further on this exciting announcement.

MLA Lamoureux: Experts in child development recommended that students be screened for literacy challenges at least twice per year, a standard clearly outlined in Bill 225.

The government's directive falls short, and it only offers vague commitments with no requirement for ongoing screening. This has been noted by school divisions and teachers who consulted on Bill 225.

I'd like to ask the minister: Who did this government consult with to determine that only one screening is required?

MLA Schmidt: Again, I thank the member opposite for the opportunity to get up and to clarify the record.

It was clear in our news release and it's been clear in our department's communication with school

divisions that, in fact, students will be screened not once but twice a year for at least three years between the period of kindergarten to grade 4.

And when it's—when—and the member is correct that we did a very comprehensive and wide consultation on this bill. I would like to table for the House comments by—from Dyslexia Canada in supporting our announcement. Dyslexia Canada says: Dyslexia Canada applauds the government of Manitoba for announcing universal early reading screening. This is a 'signeficant'—significant step forward ensuring that all children, especially those at risk for dyslexia, receive the support that they need to become confident and capable leaders—

The Deputy Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

MLA Lamoureux: This government is being anti-democratic.

The bill, Bill 225, unanimously passed second reading on April 15 here in the House. Since then, individuals, including doctors, speech-language pathologists, teachers and parents—even members of this very government—they have signed up to speak at committee in support of this legislation and to have their voices heard.

Will this government do the right thing—the democratic move—allow for Manitobans to contribute towards this legislation and send Bill 225 to committee?

MLA Schmidt: Again, I thank the member for the question. Very excited to work with her on improving literacy outcomes here in Manitoba.

Our government chose not to wait for Bill 225, and we knew that we could do this important work with a policy directive which we were excited to announce.

But I think it's important to think—the member opposite spoke about being anti-democratic, and I take great exception to that comment, honourable Speaker.

* (14:40)

And if she is concerned about anti-democracy, she should confer with the members that she regularly sits with and confers with about why they are delaying important bills that have been introduced in this Legislature in this session, bills that would—this is what the members opposite stand for. They stand against bills that would remove hateful and divisive campaigns; they stand against bills that—

The Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Removal of Interprovincial Trade Barriers MOU Signed with Ontario

MLA JD Devgan (McPhillips): Last week our government signed a memorandum of understanding with the government of Ontario, taking another step to breaking down interprovincial trade barriers.

We know that for seven and a half years, the opposition sat on their hands and did nothing to improve interprovincial trade barriers, and today they profusely thanked Trump for attacking Manitoban families with tariffs.

Can the Premier please share with the House the details of the MOU and what we're doing to unlock free trade across Canada?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I want to thank our colleague from McPhillips. He's somebody with real-world business expertise and a good understanding of the economy, unlike the members opposite, who've never worked a day in their lives and they're all lined up at the public trough.

Now when it comes to building up this country that we love so much, we're knocking down trade barriers. We will never be the 51st state, and we will always be the true north strong and free.

We signed this MOU so that we could advance the project of having free trade in Canada by Canada Day. The members opposite, still chirping, can do their part by making sure that this bill passes before the House rises.

And, you know, Premier Ford and I, we always have a good back and forth. He says, you know, I don't think you're really NDP, and I say, well I don't think you're really PC, because in Manitoba, the PCs are broke; they lose elections; and they love Donald Trump.

Watercraft Ban for Clear Lake Government Knowledge of Ban

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Just hours before the start of the May long weekend, Parks Canada announced they would ban motorized watercraft from Clear Lake for the 2025 season. This was a complete reversal of the decision in January to return to the one boat-one lake system.

Can the minister share when they were first notified of this change by Parks Canada?

Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Well, let me just say that we recognize, on this side of the House, the magnificent beauty and value that Clear Lake is to our province. We understand that it is a great recreational spot; it's a great economic driver for our province. We want to ensure that Clear Lake remains that for time to come.

To answer the question directly, I found out on Friday.

Request to Remove Ban

Mr. Nesbitt: Besides affecting the manage-cottage owners with boats, this last-minute boat ban directly affects the Clear Lake marina, which offers lake cruises and watercraft rentals.

Will the minister pick up the phone today and tell the federal government to reverse this decision?

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

We know Clear Lake, Manitoba, is a very beautiful spot that a lot of Manitobans care about deeply, and we want to make sure that there's a lot of economic activity that can happen as a result of the beautiful assets we have in Manitoba.

And that's why we've already reached out to the federal environment minister with a letter to ensure that we advocate for businesses in the community and that they know that we have their back: supporting the economic activity in the Clear Lake region and for the use of all Manitobans. And I'll table that letter today.

The Deputy Speaker: And with a final supplementary question, the honourable member for Riding Mountain.

Support for Business Community

Mr. Nesbitt: Last year, the minister promised financial support for businesses affected by the closure of Clear Lake to boating.

Can the minister tell the House how much money they allocated in 2024 to supporting the business community of the Clear Lake area?

Mr. Moses: I appreciate the members opposite reminding Manitobans how we've been consistent in our advocacy for the economic activity around Clear Lake and the business community there. I've had pleasure of having great conversations with business leaders there and advocating for their support from the

federal government to help them during this challenging economic time.

We know that closure to motorized boats on Clear Lake will have an economic impact but we're here, as a provincial government, to advocate for those business owners to the federal government and that's why we've written a letter to the Minister of Environment.

This is real work, real action that our government is taking to support economic activity and the business community right across Manitoba and particularly at Clear Lake.

Constituent in Springfield Constituency Request for Mental Health Assessment

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): I have a constituent in Springfield who is suffering terrible mental health issues. Unfortunately, his house went up for auction because of tax arrears. The end of this month, the house is to be demolished and he has nowhere to go. Approached the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith), the file was transferred to Families and then to the Minister of Health.

This man needs help. He needs an assessment. The community is trying their best.

I would ask anyone on the other side if they would please reach out, get this individual an assessment before his house is demolished and he has nowhere to go.

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Certainly, the member opposite knows that we take casework very, very seriously and certainly if there's a level of urgency to any casework that any member of this House has, I always encourage folks to bring it to myself or the appropriate person directly. So, of course, I'm more than happy to meet with that member immediately after question period and have a conversation about this and see what support we can offer this constituent.

I would say, you know, honourable Speaker—honourable Deputy Speaker, it is so important that we work across party lines and have those direct conversations. I think that not politicizing these really important issues that Manitobans face is an important approach, one that our government takes seriously.

The Deputy Speaker: And with that, time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Death of Jordyn Reimer—Judicial Review Request

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

* (14:50)

(7) An out-of-province review is supported by MADD Canada, MADD Winnipeg 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 the prosecutor's decision to not prosecute the accomplice in the death of Jordyn Reimer.

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

Opposition to Releasing Repeat Offenders

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Kellie Verwey, a beloved young woman from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, was tragically killed in a car crash caused by a repeat violent offender with a long criminal history.

(2) Despite repeated violations of his bail conditions, the offender was free to roam the streets and to ultimately claim Kellie's life. This tragedy was entirely preventable.

(3) While the Criminal Code falls under federal jurisdiction, provinces have been given the responsibility for the administration of justice, allowing for meaningful provincial action on bail reform to ensure public safety.

(4) Other provinces have taken proactive steps to strengthen bail enforcement, but Manitoba has not used all the available tools to address this issue effectively.

(5) The provincial government has the ability and the responsibility to advocate for and implement measures that protect its citizens by ensuring that repeat violent offenders are not released into our communities without proper safeguards.

(6) Immediate action is required to close gaps in the justice system that allow dangerous criminals to remain free, which puts innocent Manitobans at risk.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to take immediate and decisive action on bail reform to address the serious deficits in enforcement by utilizing all available provincial mechanisms to strengthen warrant enforcement, increasing bail supervision and opposing release of offenders, thus ensuring that repeat violent offenders are held accountable and that public safety is prioritized over leniency; and

(2) To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to immediately repeal provisions of the Criminal Code that allow for the continued victimization of law-abiding Manitobans while granting repeat offenders additional rights.

This petition has been signed by Simeran *[phonetic]* Nanda, McKenzie Schnell and Nicole Fontaine, along with many, many Manitobans.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no further petitions, grievances?

GRIEVANCES

Remembering Jason Schreyer

MLA Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Honourable Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to my long-time great friend and colleague, Jason Schreyer, who left us suddenly on April 29, 2025. Like to express my heartfelt condolences to Jason's wife Sarah and sons Ramzi and Jared.

My heartfelt condolences also go to Jason's father and mother, right honourable Edward and Lily Schreyer, sisters Karmel and Lisa and brother Toben and to the entire Tena family.

Jason was the son of a former Manitoba premier, Ed Schreyer, and Lily Schreyer, and the grandson of Jake Schulz, Lily's father, who was a founding member of the National Farmer's Union in Manitoba and became an MP for the CCF in 1957.

Jason accomplished a big upset by defeating incumbent city counsellor Thomas Steen in 2014, a feat that rarely happens. And re-elected in 2018 and 2022 in the Elmwood-East Kildonan ward. Jason had politics in his blood.

During the 1988 provincial NDP leadership campaign, Jason officially joined the Manitoba NDP, and we were both active in the Maureen Hemphill leadership campaign, and he acted as our ambassador to the Len Harapiuk campaign and made his first run for public office in the 1993 federal election in the riding of Selkirk-Red River.

Jason later worked for his progressive predecessor at City Hall, counsellor Lillian Thomas. Jason had a talent for producing political leaflets. He went from appearing in our leaflet in 1988 to producing them when I was MP for Elmwood-Transcona. Between 2008 and 2011, Jason was in charge of my leaflets for my MP's office. He had an eye for design and a great talent for putting together an exceptional product.

Being a perfectionist, however, had its drawbacks, especially with the time frames of election campaigns. But Jason could square the circle and—when it counted—and would then become the person who distributed the leaflets with Sarah, Jared and other family members, often until late at night.

Jason was a veteran of the Elmwood sign wars from 1988 and on. Before that, Russ Johnston, the uncle of our long-time Elmwood president Ed Innes, was the sign chair. And who was then joined by Pablo Herrera and then Jason adopted the Ed Innes method of perfection in signs.

Now, these signs were all the same size and they're all the same height and they're all facing in the same direction, which you would expect from the professional engineer that Ed Innes is. Jason adopted the same system; he could erect a full large sign by himself in record time, which is impossible for the average person to do.

Jason always had a vision to win. The logistical answer was to be on the street full time, living in my truck until late at night, starting months before the election even began. Election nights were always spent attaching special thank-you signs onto our regular signs on Main Street locations, a job that always lasted way too long, 'til 2 or 3 in the morning.

The next day, the removal of, the teardown and the storage of the signs began, and that would last another week, minimum. Jason and I and Randy Schulz and Ed Innes logged hundreds of hours in the truck during the elections, almost non-stop, through our provincial, federal and municipal campaigns.

As a result of this campaigning method, our efficiency skyrocketed, and so Jason, Randy Schulz and I probably ran the cheapest campaigns with the most visibility and proven results. And that's hard to beat. Jason loved working with people; he worked for my colleague Steve Ashton when he was Infrastructure minister.

And during the 2011 federal election, we were able to arrange provincial funding for the Plessis Road

underpass in less than a week, and this project wasn't even on anybody's priority list. Together, Jason and I would work on issues on issues like local crime.

* (15:00)

This was especially true in the last municipal election of October 2022, where Jason and I ran into many people who had garages broken into and catalytic converter thefts, which helped us focus on issues that involved—that evolved eventually into the current provincial security camera rebates and the provincial catalytic converter legislation.

We also supported city councillor Brian Mayes, who has worked to speed up the separation of our combined sewer system to stop the problem of sewer backup into our basements, and sewer overflow into the Red River. This should not take an extra 50 years.

We also demanded assistance from homeowners who have lead water pipes running from the street to the basement, which should all be replaced as soon as possible according to Health Canada.

Another long overdue issue is the replacement of the second oldest bridge in Winnipeg, the Louise Bridge. Built at the time of the shoot-out at the O.K. Corral in 1881, we spent countless hours distributing leaflets and collecting signatures in a long-standing effort to replace the bridge with a three lanes in each direction, and keeping the old bridge as local access and an active transportation link.

Jason even insisted on publishing pictures of the underside of the Louise Bridge, featuring numerous plywood patches covering many holes still on the old two-lane, functionally obsolete bridge. And those patches are still there today. We go there on—by the boat, take pictures of them.

Jason was always—also responsible for restarting the Elmwood seed campaign, which had stopped in 2011. Jason had the great idea of restarting the seed distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic, and while I was buying McKenzie seed packets, Jason went back to where we got the original idea, and that was in 1966. Burrows MLA Ben Hanuschak came up with the idea—former Speaker, by the way—with the idea of buying seeds in bulk, filling bags by hand and stapling a label on the seeds.

Jason, as the councillor, briefly became one of the largest seed wholesalers in Winnipeg, and he, Sarah and Jared spent an enormous chunk of the pandemic producing bags of seeds which they distributed to every house in the Elmwood-East Kildonan ward,

with a printed planting instructions carefully inserted in each package.

Another great idea Jason had was the big yellow keep Concordia ER sign campaign to get the Pallister government to back down on the closure of the Concordia ER. Originally, the Pallister Conservatives decided to close the ER totally in 2016, and after we had, like, 700 yellow signs up on main streets and corner lots, a year later the government relented and they proposed a clinic, which really satisfied no one. And it wasn't until June of 2019 the government backed down. They agreed to an urgent-care facility just months before the provincial election.

Jason was an animal lover, and when in late 2020 we lost both our dog Lola and cat Chica, both of kidney failure, once again Jason came to the rescue. And we drove up to Arborg during the pandemic to see Ed Schreyer's long-time friend Ed Dern and adopted two cats, Taco and Chico, who are still with us today.

Jason referred us to his old school classmate Kareena Grywinski, who is the founder of a dog welfare organization called Feed the Furbabies Canada organization. We got our great rescue dog Chola, who is still with us.

These are just a handful of the great experiences we got to share with the best friend a person could have. Jason was a good father who spent an enormous amount of time with his son Jared, including mentoring him on every aspect of political campaigning from leaflet dropping with dad, beginning at age five, to all the fine details of sign campaigning.

We find it hard to believe that Jason is gone. We keep expecting doorbell to ring and Jason will be there. Thank you for being the best friend ever. Rest in peace, Jason.

Honourable Speaker, I'd like to ask for a moment of silence.

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

A moment of silence was observed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Two things: pursuant to rule 34(7), I am announcing the private member's resolution to be considered on

the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Brar). The title of the resolution is supporting the agricultural industry—agriculture industry in Manitoba.

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

The Deputy Speaker: It has been announced, pursuant to rule 34(7), the private members' resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Burrows. The title of the resolution is Supporting the Agricultural Industry in Manitoba.

* * *

The Deputy Speaker: And as announced, we will resolve into Committee of Supply for departmental Estimates.

Deputy Speaker, take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

* (15:10)

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of the Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I do. On behalf of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning, I am so pleased to be here today for this committee meeting to discuss the Estimates for the '25-26 fiscal year.

Before I get started with my opening statement, I just want to say a quick thank you to all of the committee room support staff that are here today helping us. It's important work that you all do, and we appreciate you keeping us on time and on task and watered and Hansard and all the rest. So thank you very much for your work, and also thank you so much to the department staff.

We have some amazing staff from the department here assisting and supporting us today, but also to all of the staff that work in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning, thank you so much for all of the work that you did in putting together this year's budget Estimates, and there's something we can really be proud of. So thank you so much for your work. I value and thank each and every one of you.

So when it comes to education, our government is turning the page. We are making record investments in education funding so that students can receive the supports they need in the classroom. Over the past two years, we've increased funding by over \$170 million, and that includes \$30 million for our universal nutrition program. This year alone, we announced another robust and healthy funding increase of \$67 million, or a 3.6 per cent lift.

We understand the importance of quality education for all Manitoba students and its impact on the province overall, and we will continue to strive to provide school divisions with predictable and stable funding that keeps pace with enrolment and addresses students' needs. As our Premier (Mr. Kinew) has said many times, and others have said before him, the best economic plan is an education plan. And that's why Budget 2025 continues with the investments we've made into our students.

* (15:20)

After the former PC government cut the small class size cap, we've invested \$3 million towards bringing back small class sizes. And in one school year alone, our investments have helped school divisions hire more than 630 educators back into the classroom so children can get that critical one-on-one support.

And there are other ways we're helping our youngest learners. Starting in fall 2025, we will be rolling out and piloting our universal early reading screeners to help identify students who may be at risk for future reading difficulties, including reading disabilities like dyslexia. And the full rollout of that program will take place in the fall of 2026.

All Manitoba students will be screened for early reading skills for at least three years during their kindergarten-to-grade-4 years, ensuring that no student falls behind and all students have the necessary supports in place to become successful readers and writers.

We're also taking actions to strengthen math outcomes for students. We're implementing a

financial literacy unit into grade 9 to prepare students for their lives after school. And we've recently announced that we are doubling the amount of time that students spend in grade 9 math, which will help all students across Manitoba succeed in future years.

We are also excited to be piloting a renewed science curriculum in schools, grounded in Indigenous knowledge of the natural world within the context of contemporary science education. And that curriculum redevelopment was developed in collaboration with a group of science education experts from around the world. The renewed curriculum equips learners with the skills and competencies necessary to become scientifically literate citizens who understand how science works, are curious and care about the world around them, who think critically about issues and make informed, sustainable decisions.

We are helping children learn through our historic \$30-million universal nutrition program, which ensures that no child will have to learn on an empty stomach. We are already hearing about increased attendance from school divisions, better engagement in the classroom and stronger community building.

We are also happy to partner with the federal government, as they followed in Manitoba's footsteps by rolling out a national school food program. We know these investments will continue to pay dividends in terms not only of these individual successes of students and improved educational outcomes in our province but also into our provincial economy for generations to come.

Indigenous language education is also a priority of our government, led by the vision of the Premier who recently made history by delivering his speech in the Chamber on Spirit Bear Day in Cree. To support Indigenous language revitalization and preservation, some key initiatives we're working on include Indigenous language curriculum framework development, teacher recruitment strategies, community program funding and post-secondary partnerships. We've also introduced Bill 18, which will allow for Indigenous language immersion programming in Manitoba, finally.

For the '25—pardon me—for the '24-25 school year, our government increased funding for the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba to a total of \$350,000 to support treaty education training. This funding will continue in '25-26 to help ensure that all teachers and school staff are trained in treaty education.

French spoken

Notre gouvernement appuie l'éducation en français avec des investissements importants.

Translation

Our government supports French-language education with major investments.

English

This includes re-establishing the assistant deputy minister position for le Bureau de l'éducation française after it was cut by the previous PC government.

We're also partnering with key French education partners, including l'Université de Saint-Boniface, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, the Manitoba School Boards Association and the Manitoba Teachers' Society to recruit and retain more French language teachers.

We're also building two DSFM schools, one in Brandon and the other in St. Boniface. This is part of our government's plan to build 11 new schools to support growing enrolment across our province.

These schools include a K-to-8 school in River East Transcona School Division, Devonshire Park; a K-to-8 school in Pembina Trails School Division at Prairie Pointe; a K-to-8 school in Brandon—in Brandon southwest; a K-to-8 school in Seven Oaks in Meadowlands; a new Ste. Anne high school in the Seine River School Division; a new K-to-8 school in Bridgwater Lakes as part of the Pembina Trails School Division; a new school—new high school in Neepawa, part of the Beautiful Plains School Division; a new K-to-8 school in Seven Oaks at Highland Pointe; and a Winnipeg northwest high school in the Winnipeg School Division.

And unlike the previous government, these schools are all properly budgeted for and will be delivered to Manitobans on time and on budget.

But the good news does not end there. There's also many good things to talk about in early learning and child care. Just a couple of months ago, we announced that we successfully negotiated a five-year extension with the federal government, providing Manitoba with over \$1.9 billion to continue building on the progress we have made in ensuring the sustainability of child care for families across our province.

Through federal and provincial investments, we are increasing the availability of affordable, high-quality child care and investing in our workforce of early learning and child-care professionals. Last year, together

with Canada, we increased the wage grid for ECEs by 2.75 per cent and provided an additional \$10.9 million to facilities to support those wage increases.

We continue to expand training opportunities, creating more pathways to becoming an early childhood educator in Manitoba. We've made some huge strides, but we absolutely know that there is much more work to do, which is why this year we are going to launch a provincial workforce strategy to help us recruit and retain more professionals into this important and valued and rewarding career.

Manitoba is committed to expanding our child-care system with a space-expansion plan that already includes over 16,000 new spaces for children aged zero to 12 across our province.

There are so many exciting projects that we can look forward to announcing in the near future. These announcements are going to build off of the growing number of projects we already have and partnerships that we have with schools, school divisions, in hospitals and post-secondary institutions and beyond.

So, honourable Chair, and to the committee, there are a lot of great things happening in education. I am so proud of the work that our government is doing with many of our great partners across this province, with the many school divisions, with the child-care centres, with our First Nations partners, with teachers and educators and students across this province.

I very much look forward to the discussion here today at committee, and with that I will conclude my opening statements.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): We thank the minister for those comments.

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

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Thank you, Madam Chairperson, or—yes, Madam Chairperson. Thank you for everyone—

An Honourable Member: Honourable Chairperson.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, I sit corrected, honourable Chairperson, by the Justice Minister already. So we'll get going on the conversation today.

We're—it gives me great pleasure to be here today to ask some questions on behalf of Manitobans in regards to a very important topic of high priority is education here in Manitoba.

I, too, would like to commend and thank the committee room support staff, everyone involved, of course, those that are working in behind the scenes to make sure that we're running a tight ship here in committee during Estimates. Look forward to many, many days ahead of us, having questions and that taken forward to the Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister.

And at this time I'd also like to thank the department staff and the many individuals that work behind the scenes, that definitely work tirelessly to make sure that the government in Manitoba, in their education field, is trying to put the best foot forward even though, at times, I know that the current NDP government throws a few wrenches into the system.

And with that, honourable Chairperson, I'm—I'd also like to make mention of the grievance/announcement that the member for Elmwood (MLA Maloway) brought forward on our way out of the Chamber today, and that was to not really grieve, but it was sort of a grieve. He commemorated and talked about our recently passing of Councillor Jason Schreyer.

* (15:30)

And so our heartfelt condolences go out to Jason's family and, of course, his son Jared, of course, that I know, spent many times with Jason and, of course, to the honourable Ed Schreyer and his wonderful wife Lily and—who I've had the pleasure of getting to know for many, many years, considering that Mr. Schreyer was a teacher in the Brokenhead-Beausejour area back in the day, and there's been quite a few Ewaskos that have been taught by Mr. Schreyer.

And so with that, I know that it's been a tough go. I know the member for Elmwood brought forward a very compassionate speech today commemorating his good friend Jason.

I take a look at the—and I listened to the Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister today on what they're brought forward in regards to their opening speech, and I see many things that we agree on, considering many of the things that the Education Minister is now trying to have her Premier (Mr. Kinew) take credit for were a lot of Progressive Conservative initiatives—not only ones that were well under way, but ones that were under way but yet paused or stopped by the Kinew government. And it's nice to hear when the Education Minister rattles off some of the projects and some of the initiatives coming forward, either that have been unpaused or continue to go on; it's nice to see them going forward.

One of the things that we do not see eye to eye on is the fact on raising taxes on you, the hard-working Manitobans, property owners and renters in this province of ours. As we heard today, we heard the Premier and the Finance Minister point fingers at the school boards and blame them for the fact that this government has cut education funding, but I'm sure we will look to many days ahead of us in regards to some questions, and try to get some answers on behalf of Manitobans.

So with that, honourable Chairperson, I'll concede the floor and we'll move on with the 2025-2026 Estimates.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): We thank the member.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in this Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 16.1.(a) contained in resolution 16.1.

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.

At this time we ask that the minister introduce the staff in attendance.

MLA Schmidt: It's my pleasure to introduce some of the many department staff that we are so lucky to have in Education and Early Childhood Learning. All of them contribute to a team that has just produced incredible results for students and for Manitobans, and I'm so very grateful for the chance to get to work with all of them, and to learn from them; and for all the help that they have given me in these first few months since I've taken on the role of minister of the department.

So immediately to my left we have our deputy minister, Brian O'Leary. To his left we have Andrew Henry, who is our executive financial officer. I believe that's the right—EFO? That's the right title?

Beside Andrew we have Sarah Whiteford, who is our assistant deputy minister for Early Learning and Child Care. And beside Sarah we have our acting assistant deputy minister of—*[interjection]* No longer acting. Congratulations. I apologize. This is news to me.

We have our formal appointed assistant deputy minister of System Performance & Accountability, Jeff Kehler. So welcome to the role officially now, Jeff. And Jeff has been doing an absolutely fantastic job in his acting capacity, and I am absolutely thrilled that

he has joined—or, he has filled that position on a permanent basis.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Thank you, Honourable Minister.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ewasko: Welcome, of course, to the staff; and congratulations, Mr. Kehler, on being permanent deputy minister—or assistant deputy minister of System Performance & Accountability. So—and welcome everybody here this afternoon.

So I'm going to start off by asking the Education Minister almost a Estimates question one-oh-one. Can she provide more of the organizational structure in addition to what is shown on page 15 of the Estimates document?

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the critic for the question. I'm happy to put more information on the record about the organizational structure of the department and some of the functions that they perform.

So, again, we have with us today our deputy minister. Below the deputy minister we have two different sort of department services branches. We have the Financial and Administrative Services branch, which is headed by Andrew Henry who is here with us today, who is our EFO. Another department service that we have is our Corporate Services, and the executive director of the Corporate Services branch is Rebecca Johnston.

There are five main divisions in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning, being Student Achievement & Inclusion, whose assistant deputy minister's name is Janet Tomy. We have—thank goodness, now, since our government has been elected, we have reinstated the division of the Bureau de l'éducation française, and that is headed by the assistant deputy minister by the name of René Déquier, and we're very proud to have added that position back into the public service, something that is very needed.

* (15:40)

Manitoba is so proud to be a bilingual province, and it was a real shame that the previous

PC government didn't see the value of bilingualism, didn't see the value of supporting French-language education in our province and cut the bureau.

And so we have—again, our government, the NDP government, has reinstated the Bureau de l'éducation française division and has hired a new assistant deputy minister in Mr. Déquier.

Another division of the department is the division of Indigenous Excellence in Education, headed by the assistant deputy minister, Jackie Connell. Jackie has an impressive career as an educator and as—and an administrator, and our department is so very lucky to have Jackie have joined the team. She has done some incredible work already. Much of her work can be seen in our legislative agenda that we put forward this session, many incredible bills that will certainly move Indigenous education forward in this province and also see Indigenous excellence—further Indigenous excellence attained in our province.

Another division of the department is System Performance and Accountability, headed by our newly minted assistant deputy minister, Jeff Kehler.

And, finally, what is also a division of the department but really occupies about 50 per cent of our mandate and our time and effort and attention, and that's the division of Early Learning and Child Care, headed by the assistant deputy minister, Sarah Whiteford, who, again, also has done incredible work. Her leadership across Canada is noted.

Manitoba is currently the co-chair of the FPT of ministers most responsible for child care. And when I had the pleasure of attending that conference late last year, I got to meet many of the ministers from across Canada and also many of the deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers across Canada that are working on child care.

And each and every one of the people that I ran into and spoke with, in what was at the time an acting role for myself, something I was just starting to sink into and learn about, everyone I spoke to at that national conference—again, a gathering of all of the federal, provincial and territorial ministers most responsible for child care, including their deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers—everyone had really fantastic things to say about Sarah. And Sarah and her team, with the support of our government, really led the charge in getting Canada back to the table to renegotiate the Canada-wide early childhood program.

I may have missed—most of the time—I may have missed the Student Achievement and Inclusion, headed by the assistant deputy minister, Janet Tomy. If I failed to mention her already, I apologize. She also does incredible work on assessment and curriculum. Incredible folks working in our department.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Thank you.

Mr. Ewasko: So what I had asked the minister was, in addition to what's on page 15 of the Estimates book, if she could go through some additional—of the positions and also the names attached to each.

And at this time, I would also like to congratulate Assistant Deputy Minister Déquier on her appointment.

I'd also like to say that in addition to what the minister—or, to correct the record, I guess, a little bit, is the fact that we did have—you know, under our previous government, we still had Assistant Deputy Minister Janet Tomy, who is proficient in French language and had still worked with the francophone school divisions and, of course, everything in regards to the French immersion and francophonie sections of Manitoba Education.

So back to the original question. I would like the minister to talk about the organizational structure that is in addition to—on what is in page 15, with those names as well.

MLA Schmidt: Something I failed to mention in my opening statement, perhaps, something I think is important in spaces like this when we're having meetings, when we're identifying ourselves, is pronouns.

So I use the pronouns she/her. I think pronouns are important for individuals; they're important for respectful dialogue. And I don't believe that the member opposite did this intentionally, but they did, as a—in the interest of correcting the record, for accuracy and for respect: René Déquier, who is the assistant deputy minister in the bureau, uses he/him pronouns, not she/her pronouns. So, just for accuracy. And, again, I don't suspect that the member opposite did that with any intent.

That being said, I think it's also very important, so just to correct the record.

So, again, it gives me great pleasure to further highlight some of the incredible folks that work in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning and to read their names and their roles onto the permanent record forever and all time.

So, again, there are five main divisions in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning. We can start with—as it appears, sort of, from left to right in the organizational chart that's printed at page 15 of the Estimates book—so we'll start with the division of Student Achievement and Inclusion, again, headed by Assistant Deputy Minister Janet Tomy.

So one of the other executive staff—some of the other executive that work with Janet in Student Achievement and Inclusion include: we have Rhonda Shaw, who is the executive director of the Learning and Outcomes branch; we also have Allan Hawkins, who is the executive director of Inclusion Support and Services Branch. And we know that the work that they do is so important in learning and outcomes. They do the work of developing curriculum, of working on assessments which are so important for students and for families.

* (15:50)

And, again, Allan's work is also very important in the role of inclusion; inclusion is something that we think about every day in the department, with the ideal of having every student in class all day, every day is the goal. Of course, we know that inclusion means different things for different students and different families and different schools. But again, we're guided by the underlying principle that every child matters.

So next, we can work on the Bureau d'éducation française, again, headed by the ADM René Déquier. I can highlight the executive director of the bureau, whose name is Kassy Assié.

And again—oh, yes, sorry, yes—and again, in that branch, they do such incredible and important work of promoting French language education here in Manitoba, something that is somewhat unique to Manitoba, something that we should be so proud of, of both French language education and also French immersion education. We have such a proud tradition in our province. I, myself, am a benefactor of French immersion education. I know many members of our caucus and many members of the Assembly have also benefited from French language instruction here in our province.

So moving on to Indigenous Excellence in Education, headed by the Assistant Deputy Minister Jackie Connell. We do have a director that works with Jackie and that is someone by the name of Sarah Gazan. And again, the work that they are producing out of the Indigenous Excellence division is absolutely transformational, and really, work that's leading the way across Canada.

Moving on to System Performance and Accountability, I'd like to highlight Tina Choy-Pohl, who is the director of Education Funding branch. I'd like to highlight Faisal Islam, who is the acting executive director of the Governance and Policy branch. I'd like to highlight Stacey Hay, who is the executive director of Teacher Certification and Standards. And from the Early Learning and Child Care division, I'd love to highlight Jennifer Faulder—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Ewasko: Absolutely, I'll start off by apologizing to the minister for using incorrect pronouns for her, and, again, apologizing to Monsieur Déquier who is now the assistant deputy minister in the department for using the wrong pronouns for him. So—but again, congratulations on your appointment.

I will ask the minister to continue on listing the different positions and the names, but I'd also like her to list off how many political staff she has in the Department of Education as well.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Would the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) please repeat the last part of the question? Just there was a—yes.

An Honourable Member: Sure. Yes.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Member for Lac du Bonnet.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, so I can go? Okay. So last part of the question—so, first of all, was for the minister to continue on the positions and the names that she was going down; she just ran out of time.

And the second part was: How many political staff does she have in the Department of Education?

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the member opposite for allowing me the time to, again, read some of the names and positions of some of the incredible folks that work in our department. I really appreciate the opportunity to finish where we had left off.

So, again, we were—where we had left off was listing some additional positions in the division of Early Learning and Child Care, headed by the assistant deputy minister of—Sarah Whiteford.

So, again, where I had left off was I spoke about Jennifer Fauldner, who is the executive director of the Policy and Planning branch. I'd love to acknowledge Susan Emerson, who's the director of our Provincial Operations branch.

And I would love to highlight Nneka Anyaoku-Onyenekwu and, again, I apologize if I fail to pronounce that properly. Nneka is the executive director of Funding and Financial Assistance. She's also an incredibly warm and upbeat person, and so I apologize to her directly if I have failed to pronounce her name correctly; I'm embarrassed about that.

I will just say very briefly, just two weeks ago, three weeks ago, a month ago—I'm not sure; time flies in this space—very recently, it was the Week of the Early Childhood Educator here in Manitoba, and during that week, I was very lucky to accompany ADM Whiteford to the early childhood learning division offices downtown here and get to meet some of the incredible folks that work in that division of the department. So many of the folks that work in the department, as fantastic public servants, have the lived experience of working as early childhood educators and have worked in the sector, some of them for decades.

And it was just such a privilege and an honour to get to share space with them and to get to celebrate not just—again, not just what they do as public servants working within the department to expand access to affordable, high-quality child care for families here in Manitoba, which is really important work, but also to really acknowledge the fact of, again, their—the work that they've done in this sector directly working with children as early childhood educators here in our system, and then they bring that knowledge and that passion that they have for kids into our department to allow and to support the work that we're doing as government to really quite rapidly and, I—dare I say, radically expand child-care space here in Manitoba in partnership with the federal government. Their work is so valued, and it was, again, such a privilege to get to go visit with them in their place of work.

So I am going to go back to—I would like to mention one other political staff—I'm sorry, not political staff—department staff that I failed to mention from the Student Achievement and Inclusion division, and that is Allison Potter, who works on Continuous Improvement. Her work is also very, very important.

So those are just some of the further—some further information on the organizational structure. Happy to follow up with the member if he has further questions.

Oh, I didn't get to everyone; I missed one person. I'm all over the place here today. Thank you to the committee for your patience.

I did fail to read out the name of one of our other executive directors in the Early Learning and Child Care division, and that's the executive director of Capital and Space Expansion, Signe Hanson, and it's very important, and I thank my—the support staff that I have with me here today because, again, all of the roles—every person and department performs a important and pivotal role.

Signe, in particular, as the executive director of Capital and Space Expansion, has a very, very important job and she leads an excellent team, and I cannot—and Manitobans cannot—thank them enough for the work that they are doing in—again, in partnership with the federal government in rapidly and radically expanding access to child care here in our province and really developing, analyzing and getting off the ground the many, many capital space expansion projects that we have right across our province.

So thank you to the staff for reminding me about Signe, and thank you very much to Signe, herself, for the work that she does.

Running out of time here to answer the second part of the member's question and again thank him for repeating the question for us. I currently have four political staff in the office.

Mr. Ewasko: I'm going to concede some time to the member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux) 'til 4:15.

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank my colleague from Lac du Bonnet for allowing me some time here this afternoon, as well as the minister and all the departmental staff for being here this afternoon and answering our questions.

After I introduced Bill 225, there was a policy directive that the minister had announced on the exact same lines—I would argue quite vague; doesn't have everything in writing that she shares in the House, she explains as similar to the bill. The policy directive does not include very specific details such as informing parents, such as ensuring that the schools follow up with the findings of universal screening.

Now, on April 15, the legislation passed second reading unanimously. Many members of the government, in fact, spoke in favour of the legislation.

* (16:00)

Since then, I've had many people reach out to me; we're talking doctors, speech pathologists, teachers, parents of students, some from Dyslexia Canada. I know the member—minister mentioned Dyslexia Canada earlier. They would like to see Bill 225 go to committee.

I am more than happy to share some of these correspondence with the minister, if she would like. I'm more than happy to help arrange some of these meetings so she can hear directly from them, if she would prefer.

There are currently 26 people signed up to speak at committee, and members around this table know that's a high number of people who tend to come out to speak at committee.

I am asking the minister to call Bill 225 to committee to ensure that the voices of those who helped contribute towards this legislation—again, that came out before the policy directive—have the opportunity to share their thoughts, their ideas, their concerns with MLAs.

And I, too, like the minister said earlier, I would love to be able to work collaboratively on this. I actually had the opportunity to do this with my colleague from Concordia here as well. I'd love the opportunity, but she has to include me in the conversation then.

Will she bring the bill to committee?

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Just as a point of order, Bill 225 is currently before the House and we can't speak about things that are in the House during Estimates.

So could the member from Tyndall Park please rephrase your question to tie it into the Estimates.

MLA Lamoureux: I can certainly try my best to bring it back to Estimates here.

I think a big part of why we hold Estimates is so that MLAs can ask questions of the minister and the departmental staff to ensure that, in this case, education across the province is widely understood. And I think that's what a big part of what all the work is that we're doing in the House.

So I guess the bottom line of the question to the minister and the department is: Does she believe that committee is an important step of legislation—we'll keep it very vague—and, if so, would she send—would she recommend that legislation that has quite a few—in this case, 26 members—signed up to speak, should go to committee because that's the democratic thing to do?

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): While we do appreciate the member from Tyndall Park trying to bring it back, unfortunately we really need you to frame it in terms of the Estimates.

MLA Lamoureux: I'd like to ask the minister if it is costing her money to send Bill 225 to committee.

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

There is no budget line in Estimates to send bills to committee. So, no, there is no cost to the department, I suppose, to send bills to committee. I can assure the member and all Manitobans that, certainly, the cost of running a committee would never be a consideration for whether or not we would move a bill through committee or not.

Committee—the committee process is an important one, as the member noted, and it's somewhat unique to our process here in Manitoba. And it is an important opportunity to speak to stakeholders and to Manitobans and to hear voices that contribute to or are concerned about the particular issue at hand.

I'm always happy to meet with those affected. Very happy to have very recently attended the Manitoba Reading Association conference, where the announcement about our universal reader screener was given a resounding applause.

And it's work that, despite the member's suggestion, was initiated by the department well in advance of the introduction of her bill—again, which is not the subject of Estimates here today. But the work of the department began as late—I'm sorry, as early as October of 2024, so well in advance of Bill 225. Again, I applaud the member for her work that she does on behalf of her constituents. It was also a commitment that was made in our Throne Speech.

So any suggestion that this is piggybacking off of the member's bill is simply inaccurate. It's interesting timing; it's certainly coincidence and coincidences do happen, but that's certainly—the timing of the announcements was certainly nothing more than coincidental. And again, you know, there's certainly ample of evidence through the department to prove what I'm suggesting here at committee today.

Again, always happy to hear from those that are advocates on this matter. I've met recently with the department, with Dyslexia Canada—with representatives from Dyslexia Canada, both local representatives and national representatives, and we met on May 6. And I know the department has met with them previously and on many occasions. And we applaud their work and we thank their work, their advocacy work that they do in supporting learners across Canada and certainly here in Manitoba.

We all want the same things, which is improved outcomes for students here in Manitoba, for greater success and achievement when it comes to reading, which is so foundational to all learning going forward. So, again, really appreciate the work of Dyslexia Canada who we met with on May 6.

I've also, in my role as the—as an MLA, have recently met with a constituent and a volunteer of Dyslexia Canada, attended the meeting with them, and I was more than happy to sit with them and listen to the challenges that this constituent's child had faced in the education system. It was—there were some heart-wrenching stories that I heard in that case, and in other conversations that I've had with other colleagues of mine who have also met with constituents about this very important issue.

* (16:10)

And it is a—hopefully—a non-partisan issue. Happy to work with the member opposite.

I was not invited to the bill briefing for Bill 225. Going forward, I'd be happy to participate in things like that. Sure. Happy to work with the member opposite on this matter going forward. Again, this is something that should not be political. I believe that all of us here on this committee here today would agree that improving reading outcomes for students is important, providing supports to students is important.

I will add to the record just before I run out of time that I do not believe our announcement was vague. More details to come.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Member's time has—minister's time has expired.

MLA Lamoureux: I do appreciate the minister's comments, and I would love to take her up on that. And, ideally, we can work together and perhaps bring forward changes to the legislation because either way, these big changes in our education system should be put into legislation, so perhaps we can do that together. Legislation—or, amendments can be brought forward at the committee stage so I just—I suggest—I would encourage if there are things I can do on my end to continue having the bill move forward, I would very much appreciate that opportunity.

For my last question, I know that a lot of funds go into the building of a brand new school. This is not an easy thing to go about. Previously, there was a school planned to be built in Tyndall Park. I know the minister is aware of this. We've talked about this. And I have since then heard that the school was no longer

going to be built, and more recently I heard from a reliable source that the school, in fact, was going to be built in Tyndall Park. So I think I'm looking for some clarity.

Is there going to be—are there plans to build a new school in Tyndall Park and, if so, is there a timeline, is there a budget set out for it and when?

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the member for the question.

Just very briefly because you mentioned it, so sort of building off the last question when we were talking about the universal screeners. The member opposite mentioned or stated that legislation here is necessary, and speaking very generally, so not—I'm not speaking here about your bill, Bill 225 in particular, but just speaking very generally, I would disagree with that notion.

Legislation is one of the tools at our disposal, at the department's disposal, at the sector's disposal, but legislation is not always necessary. Legislation can be cumbersome. Legislation can not always address the needs and it's—certainly, legislation does not move quickly. Legislation runs the risk of being stalled by the opposition, as we've seen many important bills that our government has put forward this session has happened to those bills.

So, in this case, with all due respect, we did not feel that legislation was necessary. Legislation is not necessary in the development of most curriculum and policy in the education sector, and if we had to strike a legislation every single time that we were issuing a policy directive or a new piece of curriculum to the education sector, I fear that education in this province would ground to a halt. So we did not feel that we needed to introduce legislation, which is why we moved forward with the announcement that we made on April 11 of 2025, announcing our universal early reading tools.

We wanted to do this as soon as was practically possible. We know that the upcoming school year is about to start in September so we thought this was an important time in April to make this announcement so that schools had the remaining time that they had in the month of April and the time that they have in May and June to confer with their school boards, to confer with their senior administration, to confer with the department and get everything in line so that this pilot program can be launched on time and effectively and comprehensively in September of 2025.

So again, legislation is very important in many regards, but again, it's only one tool that we have as policy leaders here in the province and it's not—legislation is not always necessary. What is necessary is action, and I believe that our government took some great action in moving forward with the announcement that we made on April the 11th.

So to get to the question about the school in Tyndall Park—thank you—so yes. So my understanding is that my staff reached out to the member for Tyndall Park's (MLA Lamoureux) staff on April the 22nd after this issue was raised during question period and to clarify some of what we had announced previously.

So we can confirm—happy to further confirm—today during Estimates that absolutely, there is a new high school being built in the constituency of Tyndall Park. We understand that the current plans would have that school built on Commercial Drive which is north of Inkster.

We currently have an opening target date of 2029. We are confident that the school will be delivered on time. We are having great progress on the initial four schools that we've announced so far. I can confirm that that school will be a grade 9-to-12 school. We're aiming for a capacity of roughly five to six hundred.

Again, we're happy to work with both the Department of Public Service Delivery and with the school division—with Winnipeg School Division—as we move towards the planning and design phase of that project, to make sure that we're meeting the needs of your constituents and of the community.

And we have been working quite closely with Winnipeg School Division in the last number of months and the last year and a half, I suppose, to rightsize that plan and to make sure that we are addressing the needs of all of the students in the Winnipeg School Division and in that surrounding area.

The planning of these schools is something that we take very seriously and it's very important to take your time to do it correctly so that, again, students' needs are being addressed.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Thank you.

Mr. Ewasko: So the minister mentioned the four political staff and like to ask her to provide the names of those political staff and their positions.

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the member opposite, to the critic, for allowing me an opportunity to

highlight some of the incredible political staff that I have the great fortune of working with every day.

* (16:20)

So with us here today in the role of director of ministerial affairs, we have Rylan Ramnarace. Rylan began in this role and with the department before I did; he began in June of 2024. And he worked alongside our friend, the dearly departed Nello Altomare. So I've had the great pleasure of getting to know Rylan and getting to work with him and have his support. I feel very privileged to be able to work with him.

And I want to extend my condolences to him. And this is something I didn't do previously, but really to the whole team, to Brian in particular and to Rylan. It was a real challenge that we went through in losing our previous minister, Minister Nello Altomare, who tragically passed away earlier this year. Again, it's been the honour of my lifetime to take on this role, but frankly speaking, it was a bit of a challenge taking on this role and a challenge, I know, for both Brian and Rylan in particular who both worked very closely with Minister Altomare in his time in this role.

So I sort of, for lack of a better word, inherited both Brian and Rylan, and so I wish them—you know, I give them my sincere condolences that they were able to continue on doing that work during that transition, considering the close personal relationships that I know that they had with the minister, and for supporting me and welcoming me with open arms and assisting me through that transition as the new minister in this portfolio.

So thank you very much, Rylan, and also to you, Brian.

So other political staff that I have as of February 28 of 2025, which is in and around when I took on this role formally. We also have Alexandra Koslock, who is the special assistant to the minister or also known as the SA. We have Nicole Dvorak, who is the executive assistant to the minister. Again, I work with them both every day. They are both incredible, strong, smart women who I enjoy working with very, very much, and I'm very grateful to both of them for the support that they offer me every day.

And finally, no longer a political staff, but just in case you have questions because it is in the Estimates binder, is also listed Devon Kelly. Devon worked as the executive assistant until March 18 of 2025. Devon was the executive assistant to Minister Altomare and worked very closely with Minister Altomare both in the Department of Education, but also helped support

him in his role as a member of the Legislative Assembly in the riding of Transcona. So, again, after Minister Altomare's tragic passing, Devon took the opportunity to transition into a new role. So he is no longer executive assistant to the minister. But, again, I thank him greatly.

I also, you know, again, lack of a better term, inherited Devon when I took on this role in an acting capacity. I had the great benefit of having Devon's support for many months while I served as the acting minister. And, again, I want to offer Devon my sincere condolences in the passing of our friend Nello Altomare because I know that, again, Devon worked very, very closely with the minister and for many, many years, including, I believe, when Minister Altomare was in opposition. So Devon had a very long history of working with Minister Altomare, and I know that the loss was very great for him. I thank him for all of the support that he offered not only to me but to Minister Altomare, and I wish Devon all the best in his new role.

Thank you.

Mr. Ewasko: So the minister mentioned earlier that she had four political staff. I'm going to look just for sort of a head nod yes or no; that way, it's a quicker answer.

So Devon was done at the end of March? So just for clarification for those hundreds of Manitobans that are watching from home today, so the answer was yes. Devon—you know, and again, condolences go out to the whole team who worked with Nello, and, I mean, many of us on all sides of the aisle had the great pleasure of working with him, and he was a very classy gentleman that I know that he served in his role as Education and Early Childhood Learning minister quite well, and we had many conversations when I was his critic for a little bit. But then previous to that, when I was minister of Education, he was my critic.

So I am going to ask sort of a two-part question. So do you now only have—so to the minister—do you only have now three political staff in the department? And if you can clarify that in a little bit.

And then, on top of that, three political staff for sure, possibly another one, which you're going to get to that answer right away, what are their salaries as well, now?

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): Just a reminder to the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) to direct questions through the Chair.

Thank you.

MLA Schmidt: And thank you to the member for the opportunity to clarify.

So, yes. So currently, as minister, I have three political staff: Rylan Ramnarace as DOMA, director of ministerial affairs; Alexandra Koslock as special assistant, or SA; and Nicole Dvorak as executive assistant, or EA.

I believe, to answer the member's question about their salary, that is all public information. All three of those appointments were done by order-in-council, so that information is available publicly.

Furthermore, I could refer the committee to page 37 of the book of Estimates, and there you will have information regarding our budget for executive support, so their salaries would further be detailed on that line item.

Mr. Ewasko: I thank the minister for the question.

So, through you, honourable Chairperson, to the minister: We know that, presently, Winnipeggers and soon to be many Manitobans are going to be receiving their education property tax bills in the mail. And I'd like to know any information that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Schmidt) can give to the—on the topic of property tax offset grant.

* (16:30)

MLA Schmidt: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

We could reasonably anticipate this question, and to all the Manitobans that are listening, please don't get me wrong. Affordability for Manitobans is of-top of mind for our government. Our Budget 2025 is evidence of that, with 25 amazing ways to save, including the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit, which we know will benefit a vast number of Manitobans who pay property taxes here in Manitoba. We know that it will provide affordability.

But the funding of schools and school property taxes are only one element of our education system. I wish, every day I wish, for questions from the members opposite about student outcomes and achievements; about our nutrition program; about math and about literacy, which the member from Tyndall Park was here just moments ago asking about. And I appreciate her work on literacy.

When it comes to education, the member opposite shows his hand, and that is, when it comes to education here in Manitoba, the opposition, it's all about

dollars and cents. That's how they see students here in Manitoba, as if funding education is a burden.

In preparing for this meeting today, I had the great benefit of reviewing Hansard and reviewing some of the comments that my predecessor, the late, great Nello Altomare, made last year during this Estimates process that he was able to attend back in May—May 29. I'm so grateful for some of the wisdom he put on the record, so grateful for Hansard for allowing us this opportunity to have Nello's words of wisdom here before us.

And there was something I read and I underlined this morning, and this is the voice of Nello Altomare speaking: We—when he sees—when he says we, he means the New Democrats—"We don't see education as a cost; we see it as an investment in the future." And I think that's really important to reflect on, about the investments that we're making in education, including a \$30-million universal nutrition program, which is going to create lasting outcomes, not just for individual students in our province who are able to learn with some food in their belly, but it's also going to mean a great deal for our economy and for creating the economy that we want to see here in the future, supporting students in the classroom.

So, again, funding education is important, and there's two ways to fund education in our province. One is through funding grants from the Province, and the other is school divisions who are able to levy local education property taxes, a point that was clarified on the record earlier today by both our Premier (Mr. Kinew) and our Minister of Finance (MLA Sala).

The member opposite, earlier in his opening statement, referred to that as blame. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Premier and the Minister of Finance were not blaming school divisions; they're simply correcting misinformation that is put on the record daily by the opposition, that the NDP has raised property taxes for Manitobans. It's simply not true. These are decisions made at the elected school board level, in consultation with their communities and in addressing the needs of their students.

And, again, I mentioned earlier, there's two ways that schools receive funding here in the province, and that's either (a) directly through operational grants from the Department of Education, or through taxes levied locally at the school division level. And I would like to put on the record that the previous government failed on both accounts, which is why school divisions and Manitobans are facing what they're facing today.

* (16:40)

The previous government failed to fund education directly, and they also failed to allow school divisions to local-to levy local taxes. This has put schools and students at a disadvantage here in Manitoba, and that is work that we—

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): The minister's time is up.

Mr. Ewasko: You know, when the minister's having a bit of a tough go answering the question, you know it's getting to be a little personal.

So we're just going to sidestep that and wait for the minister, hopefully, to give us the answer on property tax offset grants, which I had asked. But also, in her own words, she said that the school divisions had to raise taxes. So they had to raise taxes.

I'll ask the Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister, why did they have to raise taxes to—some of them double-digit figures?

MLA Schmidt: I regret the member opposite feels that my answer was personal. I think that the record would reveal, and Hansard will reveal, that there was absolutely nothing personal whatsoever in my answer. My answer, perhaps, was partisan, and rightfully so. I'm putting facts on the record. If he is embarrassed of, or doesn't like to be reminded of the record of his government, then perhaps he should have reconsidered this line of work.

However, it is my job not only to serve Manitobans in this role as Minister of Education and ensure that schools are properly funded, that schools are resourced, that students are receiving the resources they need, but also a large part of my work and of our team's work, unfortunately, is undoing the damage caused by seven and a half years of a PC government that failed to prioritize education, failed to prioritize students, failed to prioritize families and failed to prioritize their communities. So a lot of the work that we have to do is undoing their record.

And so if the member finds that me bringing up the record of his government—his previous failed, cold, callous government—is personal, then I think that I would have to respectfully disagree or, perhaps, we might have to define the word personal, because I don't think we're both using it in the same regard.

To answer the question more substantively on the issue of property tax offset grant, I'm happy to inform the committee that as of the '24-25 budget, that the property tax offset grant is no longer a separate grant

and that it's been rolled into base, which means that those dollars are still being offered and will continue to be so in perpetuity as part of our base, so no longer a separate grant.

Again, the member opposite asked why students—pardon me, I misspoke—why school divisions have raised their mill rate. And again, to correct the record, not all school divisions, in fact, have raised taxes. It's important to know and something the members opposite fail to acknowledge—they would prefer to mislead Manitobans and put misinformation on the record—but this was an assessment year, so every house in Manitoba was reassessed this year.

And some of the increases that we're seeing on our tax bills are due to the increase of the assessed value of your home; it has nothing to do with tax increases or mill rate increases or the funding of schools or the funding of school divisions whatsoever. So that's important to note.

And when it comes to blame, again, our government does not blame school divisions for the position that they are in. There is only one organization that we blame, and that is the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba who, for seven and a half years, not only did not increase funding to schools, but effectively decreased funding to schools by not keeping up with the rate of inflation.

This year, for '25-26, we are very proud that our funding of schools announcement absolutely kept pace with the rate of inflation, with no school division in Manitoba receiving an operational grant of less than 1 per cent. So every school division in Manitoba next year will see an increase in their operational funding, and that funding is going to go to support students in the classroom, making sure that they have more one-on-one time with their educators, making sure that they have a universal school nutrition program that they can rely on when times are tough and making sure that we are investing in small class sizes.

So if there is blame to be had for the situation that school divisions are in, it is to the member opposite in his time as minister of Education, under the leadership of Heather Stefanson and Brian Pallister before her, and their failure to prioritize education funding.

Mr. Ewasko: Here we go.

So the Minister of Education partially answered my question, and I guess the question that I have for her is the fact that school divisions are increasing their education property taxes because they are not properly funded. It's not by the historical misinformation that

the Health—or, that the Education Minister puts on the record. It's the fact that this current NDP government, Kinew government, is underfunding schools, and so then, school divisions are increasing property taxes.

And to correct what the minister had put on the record in addition to that is I said—and she can check Hansard tomorrow or later tonight when it comes out—I did say that some school divisions are hitting double-digit property tax increases.

So I agree with her that part of this issue is the fact of the—this year is a reassessment year of properties. And this is something where, you know, possibly, as she put on the record, maybe she could sit down with the Finance Minister and give him a little bit of a tutorial on how this works, because they should have seen the property reassessment coming this year. And so it's unfortunate that Winnipeggers, and soon to be other Manitobans, are going to be receiving their education property tax bills in the mail, and they're going to be experiencing sticker shock.

I guess, really, if the NDP government was properly funding education, you would not be seeing these property tax increases. And so I would like to see the Education Minister take some responsibility and accountability for this; and if it's not her and her department, I would like to see definitely the Finance Minister answer some questions. I know that we on the opposition side are receiving many concerns and calls and emails and property tax bills that are showing the increases.

And so we know that, you know, life is getting less affordable here in Manitoba. Doesn't matter, really, how the Premier (Mr. Kinew) is doing TikTok videos and whatever else trying to say otherwise. But real Manitobans are experiencing the increase in various different things, cost of living and food inflation and those types of things.

* (16:50)

And so now Manitobans are experiencing, through education property tax increases, solely on the fact that the Education Minister and her Finance Minister are not funding education properly.

So I'd like to ask the minister: Are they going to—is the government—through you, honourable Chairperson—is your government going to cap the double-digit increases school boards can now impose? Or what type of—to take a word from the Education Minister—what type of predictable funding are school divisions going to be seeing in the next year or two? Because this isn't very predictable.

MLA Schmidt: And, again, similar to previous questions asked by the members opposite, they show their hand.

They show their hand and their MO when it comes to education, which was evidenced by their time in office, which is picking fights with school divisions and blaming school divisions and, who knows, maybe eliminating school divisions altogether.

Really, that was their—as far as I can tell, that was the only education plan that the previous PC government had under the leadership of the member opposite during his time as the minister of Education. The only education they—plan they had was to get rid of school divisions, to less democracy, less local participation, less voices at the table, less funding for schools. And, of course, I'm talking about bill 64, which I've said on the record more than one time is perhaps one of the most hard-fought-against—if that's a term I can use—piece of legislation we may have ever seen here in Manitoba.

And I'll remind Manitobans, when we're talking about affordability, that, under the leadership of the member from Lac du Bonnet, \$1.5 million of your taxpayer dollars went to consultants and to advertising to promote bill 64, again, which was resoundingly rejected by not just the opposition—and thank goodness for them and the great work that they did during that time—but resoundingly from the community. It was really a community effort that defeated bill 64.

So, on this side of the House, we believe in democracy, we believe in locally elected school boards. We believe in the work of trustees and the role that they serve in supporting the needs of students and families in their communities. And we will continue to work with school divisions, the Manitoba School Boards Association and the community to make sure that schools are properly funded and are serving the needs of their community.

The member suggested that our government has not properly funded education, and I couldn't disagree more strongly. Of course, to the committee, there is so much catch-up to do. There's seven and a half years of catch-up, seven and a half years of cuts and starvation to the education system that we are trying desperately to correct.

A hundred and—just our first two years of government, the first two budgets, \$170-million increase to schools' operational funding. This year was 3.6 per cent lift. Let me remind Manitobans that inflation last year was only at 1 per cent here in Manitoba—3.6 per cent lift to schools this year.

Let's talk about the record of the opposition. I talk about the catch-up we're playing. I talk about the damage that we are trying to undo. So again, this year, during a year of 1 per cent inflation, we gave school divisions on average a 3.6 per cent lift.

Let's look at the record of the members opposite, and let's look realistically at what sort of catch-up we're playing: 2017-2018, a 1.1 per cent lift under the leadership of the members opposite; 2018-2019, a 0.7 per cent lift under the leadership of the members opposite; 2019-2020, 0.5; in 2020-21, another 0.5.

And then, miraculously, right before the election, they all of a sudden prioritized the funding of education. And I will give them credit for the funding lifts that they provided in those last years. But, again, it's something we saw across government in an effort to—an unsuccessful effort to buy the votes of Manitobans and which, unfortunately, left Manitobans and left our government with a nearly \$2-billion deficit that we are working every day in collaboration with the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala)—the excellent Minister of Finance—to dig Manitobans out of every single day.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Ewasko: So in regards to—I'm glad the minister came to a little bit of a realization that education funding under the previous PC government was—you know, to quote another pretty good Education minister, was astronomical; the largest in over 40 years of education funding was done under the PC government.

And here, the minister pats herself on the back for the last couple years, which, again, if it was such a large amount, then, again, the school divisions are raising taxes to the tune of over double-digit numbers.

And so that's one thing for—and I will correct the record: It's actually not the Progressive Conservative team that is blaming school divisions; it's actually the Kinew government, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) himself and the Finance Minister. It is actually the Kinew government that is underfunding education, and it's the Kinew government—as I said, the Premier himself, the Finance Minister and now even the Education Minister—that are absolutely blaming school divisions for these funding increases.

And so under the former Progressive Conservative plan, was to eliminate education taxes off of property. And, matter of fact, in '23-24 budget, I believe we were up close to about 88-12.

I know that the Education Minister appreciates history and those types of things, and I know that, you know, holding the position as—of a Education and Early Childhood Learning minister is quite the honourable and privilege to have had or had—have in this great province of ours.

And so I encourage the minister, if she hasn't done so already, to take a look at how the initial education property taxes were supposed to be set up in the province of ours and where they went from to where they are today.

The Acting Chairperson (Shannon Corbett): The hour being 5 o'clock, the committee will rise.

Thank you.

ROOM 255

FINANCE

* (15:30)

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 of Finance. Questions will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): As the Minister of Finance is responsible for consolidating all of the revenues for Public Accounts each year, he and his department should be able to estimate the total amount of revenue received by all of the reporting entities that are part of the Province's summary accounts.

So I would like to have the minister and his department tell us how much was collected in school taxes and special levies by school divisions last year, and how much more the department is now estimating will be collected by school divisions this current fiscal year 2025-2026 that we are in Estimates for today.

* (15:40)

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): So the question, you know, relates to totals as a—in particular, totals relating to school taxes collected. I would point the critic to page 12, which has the forecast for '24-25. Public Accounts will be released in September as usual, so it's at that point that a more accurate number will be provided. And then for this year, of course, again, she can turn to page 12, where there is an initial estimate of her—in response to her question. And then, of course, right now is still too early because data is still coming in.

So we're going to see that forecast refine as we continue to get more information. So it is too early to provide the data, but certainly we will, once we get to Q1 or Q2, report out to Manitobans. We'll be looking to share that information about those revenues.

Now, I do want to say that when, you know, we're talking about education and education funding, it is important to use this opportunity, when we're speaking to Manitobans, to talk about some of the important changes that we've made that are really benefiting our students and that are helping our students to succeed.

We know, when it came to education and education taxes, the PCs had some, I'll say, generous approaches when it came to supporting—you know, sending out major cheques to folks on Bay Street. We've talked a lot about that, that we've stopped that. We're taking those dollars, and we're making sure that we're putting them to good use in supporting the success of our students.

We saw for many, many years that education—sorry, that school divisions got a really rough ride, and, you know, that came in the form of increases that were far below inflation that really resulted in them having to make a lot of difficult decisions, to make cuts that impacted the success of students.

I have talked a bit about this in this committee room before, but I think about in my own division, in St. James school division, I know that cuts to education resulted in our community losing our IB program, and that was a program that helped our best and brightest to thrive in high school and give them that advantage to be able to go a little bit further while studying in secondary—or, sorry, in high school. We lost that. And I know that there's a lot of equivalent programs that were lost in other divisions because of Conservative cuts to education and, frankly, their—just their overall failure to make sure that our students had what they needed to succeed.

I think about, you know, one of the biggest challenges that students faced in Manitoba in terms of achieving their full potential, and that was ensuring that they had simply access to nutritious food at the beginning of the day. And our changes to education funding have supported us being able to make sure that every kid can start their day with a good meal, a healthy—and healthy food that we know is just critical to helping them to be able to focus and do what's needed in order to succeed in class.

And then, of course, one of the other really important things that we can point to in terms of our

success in helping to make—you know, give our kids every chance to succeed and thrive is that we're finally hiring back educators after years of us not seeing success in hiring in new educators because of the last government's cuts and their overall approach to education. We've hired 630 new educators to help reduce class sizes, and we know, again, that that's going to go towards helping our kids to achieve their highest potential.

So, again, finally, we have a government that is working to fix education after many years of cuts that were leading to our kids falling behind.

And in addition to that, of course, beyond all those important investments that—you know, a new \$67 million in new school funding—we also, of course, announced as part of our \$3.7-billion capital plan 11 new schools which are just—it's an unbelievably exciting commitment to ensuring that kids can get access to the high-quality facilities they deserve. And, ultimately, we know that will help families to lay roots here in our province and help their families to move ahead.

So Devonshire Park school, Prairie Pointe school, Meadowlands school, Brandon southwest school, Brandon Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobaine school, Ste. Anne regional high school, Bridgwater Lakes 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 know, we're moving things ahead finally in education while we keep costs affordable, and that's exactly what we're going to keep on doing.

Mrs. Stone: As we've seen, trustees are coming out this year saying that this NDP government is not funding education fairly or equitably, including a former NDP candidate themselves, and this is why that they've had to increase some of those school division rates.

However, we all know that the blame rests with this NDP government when removing the 50 per cent PC tax credit, which is why we've seen so many property tax bills skyrocket over the past 10 days.

So we know that school divisions all across the city of Winnipeg—every single school division—is raising their rates in terms of double-digit numbers, including in the minister's own constituency, including in the member for McPhillips' (MLA Devgan) constituency and the member for Waverley's (MLA Pankratz) constituency.

So can the minister tell us how many school divisions are increasing their school taxes and special levies this year across the province and how much will be collected in school taxes from all these increases?

* (15:50)

MLA Sala: So, you know, the response is similar to the response I offered in my last response, which is that the information is still coming in. So in terms of specifics, look forward to being able to provide more accurate data on this once we have all the information and we're able to bring that forward at a later date. Again, as I mentioned earlier, Q1 or Q2 report to Manitobans will have more information there.

We can speak, though, about some of the important work that we've been doing here when it comes to ensuring that divisions do have the supports that they need to do the work that they do. Just top line, we look at '24-25, our government brought in a \$104.2-million increase to education funding in '24-25 that included, of course, that \$30-million lift as it relates to the Universal Child Nutrition Program. And then in '25-26, a \$67-million lift. Again, so that's a, you know, 3.4 per cent lift in '24-25, 4 per cent overall '25-26.

And what do those dollars mean? Well, those dollars mean that divisions can do the important work that they need to do. And when students need help or when they raise their hand in class, they're going to have a smaller class size, because our government has done the work of ensuring that, again, divisions can invest accordingly to make sure kids get the best supports that we can give them.

You know, and also we see the impacts of these investments in education, also in terms of the access to services for First Nations students. There's a lot of really important investments that are helping us to move forward when it comes to reconciliation. Because of those proper investments in education, finally, after many years of cuts, we're able to do things like investing and pursuing Indigenous excellence, moving forward with some land-based curriculum programming focused on more treaty education.

And then, of course, you know, when it comes to supporting our youth, our government is focusing, of course, on child care, expanding access to affordable child care, so not only ensuring that families can get access to it, but that they can do it at the lowest cost possible.

And so we did bring in a \$10-a-day all-year child care, which is, again, helping our youngest ones to become as ready as they can be when they get into

kindergarten. We know how helpful good quality early childhood education can be to young learners, and so that's another really important area of investment.

And then, of course, just ensuring that we have the spaces we need. We know, for many years, the former government did not make the kind of progress that Manitobans expected them to make when it came to opening up new spaces, but we are finally making those kinds of investments and moving forward. We've had great progress made under the leadership of our former colleague Minister Altomare, and now, of course, under Minister Schmidt, who are doing great work in moving things forward.

So those are—you know, those are just a couple examples of how we're starting to move things forward in—

The Chairperson: Order.

Sorry to interrupt. Just want to remind all members we have to use ministerial titles when referring to—the honourable minister.

MLA Sala: Lots of great work happening. Again, this is only possible because our government is finally funding education as it needs to be funded after many years of major cuts. We're, you know, committed to building new schools, schools that the former government couldn't get done.

We know that they had an imaginary plan to build nine schools that they had no budget for. There was no actual appropriations of any kind that were in place to support the development of those schools. But, with our government, we—you know, when we say we're going to do something, we deliver.

And so we're moving forward with 11 new schools. We're moving forward, again, with continuing to deliver that really important universal child nutrition program that's helping ensure our youngest kids that need that little bit of extra support get a nutritious breakfast to start their day. We're hiring new educators and moving forward and ensuring that we have the right number of teachers in our schools to help them get the smallest class size as possible.

So, again, on all fronts, it was a long seven and a half years of us falling behind when it came to funding education, but our government is finally doing that, and I think we're already starting to see that families and kids are starting to notice a difference.

Mrs. Stone: In the minister's own budget, he says the following revenue will be collected this year from his education property tax hikes and school tax hikes

collected by the Province in their consolidation of the Province's revenues in the amount of \$182 million more, which is on top of the \$148 million from last year.

* (16:00)

The text from the budget on page 8 specifically says education property tax revenues are projected to increase by \$182 million, reflecting growth in school taxes collected by school divisions and the reform of the school tax-related credits and rebates.

The minister continues to try to throw school divisions and school trustees and school boards under the bus by raising his school tax increases that are shocking Manitoba homeowners as we speak. These are extreme tax increases, and Manitobans will not soon forget the NDP breaking their promise to keep the 50 per cent rebate on education property taxes.

But here in his own budget, on page 8, he's budgeting for the revenue from these school tax increases himself, so it certainly seems that this minister is the puppet master orchestrating all these tax increases as the Finance Minister. At worst, this is a scheme of the minister to raise taxes on seniors, workers, homeowners, small businesses and hard-working families.

So we know that this minister did not do his homework, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) did not do his homework to comprehend what these tax changes would mean for Manitoba homeowners.

But as we're seeing, as the property bills are coming out and my colleagues and I, we are hearing from constituents of members on the opposite bench feeling shocked and concerned with the taxes that they are now going to have to pay as a result of these poor, sloppy decisions made by this Finance Minister. So the public is finding out, and they know exactly what the NDP are up to in this tax scheme.

To make matters worse, property owners are receiving NDP inserts claiming the NDP is saving them money, when, in fact, those \$1,500 rebates are missing from the bill and when, in fact, those homeowners would have received an even larger tax rebate under the former PC system.

So with these NDP misleading ads that were included in Winnipeg's top-property tax bills, I have to ask the minister how much this government paid for those misleading advertisements in Winnipeggers' property tax bills.

MLA Sala: So I think the most important place to start here for the critic is to share that, in her own

community in Carman, 97 per cent of residents are better off as a result of our change.

So, you know, I'm very curious about how those conversations go at the grocery store for her when she's there talking to neighbours and others that are out, about, living their lives, when 97 out of 100 people in her community stand to be better off as a result of our Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit.

So I would really like to know how those conversations go when she talks about fighting against the credit that we've brought in, given that, again, almost every single person in her constituency is better off as a result of these changes.

You know, she did reference the work that we've done to make life more affordable as a scheme. I beg to differ. I think it's a reasonable program of reducing costs. I'm happy to speak to some of the important work that we've done so far, given she know—she discussed that or referenced that work that we've been doing.

Look, you know, starting with one of the things that we did right after we got in, which was the fuel tax holiday. We know that when we got in, Manitobans had been struggling for many years with high energy costs. And what we did right out of the gate when we got in was to bring in a fuel tax holiday, something that the members opposite were never willing to do. They never took any action when it came to reducing costs of fuel or diesel for Manitobans.

And, in fact, what we do know is that they're on record as having come out in support of raising those costs of energy for Manitobans.

When it comes to carbon taxes, they voted in favour of higher carbon taxes in the House. They were the only party in the Manitoba Legislature to support carbon taxes. And I know it's probably a given, the lack—I'll say the lack of popularity of the carbon tax, you know, schemes, that it's probably—it's not easy for the members opposite to acknowledge that to Manitobans that they were in support of that measure, given we know how much that was driving higher costs for people across the province.

But we recognized that challenge and that's why, when we came in, one of the first things we did was we brought in a fuel tax holiday, something that we know is going to save Manitobans a lot of money. And not just Manitobans in one corner of the province but all over, especially those that lived in our rural and northern communities, folks who had to drive a lot, you know, had to take their kids to the game that was

many miles away or had to drive to work, might've meant a half-hour or one-hour drive.

Our change put a lot of money back in folks' pockets and I think it was a common sense measure that, again, we will never know why the members opposite never took action there to reduce costs, but we did and, ultimately, hundreds of dollars were saved.

And, you know, when that year was up for that holiday, we also—we knew the importance of that measure to, again, reducing costs, so we made a 10 per cent permanent cut. And we did that not only on fuel for diesel and gasoline, but we also did that on marked fuel to make sure that folks in rural Manitoba also stood to benefit from that 10 per cent permanent cut.

You know, that was just one area that we focused to make life more affordable. There's a long, long list here that I'm eager to talk about and will be delighted to have a chance to speak more about in future answers, but for now I'll just say, when it comes to focusing on reducing costs for Manitobans, we've shown that we're focused on reducing costs where it matters.

And those real costs that people face on a month-to-month, day-to-day basis, whether it's the fuel that you buy when you go to the pump or whether it's your hydro bill, we know that that was an area where we saw big, big increases over the former government's tenure, increases that were happening at a time when they weren't doing anything when it came to advancing, you know, the development of new energy or any investments in reliability at Hydro. We really had very little to show for the many years of big hydro rate increases that we saw under the members opposite.

And unfortunately, you know, those were years that, again, in some instances Manitobans had hydro rate increases happen that were legislated on them for the first time in our province's history. We never—we'll never know if some of the—some of those increases were needed.

We're taking a different approach. We brought in a hydro rate freeze to keep rates low. We know that we're going to keep rates low while we build out Hydro and create new energy to support our businesses and Manitobans.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): My question is going to be revolving around agriculture, of course, and the budget on agriculture.

The minister says on page 39 of his budget that he has reserved \$100 million of his 'taris'—tariff budget to respond to the tariffs being applied by China and the US on our agricultural exports. Canola alone will be in excess of 900; it is \$983 million that goes to China.

Honourable Chairperson, 3,800 jobs in the agriculture industry are at risk from these tariffs. The tariffs are expected to reduce Manitobans' incomes by \$1,420 per person. As a result, \$1.4-billion reduction in trade, \$3.6-billion reduction in GDP. This would be equal or worse than the 2009 recession.

Can the minister tell us how he's going to use that \$100 million from his tariff budget to help the agriculture sector that will be impacted by these tariffs by China and the US?

* (16:10)

MLA Sala: Appreciate the question.

You know, I just want to start out just by sharing, relating to the \$1,500 homeowner affordability credit, just for the member's awareness, that 94 per cent of residents of Portage la Prairie will be better off as a result of that change.

And I know the critic had to leave the room briefly—apologies; maybe I wasn't supposed to reference their presence or absence in the room. All to say, now that they're here, I just wanted to reiterate for them that 97 per cent of residents in Carman are going to be better off as a result of those changes.

So just some important information for them to know as they head back to their communities and speak with residents about the changes we've made to make their lives more affordable.

Relating to the question—so the member asked about our tariff contingency budget, and I appreciate him highlighting that we did specifically identify that we wanted to make sure that producers and farmers in Manitoba saw themselves being recognized in our plan and our preparations for the challenges that we face in relation to tariffs.

We—as I believe I've spoken to in this committee previously, what we wanted to do there is develop a flexible summary, one that would allow us to be as resilient as possible in the light of the challenges we face, but an approach that could be, again, rightsized depending on what we end up seeing going forward.

That tariff contingency budget was structured in an environment where we were under the, you know, the threat of a 25 per cent across-the-board tariff scenario.

And so the numbers outlined within that tariff contingency budget, especially the revenue contingency increase that we proposed, really reflect, I think, the good work that we did to prepare, eyes wide open, what will Manitobans—what would Manitobans—what should they expect in light of a 25 per cent tariff environment.

We, of course, have seen a lot of moderation in terms of that 25 per cent tariff threat from the US. However, we are in a two-front trade war, as the member would know. And so we continue to need to ensure that we navigate that effectively.

Now, we know one of the biggest reasons we're in a two-front trade war is because we stand, you know, as a country, united—as a province, rather, we stand united with the rest of the country in our response and specifically in response to the Chinese auto tariffs, and that we know that those tariffs that have been placed on Chinese EVs have resulted in these tariffs being placed on our farmers. And we stand, again, with farmers across Canada.

We stand united with other provinces and as team Canada in the face of those tariffs that have been applied to our producers. However, one of the really important things I want to really highlight here is the importance of ensuring that the federal government plays their role in supporting producers not only in Manitoba but also, of course, in other ag producing provinces that are carrying the weight associated with us, you know, standing together on team Canada.

So we're—we've made that message very clear to the federal government, that we are looking forward to understanding how they are going to be specifically supporting our producers in Manitoba in light of these challenges that we're facing in this now two-front trade war. And, you know, we're going to keep making sure that the federal government understands that. That's the message I know that our Ag Minister has brought with clarity; that's the message that I've brought with clarity to finance minister tables. And we're going to keep bringing that, and we're looking forward to finding out exactly how the federal government intends to make sure that our producers in Manitoba are supported.

Now, when it comes to, you know, specific supports we've provided, there's—of course, our main budget included business risk management investments—sizeable ones—so that support programs like AgriStability and so forth. And we did increase the scope of those investments, knowing that this year was going to be a year where they were going to face increased risks.

And so I think you can see there and in the tariff contingency budget that, you know, we've prepared and are ready to stand up as a province to support our producers.

But, again, we're going to keep working closely with colleagues across the country. We're going to make sure the federal government is clear on their accountability here. And we're going to speak with and work closely with other provinces.

And, you know, I've got a call later today with Finance Minister Horner from Alberta where we're going to talk about this and other issues so we can keep pushing the feds to make sure that they take care of our producers and respond to this challenge that we're facing together.

Mrs. Stone: I can certainly tell the minister that my constituents were looking forward to education property taxes being removed altogether while the former PCs were bumping up funding to education system. Unfortunately for this minister, his constituents are seeing a higher tax bill despite the fact that he broke his own promise that he would keep the 50 per cent tax rate. And as we know, 55 per cent of properties within the city of Winnipeg are worse off under this NDP government.

If he wants to change his plans and remove the education property tax altogether from property tax bills, I can assure the minister that my constituents would be very happy and very pleased to see that.

But I know that he's had a tough couple of weeks on the property tax file, as I'm sure he's receiving a lot of emails from some very angry constituents, as are his colleagues, so I'll turn the page slightly on this and just because on his previous comments he mentioned the EV rebate program from the budget.

* (16:20)

So on page 51 of the budget documents, it says that the Manitoba government has paid out \$10 million in EV rebates for a total of 2,529 vehicle purchases. Of those, 20 per cent, or \$1.3 million, were for Teslas, according to a recent FIPPA. Two months ago, the minister announced Teslas would no longer qualify for the EV rebate.

So I have to ask the minister: How many Manitobans have, since the Tesla rebate ended, have actually applied for the rebate program, and how much has been paid out?

MLA Sala: Appreciate the question from the critic.

I just want to—you know, she did, in her question, speak about plans that the former government had, and what she shared is in tension with what we understood from an independent review that was done by MNP.

So she said that the last government had plans to eliminate all school taxes, but one has to question the feasibility of that, well, for a long list of reasons. But one of the biggest reasons is that they left Manitobans with a \$2-billion deficit that we know was left to us because of poor planning, and, again, we've had many chances in this room to talk about this.

This is not a partisan report; this was a report developed by an independent accounting firm, widely respected. MNP does good work, and we trust that they provide an opinion that reflected the reality on the ground and the reality is they saw it.

And that report—again, we've spoken about that here—summarized that the last government made a number of decisions that constituted, quote, high budgetary risk. There were a number of decisions that were made after they released the budget, you know, big announcements, big plans, none of which were budgeted for, that left us in a giant hole. One of the worst examples of that failure to plan and their poor budgeting was that they had wildly exaggerated revenues for the last budget that they put forward, to the extent that they had hydro revenues there that were three times the common net-income level we would see at Manitoba Hydro.

So that—you know, that's one of the many things that happened that contributed to us getting that \$2-billion deficit hole that we were all left to crawl out of. How it's in any way credible for the critic to say that in addition to the \$2-billion hole that we were left, that they were just going to magically wipe away hundreds of millions of dollars of other revenues. You can see why we were left in the position we were left in, where, frankly, due to bad planning, poor oversight, we were left with this giant hole that we had to dig out of.

And so any commentary about, you know, imaginary plans that they had to reduce taxes any further, I think it's quite reasonable for Manitobans to feel concerned when they hear about other big plans that the former government had for Manitoba, that they had no plan to pay for or no actual plans to help deliver on.

Whether it's that promise that the member identifies or likes to raise, whether it's the schools that they promised that, again, they had no plan to pay for, over

and over we see these examples where it's clear that the former government, you know, they did not do what was necessary when it came to ensuring prudence and being forward-looking and protecting Manitobans' best fiscal interest.

So we know that we can't trust their team to lead the provincial finances. We have exhibit A in the form of that MNP report that was done. Again, that very clearly outlines how we got to the hole that we got to. Any suggestions about other big plans they had about, you know, schools or whatever else, I mean, it all just—really just adds to the \$2-billion number that they left us with, right. That is the reality on the ground.

Again, we appreciate that important, independent work that was done by MNP to help us understand the mistakes that were made. And not only did we use that to understand how we got to where we got, but one of the important things I want to highlight is that our government is focused on getting things right.

And so we used that MNP report as, I think, the—you know, the guiding force behind how we would approach budgeting going forward; that led to us doing multi-year planning, the kind of planning that Manitobans didn't benefit from under the former government, where we really look to understand what is our expenditure profile over the next many years pertaining to our commitments to Manitobans, pertaining to a variety of other core costs like major government decisions that happen on a yearly basis, collective bargaining. Whatever it is, we did that work. We were guided by the important advice we got from MNP. We're grateful for that.

And again, I just want to make sure Manitobans are cautioned when they hear about big promises that the former government was making that they had no plans to pay for.

And if I could just ask for a very brief recess. Could I ask the critic for a quick five-minute recess?

Thank you so much.

The committee recessed at 4:29 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:32 p.m.

Mrs. Stone: You know, I know the minister's math is different than ours because I don't see a \$373-million surplus as putting them into a hole, something that the Public Accounts Committee just passed last week with their approval, that it was a restated \$373-million surplus from the former PC government.

But my question was very direct about the EV rebates from this program that this minister started. And so I'm going to ask him again, because this will determine the success of the program and the dollars that have been set aside for this, that how many Manitobans since the Tesla rebate ended have applied for the rebate program, and how much has been paid out.

I'm looking for the number and the dollar figure. That's a very simple question the minister should answer as it's his program.

MLA Sala: Appreciate the question from the critic.

So the—right now, we don't have that data here today. The program's being delivered—or, administered, rather—through MPI and is overseen through ECC, so we don't have that data for you right now.

What I can tell you is that the total commitment was \$25 million over a two-year period, so total envelope, \$25 million. And that runs from August 2023 until March 2026 or until the entire \$25-million envelope is utilized.

So the—you know, the program's seen a lot of success so far. We know that one of the—I think, the important things that we did was we wanted to ensure that folks looking to buy EVs that were maybe in a more lower or moderate income level could access EVs as well through a used-EV rebate, so that's something I know that has been widely appreciated.

And, again, this is an important piece of our work that we're doing to help further electrify transportation in Manitoba. Very proud of the work that we did in our affordable energy plan that helped to advance this overall; this electrification of transportation in Manitoba. And this is one thing that we're doing that helps achieve that while we make life more affordable for Manitobans.

Mrs. Stone: So we know that \$10 million were paid out for a specific Tesla rebate—or, the government has paid out \$10 million in EV rebates, and of those, 20 per cent were Teslas specifically.

So I appreciate if the minister could take that under advisement and then, the next time we come back, if he would have those numbers as to how many individuals have applied for the rebate program specifically and how much has been paid out since that Tesla rebate ended.

And I also have to ask the minister how many and how much has been paid out from the rebate program

for specifically Chinese-made EV vehicles, if he has those numbers.

* (16:40)

MLA Sala: So, yes, the numbers that were referenced by the critic are, of course, those outlined on page 51, where we proudly stated in our—of our budget, where we proudly stated that we've paid out the \$10 million in rebates since the program started. And it's great to see 2,529 new EV drivers, thanks to the supports that our government has offered to help get them into those EVs.

In terms of the more forward-looking information, like, the focus of the program, of course, will continue to be to get Manitobans into electric vehicles. We've outlined here, earlier today, that the program began on August 2023. It's slated to go 'til March 2026 or—and this is very importantly—or until that \$25-million total is used up.

And so, you know, what we can commit here today is that we're going to continue to do the work of ensuring that we offer those rebates to Manitobans until those funds are utilized. And at such time, there'll be a full summary of the details I think that the member is seeking.

And we're looking forward to, again, getting these dollars out the door and into Manitobans' pockets so that they can go out and do that work of getting into an electric vehicle to support, again, decarbonization and putting more money in their wallets.

Mrs. Stone: I think this minister is refusing to answer the question because they removed the Tesla rebate despite 20 per cent of the rebate did go to Tesla owners on top of, we're seeing, 100 per cent tariffs on EV Chinese-made vehicles.

So I'd be very interested to know of how many Manitobans have actually applied for the rebate since those 100 per cent tariffs were placed on Chinese EV vehicles and since the NDP government removed that option for Teslas.

But shifting gears, honourable Chairperson, to the retail sat—sales tax revenues and the Rental Housing Construction Tax Credit. It's a bit of a different topic here.

Can the minister tell the committee how much revenue was collected last year and how much he projects will be collected this year on the construction of new homes, condos, single detached dwellings and co-operative housing? And if the minister does need some time to get those numbers or he needs to answer

them in a later round, if he could confirm that he would take that under advisement and get back to committee during the Committee of Supply process.

MLA Sala: Yes, I'd just like to ask the critic if she could repeat the—that list. She had new homes, condos, and if she could just, once again, resummarize the list.

Mrs. Stone: New homes, condos, and single detached dwellings and co-operative housing.

* (16:50)

MLA Sala: Apologies for the delay in that, in following up.

So the specific question we've dug in here, the—we're not tracking that specific information. You can see in the budget document, page 102 and 103, there's a number—summarizes a number of statistics that could speak to, you know, an approach that could be used to help determine that valuation or to get a—some kind of a higher order number, along with, of course, a summary of a number of other key areas there.

However, I think, you know, in response to the specific question, I can just share that we're not tracking that specific data. And I think the last thing I would add is that, of course, that the—those RST costs are embedded in materials that are going into new housing developments, but that is not something we're prepared to speak to, like, in summary or—nor is it something that the department is collecting or reporting out on.

Mrs. Stone: Okay, I thank the minister for that response.

So just a quick follow-up. So are contractors and builders submitting the amount of the tax credits they are claiming when they do file their RST payments?

MLA Sala: If I could just ask for clarity from the critic. Were you asking about contractors and the process of them submitting sales tax reports, or can you help just offer a little more specifics around that? It's a little bit of lack of clarity around whether or not you're asking if contractors themselves are submitting summaries of sales tax reports, or whether they're submitting summaries of RST, PST expenditures that they've made.

Mrs. Stone: I apologize with the way that question was framed.

So I'm asking if contractors—are contractors and builders submitting the amount of the tax credits they're claiming when they do file their RST payments? So contracts and builders have to file their RST payments, but through that, are they also sub-

mitting the amount of those tax credits they're applying for?

MLA Sala: Yes, I'll just share with the critic—so they'll be claiming the credit on their income tax return. So they would be paying for the inputs upfront, and then would later be receiving the credit through their income tax return in that process.

Mrs. Stone: Yes, thank you—

The Chairperson: Oh, sorry.

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

CHAMBER

SPORT, CULTURE, HERITAGE AND TOURISM

* (15:10)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

This time we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

* (15:20)

Would the minister like to introduce her staff and attendants?

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): So, with me, I have my deputy minister, who is Jeff Hnatiuk. I have Mike Sosiak and I have my DOMA, director of ministerial affairs, Chantel Bacon.

The Chairperson: Thank you for that, Minister.

Would the official critic like to introduce the staff in attendance for him?

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): Of course, I'd like to introduce my staff. We have, attending with us today, is Guruch Buttar, who's a key member of our staff, doing a tremendous amount of research and helps guide us along.

The Chairperson: Thank you for that.

As per subrule 77(15), questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Perchotte: The last time we got together, it was a lot of time that seemed to be wasted and not a lot of

answers, so, hopefully, today we can actually get down to some answers. The first one—question I have is a—just a clarification, and something that looks to be just a simple typo on page 28 of the supplements. It says that in 2022, tourism in Manitoba supports over 25,000 direct and indirect jobs across the province, a significant increase from 1,800 and 666 jobs in 2022.

Being that they both reference the same year, I'm assuming that is a typo, and I'd just like to see if we can get the minister to confirm if the sentence should read: In 2023, tourism in Manitoba supported over 25,000 direct and indirect jobs across the province.

MLA Kennedy: So in reference to the question, it appears to be a typo. And so it should read: in 2023, visitors spent \$1.82 billion in Manitoba, generating \$373 million in provincial taxes and contributing \$1.3 billion to the province's real GDP.

And then the next sentence should read: in 2023—not 2022—tourism in Manitoba supports over 25,000 direct and indirect 'drobs' across the province, a significant increase from 18,666 jobs in 2022.

Thank you.

Mr. Perchotte: I'd like to thank the minister for the answer to that question. I think we're going to be on to something great today. We're getting some answers.

So as stated by the department, tourism saw significant growth under our PC government. In the 2023 fiscal year, the number of tourism visits to Manitoba increased by 1.7 million from the previous year.

In 2024-25, the NDP government targeted an increase of only 400,000. The next year, they're targeting an increase of only 100,000. How is the minister claiming to boast tourism but anticipates less visitor growth over these two years?

* (15:30)

MLA Kennedy: So the question is regarding tourism, which is a remarkable part of the department that I am responsible for.

We have an incredible province; we have incredible attractions. And I was thrilled to be able to announce in this year's budget that we have increased our budget in 2025 to build on the current investment; that is \$13.9 million to Travel Manitoba. So we are providing an additional \$4.5 million, which is very exciting.

We heard, you know, from Travel Manitoba that they are just utterly thrilled with this new investment in dollars, to be able to market our incredible province to the rest of Canada and right here at home to folks

who, want to spend their money for taking trips and have decided that they're not wanting to support the US, and so where they can travel right within their province.

And so we're wanting to, of course, attract more out-of-province visitors. You know, we welcome our American neighbours to continue to take part in our incredible fishing and lodge experiences around our province. And, of course, with all of that tourism comes great economic return, which is a bonus for our province. Tourism is an incredible economic driver.

And so, of course, you know, we get a great return on our investment. We generate an increased provincial and local tax revenue, and, of course, that means that we are able to pay down and reduce the provincial deficit that was left through—for us by the former PC government.

So tourism, of course, we had an all-time high of \$440 billion in film production last year, which was really incredible, and our investments in Manitoba's film and production have drawn millions of dollars into our local economy from international investors. We're well known for our incredible world-class film crews and having the best tax credit in Canada for our film industry, which is something that we're incredibly proud of.

So we wanted to ensure that we've streamlined the intake process and that also removes the administrative barriers and burden on film productions that can apply for the tax credits. So we just really want to continue to grow the film industry in Manitoba, which really does contribute to our tourism economy. We have people from all over the US and across international borders that come and utilize our beautiful province for production and for filming different projects, and we welcome them here. They spend a lot of money on the local economy with hotels and restaurants and taking in our local attractions.

I would like to point out that the PCs have had their own failures with regards to the current Leader of the Opposition. He was, well, a failed minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism—or, just sport, culture, heritage. He thanked Donald Trump for tariffs. I mean, I don't even understand that. And they pose a very large threat to our Canadian economy and our provincial economy, so I'm still confused by that. I think we're all confused by that.

So that's where government is working with provincial and federal counterparts and the provincial and federal governments to stand against these tariffs. Our Premier (Mr. Kinew) just got back from signing

a memorandum of understanding to reduce inter-provincial trade barriers with the Premier of Ontario to promote our local economy right here at home.

And so while members opposite are open to us becoming the 51st state, our country, we've stopped sending money to Elon Musk. We don't support this at all, and we want to ensure—

The Chairperson: The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Perchotte: We're at second question and we've—we're off the rails. The member says they're confused, and I believe that they are. The question was very clearly—and I'll state it again: The PC government, in 2023, in the fiscal year, the number of tourism visits to Manitoba increased by 1.7 million people from the previous year.

In 2024 the NDP government targeted an increase of only 400,000. And the next year, in '25-26, they're targeting only an increase of 100,000.

The question was: How are you claiming to—how is the minister claiming to boost tourism but anticipates less visitor growth over those three years?

Instead, the minister went on to talk about the film industry, how the film industry are tourism. They're—the film industry isn't tourism; they're coming here to work. They're coming here for the tax dollars. They create tourism once they're here, but those people who come here to film here in the province are coming here for a tax credit, to work, to generate and produce films. They're not coming here to go for tours or to visit places; they simply come here to work.

* (15:40)

Most of the people on the production crews are fed by companies that come and feed them. They're lodged in trailers on-site; that they stay here only the length of the movie and then they go back, and they come back and forth for filming. The people afterwards, when the movies are produced, people come up here to see where they were done, and the tourism happens then.

But when they talk about, you know, people thanking Donald Trump, we just had in the House earlier today where we tabled the documents to show that the NDP government, in fact, moments after the tariffs were put in place, they were signing multi-million-dollar contracts with US companies. And they have the audacity to come here and say that other people support, when they clearly have demonstrated that they support it themselves. They wrote the contracts; we didn't write the contracts.

So I'll ask the member one more time—*[interjection]*—sorry, the minister one more time—no disrespect: The PC government had 1.7 million visitors in 2023, an—increased by 1.7 million in 2023. Why has the NDP government only targeted increases of 400,000 and 100,000 for 2025 and 2026, respectively?

MLA Kennedy: So on the topic of tourism, I just want to say it's an incredible position that I am in to be able to be the minister for Tourism.

I, since being appointed in the middle of November, have been able to meet with a number of stakeholders to discuss this incredible driver of our economy. And throughout being able to do that—you know, Colin Ferguson, who is in charge of Travel Manitoba—we've had great conversations about what this will look like on—I think for the last number of years, they've lobbied government to increase their funding to the 95-5 model.

* (15:50)

And so this year, we did that. Just this year alone, we're investing \$4.5 million more, which is—been incredibly well-received by the industry. And within that, you know, we've been able to increase funding to Indigenous Tourism, which is really quite remarkable. We increased the funding for Indigenous Tourism by \$450,000, and that's going to go a long way to the Indigenous Tourism operators that do such incredible work.

And we heard from the industry that they are just so excited about this increase in funding. I had the great privilege of attending a press conference, and Indigenous Tourism was there, and Travel Manitoba were there. And we had a really positive event, and so many stakeholders were there talking about how much this was going to mean to the tourism sector here in Manitoba.

So this increase—the \$4.5 million that we are increasing is going to mean an additional \$125 million in visitor spending. And it's going to mean that we're going to have an increase of \$9 million in provincial revenue, an additional 770 jobs. That is significant, and so I am so proud of the work that our government and the department does on this file.

So one thing that I've heard, though, from the industry is that they are incredibly worried about the threat of tariffs from Donald Trump, and that includes the film industry, just so we're clear on that. They're very worried about the threat of tariffs. And it's very clear—I don't know; I guess the member opposite might be a bit confused—but very clearly, the member of the

opposition thanked Donald Trump for tariffs. That's a direct quote that I can read here, and I'm going to read.

The quote is—it's clear as day that the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) said this—and the quote is, quote: Trump wants a win. I think one of his clear wins and a lot of Canadians' wins was a change in federal government. He wanted Justin Trudeau gone, and thank God he's gone. So how much of an influence did the 25 per cent tariff threat have on that? I would say a lot, and I would say thank you. I would say thank you; he's gone now.

So I know that the member for Selkirk (Mr. Perchotte) wants his leader to—you know, we want to—he wants to hope that his leader didn't say that, but he did. I mean, it's clearly on record as a quote.

But I want to remind Manitobans and let Manitobans know that they have a government now that stands up for Manitobans. It stands up for them and stands up for Canada. We have our leader, who is an incredible Premier (Mr. Kinew) that is so well-respected across this country and in our province, and he is taking a hard stance against tariffs and against Donald Trump. And I am proud to be a minister of the Crown with the NDP government who is taking that stance, that tough stance against tariffs.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

Mr. Perchotte: Once again, no answers. I've asked several times. This is the second day we're in Estimates with the minister and we're not getting answers.

The question was clearly why are they predicting such a little increase in tourism growth under the NDP government, and all we got back was talking points. But what—the talking points that matter, that—when it comes to Trump and the tariffs, what really matters is who financially thanked that government, who financially wrote contracts to US corporations for millions of dollars, untendered, and just tried to pass them through. That's the—what the minister is not telling us here in Estimates is that the fact that the NDP government did that. They wrote contracts worth millions of dollars with US corporations and they're trying to deflect that again.

So I—once again, the question on tourism is: Why was the target increase so small when they're apparently claiming to spend much more money in the department? And, again, we got no answer.

So I'll move on. It looks like something I should be expecting today is no answers and talking points.

But, hopefully, we can get the minister to answer something on this question because it's very important to Manitobans.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, the number of Indigenous-owned tourism businesses under the PC government more than doubled to 170 between 2019 and 2023. The PCs actually aimed to return the Indigenous tourism sector to 2019 levels by 2025, which we actually accomplished way ahead of time.

Given this huge progress that the PCs were able to accomplish despite a worldwide pandemic, why does the minister only project the total of 100 Indigenous tourism members for 2025?

*(16:00)

MLA Kennedy: It's interesting that we're discussing Indigenous tourism because, since becoming minister, I've been able to meet with, like I had said previously, many stakeholders regarding the tourism sector in general.

And I have had the pleasure of meeting the head of Indigenous Tourism, Holly Courchene, on actually a number of occasions, whether it's at events or in my office or with the Premier in his office. And it has been a pleasure to get to know her. She is a powerhouse of a person and so committed to Indigenous tourism being a viable sector.

We've spoken a lot about Indigenous tourism going a long way with regards to being a part of reconciliation and providing First Nations communities with the ability to be producing some great full-time jobs, sustainable jobs in local—in their local communities, which is something that I'm really committed to. And I know our government is really committed to economic reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

And a part of our funding increase I had stated was the \$450,000 that we've increased this year, but what I will say is that over the next—you know, over six years, where our increase is going to be \$2.7 million. And that's sustainable, predictable, stable funding. And that's what we've heard from Indigenous Tourism is that one-offs or something that's in the budget one year and not the next, that's not the way the Indigenous tourism sector is going to grow.

So with this increase in funding, they will be able to train, which is really important to really focus on taking those funds and training up the workforce for the Indigenous Tourism operators to be able to have, like I'd said, those local jobs that will stay in the

community. That will provide, you know—really, it'll be a boost to their local economies, so whether that is in First Nations communities or the surrounding areas, it's going to be able to have a positive impact on those communities.

And, really, the increase will really be able to provide opportunity. And I think that's something to be said within our government. We are committed to providing opportunity, and certainly, you know, I had the chance of meeting with OCN Chief Maureen Brown who's—she's a pretty wonderful lady. We've had many conversations, and she actually owns a business in the Clear Lake area. And so it's, to her, something that's very personal, is to be able to increase tourism and support the Indigenous tourism sector in continuing to grow.

So the numbers I think that the member had been alluding to, the increase was to the Indigenous Tourism membership, and so that was because there was a proper survey done. And so the numbers that were given were Indigenous Tourism members. And so just because you're a member, that doesn't capture all of the Indigenous Tourism operators.

And so with the increase in funding, something that Indigenous Tourism is going to do is focus on building up that membership and being able to provide those members as they increase their members, that type of training and support to grow their business and really focus on, you know, that return on investment for these tourism operators.

And we have incredible places to go. I got to learn a lot about that with meeting with the OCN Chief Maureen Brown and the head of Indigenous Tourism, Holly Courchene, talked about the wonderful places to be able to visit and to really have the authentic experience of being able to—

The Chairperson: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Perchotte: That was a long answer. I appreciate the minister talking about the increase of funding. The Indigenous-owned tourism businesses we have in our province are very important to the province and to our economic sector, and especially in Selkirk and the Interlake, where I'm here to represent a very large Indigenous population. So I'm looking forward to an additional \$2.7 million going into that sector.

We did not talk about why there was only 100 Indigenous tourist members when they should be 170. Or maybe the minister covered that and I missed it.

So I will move on again; it took almost eight minutes to come up with that, and it's a very important question, so I'm glad we spent the time getting the information out on that.

* (16:10)

The previous PC government had supported the design and installation of a Chief Peguis statue as the first monument on the Legislative grounds to commemorate First Nations. This is something that is dear to my heart. As I said, I represent a very large Indigenous percentage of the population in Selkirk, and I've also went to the school that bears the name of Chief Peguis—proudly went to that school.

Very important that this monument gets done. This monument was to be installed last September, but so far has been delayed. I hope this is just a process that is just taking a little bit longer than anticipated, but we are—that it is in the works.

I would just like to know if the minister can provide an update on this extremely important monument.

MLA Kennedy: I thank the member for the question. You know, Chief Peguis, was an incredible leader. And obviously, on this side of the House, our NDP government celebrates incredible Indigenous leaders. I mean, we have our wildly popular and very effective Premier (Mr. Kinew), who is an Indigenous man. We have the first—two first First Nations women who have been appointed to Cabinet, which is—I mean, we're living history right now. It's pretty incredible.

They're so effective as leaders in their own communities, but leaders within our Cabinet and our caucus. You know, Minister for Families is truly an inspiration and a matriarch, a mentor to many of us. And Minister Smith—sorry. The Minister for Housing, Addictions, Homelessness and responsible for mental health is a wonderful friend, such a great leader doing such important work in her portfolio. And Manitoba's lucky to have them, to have our Premier leading us.

I was able to, over the weekend, attend the Manito Ahbee Festival for seeing all of the incredible culture and, you know, a festival that's been around for 20 years marking this incredible milestone. And seeing the young leaders that are coming up, I was able to attend the first night there seeing these incredible fashion designers with the fashion shows, just truly remarkable just to see the talent.

And we are—it's just such a great place to—Manito Ahbee really took the time and have taken the time to really engage newcomer populations that are here in

Manitoba to, you know, really experience the best of Indigenous culture and art and the spirit, the dance, the powwows. It's just—it's magical, really.

And I think that takes a lot of—it really does speak to reconciliation, and certainly our government is very committed to that. We do that, you know, I think on a daily basis by the things that we say, the things that we do, the decisions we make, the policies that come across, and it's something that we're really committed to.

And what I would say is that it's something that, being the minister responsible for culture, it's something that's near and dear to my heart. And I always see things with regards to how can we move forward for true reconciliation. And so, of course, you know the statue for Chief Peguis is—it's important.

But what I will say to the member is this actually doesn't fall under my portfolio, and the commissioning of the statue falls under Public Service Delivery, and so I would encourage him to reach out to my colleague, the Minister responsible for Public Service Delivery for an update on that project.

Thank you.

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Can the minister—we're just going to shift gears a little bit here. Can the minister talk about how much of the 2025 budget has been allocated for community sport grants organizations, and what's the process for applying for these grants?

* (16:20)

MLA Kennedy: So a part of my portfolio is, obviously, being minister responsible for sport, and it's a pretty exciting place to be. We have such an incredible environment here in Manitoba for amateur sports.

We have a huge amount of participants, really, throughout the whole province. I think we have over 70 different sporting organizations, which is—that's quite a number. And I think, within that number of sporting organizations we have, I think the total amount of participants in the amateur sport environment sits at over 164,000 people, which includes the 16,300 coaches, which is just remarkable because those coaches are coaching amateur sport, which means they are likely volunteers, giving up their time to the pursuit of sport.

And amateur sport is a great place to be to really—it's for kids, and so the youth being able to participate in these many different activities is something that really lends itself to helping them explore who they are as people.

I know my own son has played amateur sport, both in hockey and football. And it's just been tremendous for him, increasing his level of awareness and his confidence in himself and teamwork within, you know, these lifelong friendships that he makes within these opportunities to play amateur sport.

So amateur sport as well, you know, if you think about it, it really increases tourism, which is also a part of my portfolio, and it does that because, with all these amateur sporting organizations and these sports that the youth take part in, there are tournaments and they're in different events that come through. And so the local economies of where those events are being held will really reap the benefit, right. You've got people visiting and so that's an increase to your hotel bookings and your restaurants and maybe local attractions, whether it's your local community museum, which also falls under my portfolio. And so it's great for different places within Manitoba who get to benefit from these events.

And there's also, within our department, a part of what my critic was asking, there is the small event hosting that's done through our department and there is some funds for that. It's wildly popular, and so I believe this year it was its most popular year yet. And so, of course, we can't fund all of the applications that come in, but people are so thankful to be able to have that, to be able to apply for some funds to hold these small events.

And something that's really exciting about our government and our government's approach and my department is that we've increased, since coming into government, the Sport Manitoba by \$1 million, and that's significant. That is stable, predictable, sustainable funding. And \$1 million for Sport Manitoba goes towards supporting these local athletes who have these really big dreams about where they are in their journey of being athletes.

And so something that I'm very proud of. And what I've heard from the local amateur sporting community is that they are truly excited about this increase in funding as well. And certainly from Sport Manitoba, they're really delighted to see this increase in funding and we'll be able to help a lot of local athletes with their athletic journey.

So thank you, honourable Chair, for that time.

* (16:30)

MLA Lagassé: So I'd like to thank the minister, I guess, for what was perceived to be an answer, but I was specifically asking about sport grants, not small

event grants, not any of that. And I'm sure when we're talking about all the coaches and we're going on about how they're such a fabulous part—and I agree, they are; they volunteer their time and all that—but I'm sure they would like to know how to access these grants that I'm talking about here.

So going into the next question, I'm going to ask: How many grant applications were denied last year, and what was the main reason for those denials?

MLA Kennedy: So I'm curious if the member opposite can clarify the actual name of the grant program he's inquiring about, because there's a few different options here that I could provide information for. But is there a specific name to the grant program?

MLA Lagassé: So I'm guessing we're then backing up to my original question, which asked about what grants are available for community sport organizations. And then that would actually clarify for the minister exactly what we're talking about here in this Estimates.

I know that the former minister is in here, and I don't know if they have any input to put into this, but really, what I'm asking about is if there's organizations or grant applications that are available for these community organizations to apply to for their sport, in their amateur sport.

There's also a question that I would have liked answered, but, obviously, we're not going to get to it today, and it mainly applied to rural Manitoba and what kind of sports are in place for rural Manitoba, because there is life outside of the Perimeter.

So that's where I will end with that question right there, and hopefully the minister can answer.

* (16:40)

MLA Kennedy: So I appreciate the clarification from my critic.

Just a bit of mansplaining going on there. I'm well aware that there is life outside the Perimeter. I grew up in the Interlake on a farm and lived there a whole 18 years of my life. So I'm well aware that there are—there is life outside the Perimeter. So just want to put that on the record there.

Anyways, so regarding grants, the only grant that's available through our department is the small event grant, and it's wildly popular. But with regards to funding, the main spending and the main funding with regards to sport is through our department; we fund Sport Manitoba.

So—and we've increased our funding since taking office; we've increased our funding by \$1 million, which is something that's been very well received and something that I am very proud of our government for doing.

So the funding that Sport Manitoba gets, they provide funds to the provincial sport organizations, and that supports the local community amateur sports. So that's the way that that funding works. And basically, if there are any other questions about how that works, I can, I guess, answer that, but just for the member's own clarity, that is how the funding for sport works within our department.

Thanks.

Mr. Perchotte: We're getting a little bit late in the day here, and it's a shame that, of all the questions we asked today, we've got an answer on one of them: that there was a typo. Instead of 2022, it should've said 2023.

We had a tremendous number of talking points. Now, you can see that Mark Rosner is definitely in the building here, writing the information for the member opposite, the minister, to read out. And yet, around the table, there is tremendous knowledge. The deputy minister is extremely respected and knowledgeable on these subjects, but we're not getting details; we're getting simply talking points that are provided. And the unfortunate part of that is we were sent here on behalf of the constituents that we represent, and in our critic files, we're here to ask the minister what is happening in those situations.

All the information that we have asked throughout this was either ignored or it was twisted into something else. We talked many different times, and there's so many questions that I wanted to ask. You know, I wanted to talk about the Film and Video Production Tax Credit and how that's being applied and where that's going on. We talked about different things.

The minister just said that the grants that are available were only the small events grants, and I would have to say that they failed. Last year, Selkirk had Indigenous days in Selkirk. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) came out there looking to be a hero, like he is part of his event, and, in fact, you know, he even suggested that they get a picture of him flipping pancakes, and they were told no, we're not going to do that unless you're actually going to be here flipping pancakes.

So they were turned down on their \$5,000 grant application last year, and I hope that they're going to have it this year. I believe the date is June 21. So if the minister can actually look at that, so we can carry on

this wonderful celebration in Selkirk. And I've been a part of that for many years, even prior to politics. I was donating their event tent for many, many years and donating, as well, as a private citizen.

So these are things that are important in communities, and I hope we don't miss that. I'm very disappointed we didn't get any answers to what the people sent us here for. They weren't answers—or questions to try to make the government look bad; they're just simply questions of what was happening. And based on the fact that we don't have any answers, I don't feel like wasting my time in this Chamber asking any more today.

So thank you.

The Chairperson: Seeing no more questions, we'll move on to the resolutions.

Resolution 14.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$46,844,000 for Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Culture and Heritage Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 14.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,242,000 for Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Information Resources, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 14.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 14.1.

At this point, we request that all ministerial and opposition staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

* (16:50)

The floor is open for questions.

MLA Lagassé: So I'm going to move a motion here in a second. I just want to add a little bit before I do that.

An—in the minister's last response, there was something about mansplaining. I don't actually see gender. I've never referred to anyone as he, she, or any of that. I simply say they, because you are a minister of the Crown as anyone else would be a minister of the Crown in that position. So it's nothing to do with that.

So I'm going to move a motion now that has nothing to do with gender or anything else.

I move that line item 14.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage and Tourism's salary be reduced to \$1.

The Chairperson: It has been moved by the honourable member for Dawson Trail (MLA Lagassé) that line item 14.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism's salary be reduced to \$1.

The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Seeing none, is the committee ready for question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

The Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

The Chairperson: All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Chairperson: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Chairperson: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

The motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

The Chairperson: Resolution 14.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$41,684,000 for Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section is for the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

MLA Kennedy: I would request that we recess until 5 'clock.

The Chairperson: Is there leave to recess until 5 o'clock?
[Agreed]

Committee recess.

The committee recessed at 4:53 p.m.

The committee resumed at 5:00 p.m.

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

Call in the Speaker.

Committee, come back to order, please.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

The Deputy Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 20, 2025

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