



Third Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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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	Ind.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
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
ROBBINS, Colleen	Spruce Woods	PC
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>	The Pas-Kameesak	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 16, 2026

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

Routine procedures. *[interjection]* Too many things on the go here today.

Speaker's Statement

The Speaker: So, before we begin routine proceedings, for the information of all members, due to unavoidable staffing shortages, ASL coverage of today's House proceedings will end at the conclusion of oral questions.

And on behalf of all honourable members and all who work at the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the interpreters who have been working hard to ensure that our proceedings are accessible to deaf and hard of hearing Manitobans.

Now routine proceedings.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Education Week

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): What a special week it has been. I rise today to recognize the week of April 13 to 17 as Education Week in the province of Manitoba.

This week marks a meaningful opportunity for all Manitobans to reflect on the historic and enduring influence of education in our province. Education Week is an opportunity to celebrate the pivotal role that Manitoba educators and school staff play in ensuring every child has a sense of belonging and the chance to reach their full potential.

Across Manitoba, nearly 17,000 dedicated teachers work tirelessly each day, providing safe and caring learning environments and inspiring students through rich experiences. Together with teachers, EAs, principals, clinicians and other school staff leave a profound mark on students and help prepare the next generation of Manitobans.

And, as well, yesterday was School Bus Driver Day. I'd like to give a special shout-out to all of the school bus drivers in Manitoba who help transport kids safely to and from school, and as a mom of three kids who are bused and were bused, I cannot thank each of you enough for the care and safe transport that you provide to our kids.

Together with families and communities, schools prepare young people for careers and challenges of the future, equipping them with the skills needed to become active citizens and to contribute to our province's prosperity.

And we continue to make strides towards ensuring equitable, high-quality education for all students in Manitoba. Since our government has taken office, we've added over 1,600 educators in partnership with school divisions. And what that means, Honourable Speaker? That means more one-on-one time with students, smaller class sizes and better outcomes for kids.

Our government has brought in a \$30-million universal school nutrition program so that no child has to learn on an empty stomach. And we've protected this program through Nello's Law so that it will continue for years to come.

And Budget 2026 announced a \$10-million investment for free transit for youth so that the cost of bus fare will no longer be a barrier to get to school.

Our government continues to provide stable and predictable education funding, with an \$80-million increase to invest—to our investment this year, bringing our total funding, Honourable Speaker, to nearly \$2 billion.

Not only are we hiring more educators and feeding kids, but we also recognize that kids need the physical space to learn. That's why we are continuing construction on 11 new beautiful schools, the first four being in Brandon, Devonshire Park, Meadowlands and Prairie Pointe, opening in September 2027. And those schools will come with play structures and child-care spaces to support healthy kids, healthy communities and a strong, healthy economy.

These initiatives reflect our ongoing dedication to the principle that Every Child Matters and that all students can learn, belong and thrive in our great province.

Education Week encourages us to recognize the value of education and its relationship to the health of our communities and our workplaces. It's simple, Honourable Speaker: when you invest in education, you're investing in the future of our kids, our long-term health outcomes and the economic prosperity of our province.

So, on this Education Week, I invite all Manitobans to join me in the thoughtful reflection on the power of education: the power it has to transform lives and shape the future of our province. And I encourage you all to reach out to the educators that made a difference in your lives and thank them for the work that they do every single day.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I am pleased to rise today to recognize Education Week in Manitoba, taking place from April 13 to 17 this year. This week is a time to celebrate the many individuals who play a critical role in shaping the lives of our children and youth.

Education Week is an opportunity to acknowledge the dedication of teachers, educational assistants, counsellors, bus drivers, custodians, principals, school leaders, support staff and administrators, as well as those in child care, skilled trades and apprenticeship programs. Today—together, they form the foundation of a strong education system that supports students, families and communities all across this great province of ours.

I had the privilege of being a front-line teacher and guidance counsellor, and as a former minister, I know education is one of the most important investments we can make in our society. A strong education system equips students with the knowledge, skills and the discipline they need to succeed not only in the classroom but in life. It fosters critical thinking, problem solving and the ability to adapt in an increasingly complex and competitive world.

Education also plays a key role in strengthening our economy and building resilient communities. When students are supported to reach their full potential, Manitoba benefits from a skilled workforce, stronger families and greater opportunity for future growth.

Manitoba is blessed to have dedicated education professionals who go above and beyond every day. Their impact extends far beyond academics. They mentor, inspire and help shape the character and confidence of the next generation.

At the same time, we must ensure that our education system is supported with practical, student-focused policies that address real challenges. That includes reducing classroom overcrowding, truancy and violence, ensuring access to resources and continuing to invest in school infrastructure so that students have the learning environments they deserve.

Our previous PC government made important progress by working with educators, parents and communities to move forward with the construction of new schools throughout the province and expanded classroom capacity. We worked with Manitoba Teachers' Society and Manitoba School Boards Association to create a province-wide bargaining unit that they had been requesting for years, and we brought in \$10-a-day daycare. These investments were about planning for growth and ensuring students had the space and support they need for—to succeed.

Many members of their—this House have backgrounds in education and understand first-hand the value of strong classrooms and dedicated educators. It is my hope that the government MLAs recognize their daily dose of rhetoric does nothing to prepare our children for the challenges of tomorrow.

In conclusion, I want to thank all of those who contribute to Manitoba's education system. Your dedication, professionalism and commitment to students make a lasting difference, not just today, but for generations to come.

Thank you. Merci. Dyakuyu. *[Thank you.]* And miigwech.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Weston & Brooklands Residents' Association

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Honourable Speaker, Weston & Brooklands Residents' Association was formed in late 2022 by residents who wanted to make their neighbourhoods cleaner, safer and more connected. Since then, they have brought together people from all walks of life with a shared goal: to build a stronger community for everyone who calls Weston and Brooklands home.

These are vibrant neighbourhoods, rich in culture, diversity and community pride. And Weston & Brooklands Residents' Association has helped turn that pride into action. They have organized community cleanups, hosted neighbourhood safety presentations and brought residents together around important

issues like food security, neighbourhood safety and vacant and derelict properties.

One of the most exciting projects they are helping lead is the Westlands Greenway proposal, which would transform underused spaces and decommissioned railroad tracks into places where families can gather, play, bike and connect with one another.

Weston & Brooklands Residents' Association is now working to bring a year-round hydroponic farm into the neighbourhood. This Growcer project would create hands-on learning opportunities for youth and provide vegetables for 500 people per week, helping address food security in the community. Youth would have the chance to learn about science, agriculture, technology, sustainability and business, all while helping to grow 10,000 pounds of fresh food each year for residents who need it most. Working alongside Growcer, they are showing what can happen when communities come together with creativity and determination.

* (13:40)

I want to recognize and thank the volunteers, community leaders and Weston & Brooklands Residents' Association president, Maria Fernandes, and director, Michael Paille, for their leadership, along with Emily Fernandes-Bushell, Bintou Toure, Victor Giesbrecht, Victoria Giesbrecht, who are with us here today.

And I ask all members of the House to join me in recognizing their hard work and commitment to building a stronger future for Weston and Brooklands.

Portage la Prairie— Provincial and Municipal Collaboration

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): I am honoured to stand up today to welcome the City of Portage la Prairie, the RM of Portage la Prairie and Southport Aerospace. My apologies for having my back to you.

I am very proud to live in an area that handles adversity by striving for solutions. Southport Aerospace is a prime example of that. In 1992, the federal government chose to close CFB Southport. This was a huge blow to the Portage la Prairie region, and a committee was formed to save and revitalize the base. Today, the fruits of their labour are known as Southport Aerospace, where astronaut Jeremy Hansen took some of his training.

Another example of this collaboration is the historic tax sharing agreement, a Manitoba first between the

City and RM of Portage la Prairie, which brought companies such as Simplot and Roquette to our region.

Collaboration between the City and the RM of Portage also includes venues such as Stride Place multiplex, and it is the premier sports and recreation venue in Manitoba.

The City and the RM again joined forces to incorporate the Portage Hospital Foundation back in 1986. This foundation has since raised millions and millions of dollars in funds for enhancements. In fact, it was the foundation that commissioned the study that found the hospital had exceeded its lifespan and required replacement. This foundation has also set aside \$5 million for the purchase of an MRI machine for the new Portage regional health-care facility.

It is my pleasure, then, to extend a sincere thank-you to the two councils that are here with us today, along with officials of Southport Aerospace.

Please join me in recognizing this amazing group.

Scott Oake

MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond): Honourable Speaker, today I rise to recognize a remarkable Manitoban whose voice has long been woven into the fabric of hockey in this country, but whose impact reaches far beyond the rink: Scott Oake.

On April 11, many Canadians watched Scott sign off from After Hours, closing an extraordinary chapter in a broadcasting career that has spanned decades and made him one of the most respected figures in sports media. But what makes Scott truly exceptional is not only the career he built, but the legacy he chose to build through love, grief and service. He is a legacy builder and a transformative leader.

I had the opportunity to tour the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre, and what I witnessed was a place of healing, dignity and second chances, reflecting a family's commitment to ensuring others do not face addiction alone. After the devastating loss of his son in 2011, Scott and his wife, Anne Oake, transformed their grief into a mission to help others, creating the centre which provides long-term addiction treatment and hope to those who need it most.

Anne herself became a driving force behind that work. After her passing in 2021, Scott continued her compassion, and today the Anne Oake Family Recovery Centre is being developed in Fort Richmond to support women on their healing journey.

What stands out most about Scott Oake is his ability to turn heartbreak into hope. He did not allow loss to close his world. He used it to open doors for others. That is the work of a legacy builder. That is the mark of a transformative leader.

I invite all members to join me in recognizing Scott Oake for his extraordinary contributions to sport, to recovery and to the lives of countless families in Manitoba and beyond.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Recognizing Curlers from the Interlake

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): I rise today to recognize the extraordinary success of curlers from Manitoba's Interlake region: athletes whose achievements continue to bring pride to their communities and to our entire province.

The Interlake is home to Canada's reigning champions: Kerri Einarson on the women's side and Colton Lott on the men's. Their national titles speak not only to exceptional individual talent, but to the enduring strength of curling in small-town Manitoba.

Both have represented Canada with distinction on the world stage, earning medals at the world championships; proof that Interlake produces competitors who can stand among the very best.

And the success continues. Colton, alongside his wife Kadriana, is preparing for their third appearance at the World Mixed Doubles Curling Championship, an impressive testament to consistency, dedication and partnership.

The Interlake's curling legacy runs deep. Athletes like Sasha Carter of Ashern, a world champion twice over and multi-time Scotties winner, and Jared Kolomaya of St. Martin, a two-time Brier competitor, reminds us that this region has produced a powerhouse for curling.

But the curling in the Interlake is about more than championships. It is woven into the fabric of the community life, bringing generations together, fostering excellence at every level and inspiring the next wave of athletes.

In rinks across the region, young Manitobans are learning that greatness can come from anywhere.

I ask all members to join me in celebrating these outstanding athletes that join us virtually today and help recognize the proud tradition of Interlake curling.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Frank Capasso

Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière): Honourable Speaker, I rise today to recognize someone who has become known as the mayor to the of Sage Creek, Mr. Frank Capasso.

Frank has served as president of the Sage Creek Residents' Association for over a decade, and in that time he has helped shape this growing community. His work has always been about building a place that people can feel proud to call home.

When you speak with residents in Sage Creek, you quickly understand the impact he has had. He helped push forward the installation of a cell tower, strengthening connectivity and safety for families. He supported upgrades to Ron Duhamel Park, helping maintain a space where people gather, play and connect. He supported the creation of the Capasso Pump Track, a place that has become a hub for recreation and activity in the community.

I've met with Frank many times, and in one of our earliest conversations he stated play structures should be built with schools. Because of his advocacy and that of many others, in Budget 2026 and moving forward, outdoor play structures will be included in new school builds in Manitoba. These are the kind of changes that shape daily life in meaningful ways.

What stands out most is the way Frank approaches community. His work has never been about recognition. He shows up. He listens. He stays involved long after the initial work is done. There is a consistency to his efforts that people have come to rely on.

Beyond Sage Creek, Frank has contributed to sport through his involvement in the soccer community. He served as president of the Manitoba Soccer Association and contributed at the national level through the Canadian Soccer Association, helping support the growth of the sport across the country. His commitment has been recognized through honours including the King Charles III Coronation Medal, the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal, as well as his induction into the Manitoba Soccer Association Hall of Fame and recognition with the Mayor's Volunteer Service Award.

He joins us in the gallery with his wife Angie.

* (13:50)

Honourable Speaker, people like Frank Capasso remind us what it takes to build strong communities. Frank, thank you for everything you have done for

Sage Creek, Manitoba and Canada. I ask all members of this House to join me in recognizing Frank Capasso.

Speaker's Statement

The Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I first have a statement for the House.

The honourable member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux) has had her baby on April 8, 2026, at 10:46 a.m. She and her husband welcomed a healthy baby boy into the world, Rhys Leon-Lamoureux Burns, weighing seven pounds, six ounces and measuring 52 centimetres long. Baby and mom are doing well, and little Hudson is excited to have a new baby brother.

On behalf of all honourable members, we'd like to congratulate the honourable member for Tyndall Park.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: And I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Candice Narth and Nash Narth, who are guests of the honourable member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Narth).

And we welcome you here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Teacher Professional Conduct Commissioner Nature and Characterization of Departure

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Let's go over the facts.

Last week, media asked the minister about Bobbi Taillefer's working arrangements. On April 7, Bobbi Taillefer resigned as the Commissioner of Teacher Professional Conduct. On April 9, the Education Minister said to reporters that Ms. Taillefer had resigned.

But then, on April 10, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) told media, and I quote: What's been described as a resignation was actually a firing. End quote.

Both things cannot be true.

Will the Premier withdraw his previous comments and apologize to Manitoba parents, students and teachers for misleading them?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Deputy Premier): First, I just want to take this opportunity to provide an update to the House and to Manitobans, and to thank the volunteers who are stepping up right now in Peguis First Nation and across the Interlake.

Our Premier is in Peguis today, meeting with community leadership and volunteers on the ground and seeing the work that's being done first-hand to protect homes and keep people safe.

This is what one Manitoba looks like, people from across the province coming together, stepping up, spending long hours filling sandbags, building dikes and protecting their homes and protecting their neighbours. This is what Manitobans do. Manitobans look out for one another. It's communities coming together across the province, across regions to keep people safe.

So I just want to acknowledge all the folks, including many folks—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

And I would just remind all members that we shouldn't comment on whether members are present or absent.

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

Mr. Khan: I will table an order-in-council, dated April 8, 2026, a government document which states that, and I quote: "On April 7, 2026, Bobbi Taillefer resigned as Commissioner." End quote.

So either the Premier intentionally misspoke so that he could sound tough for the cameras, or he is fabricating and falsifying legal documents from his Cabinet. It has to be one of those. Manitobans cannot trust anything this Premier is—or, his minister is saying.

I will table that proof here today for the House.

So I will ask again: Was Ms. Taillefer fired like the Premier says, or did she resign like the government's own official documents say?

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would caution members that using words such as, intentionally misspoke, is inferring that someone is lying, so I would ask the honourable Leader of the Opposition to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Khan: I withdraw.

MLA Asagwara: Our government's top priority is making sure that students are safe, students are protected, that they have the resources and services they need in their schools and communities.

And I want to take a moment to acknowledge the incredible work that our Education Minister is doing with partners across the province, really and truly with the highest level of integrity.

So that's going to continue to be our government's priority, focusing on what's best for students across this province, what's best for Manitobans. We're focused squarely on Manitobans every single day, and we'll keep that work going across all departments, but, of course, in the Ministry of Education.

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

Mr. Khan: The Premier (Mr. Kinew), the Minister of Education and now the Deputy Premier's story isn't making any sense. They want you to believe that the Premier fired Ms. Taillefer when, in fact, she resigned.

If the Premier fired Bobbi Taillefer, like he says he did, because she was working in Florida, well, then, why did the Premier and the minister sign another contract to hire her back immediately? It makes no sense. Bobbi Taillefer, according to this Premier, was fired for not working in Manitoba, and then rehired on a new contract without any stipulation for residency requirements.

Honourable Speaker, Manitoba: This simply doesn't make any sense.

Will the Premier stand up today and apologize to Manitobans for misleading them?

MLA Asagwara: Our government is focused on prioritizing the safety and protections of kids in our schools. That has been our priority from day one. And that priority was even more emphasized after the Leader of the Opposition was the poster boy for a campaign that targeted trans students.

Honourable Speaker, we understand the importance of making sure that our province is a place that's safe for all learners, all students, all kids, no matter where they are learning, no matter where they're situated. Leader of the Opposition and members on that side of the House have directly undermined the safety of kids in this province.

So what I would ask is if the Leader of the Opposition ever intends on standing up and apologizing to kids in this province for making them less safe.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Employment Requirements for Position

Mr. Khan: When Bobbi Taillefer was first hired, she actually held and kept another job as the executive director of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation,

and the Premier had no problem with that. But the Canadian Centre for Child Protection did. They thought it was, and I'll quote, highly inappropriate and a clear conflict of interest. End quote.

But the Premier and the minister chose to ignore that. This NDP government chose to ignore the recommendation by the child centre—by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, whose sole responsibility is protecting children.

So I'll ask the Premier, how important is student safety to this Premier if he's hiring people on a part-time basis who already have full-time jobs? Does the Premier think that protecting kids is not a full-time job?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, the line of questioning coming from the Leader of the Opposition is confusing, considering he has made it his full-time job to undermine the safety of kids in this province.

The Leader of the Opposition is the person who has made it a point of ensuring that vulnerable kids, kids who are already targeted in so many ways, were even further targeted in the last provincial campaign and his recent remarks in the House. And he hasn't even done the bare—the basic decent thing to apologize to these kids and their families.

I don't know about you, Honourable Speaker, but I've heard from a number of families across this province who feel less safe now because of his comments made in this Chamber.

Honourable Speaker, we're going to be focused on Manitobans, keeping kids safe and making sure they have more resources, not less—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Khan: The Premier has the opportunity to stand up today and fix his mistakes and apologize, and he won't even do that.

Experts were clear when Ms. Taillefer was hired that someone from inside the system is not ideal for this important role.

* (14:00)

Paul Bennett, who was a well-respected education professor and has done extensive research on teacher

misconduct, has said when it comes to selecting a commissioner, and I quote: It should be somebody from another profession, a bona fide professional. End quote.

So will the Premier (Mr. Kinew) commit today to listening to the experts and hiring not only someone who lives in Manitoba, will work full-time and is a bona fide professional? These are three simple, logical, common sense requirements.

Will the Premier commit to doing that today?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, our government is squarely focused on protecting kids in this province, and that means taking steps like ensuring that we are the leading jurisdiction, the only jurisdiction, that has a free, universal food nutrition program in schools across Manitoba, for all the kids in this province.

It means making sure that we have an additional 1,600 educators on the front lines of our education system, educating our kids every single day. It means making sure that we are building schools, building schools to make sure that we can fit all of the kids in there that we see, you know, growing up in our growing communities across the province, and it means standing up for kids of all identities to make sure they know that they belong in this province. So, we're doing the work—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Khan: Five simple questions about protecting kids and not one answer from this NDP government. This NDP government has left Manitobans with a lot of unanswered questions over this scandal.

The Premier sacrificed his credibility once again for the cameras. He thought it would make him look tough if he said he fired her, but he didn't fire her; she resigned. And now everyone knows that, no matter what the Premier tries to say.

But now families are left wondering if their concerns about potential misconduct in the school system are even being listened to. Families are concerned that student safety is so low on this government's priority that they're willing to hire someone who works outside the province and on a part-time basis.

So I'll ask the Premier again: Will he stand up today and commit to hiring someone who works in Manitoba, going to work on a full-time basis and

listen to the bona fide experts who have given their recommendations?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, I will stack up the credibility of our Premier against the Leader of the Opposition any day of the week—any day of the week.

The Leader of the Opposition has no credibility. None. In fact, there's an editorial, I believe actually just today, that outlines the ways in which the Leader of the Opposition has continued to fail Manitobans and why he cannot be trusted.

And I would argue that brush paints the entire PC caucus. They can't be trusted. That's why they're sitting on that side of the House. That's why Manitobans have entrusted us with protecting kids across this province. And that's why we have an Education Minister who has made sure that the registry is operational. There's a strong acting role in place, is undergoing the search to make sure that the appropriate person is in that job—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Homelessness Rates Increase Concerns

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): The minister has been on the job since October of 2023 and recently shared that she has housed a little over 200 Manitobans in that time.

Unfortunately for that minister, the data is in, and according to End Homelessness Winnipeg, and I quote: More people are entering into homelessness than existing. End of quote.

Can the minister explain why, after two and a half years in the job, homelessness is getting worse rather than better?

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): I will put some facts on the record and give an update. So, we have, in fact, housed 217 people out of encampments. These are folks that members on the opposite side, when they were in government, put into encampments.

They sold off housing, social housing. It took seconds to sell off. It's taking years to build, but we're up to that task. We are committed to building 1,640 social and affordable housing units. We've completed 252 of those social and affordable housing units, 718 more to come.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

MLA Bereza: In one month, 104 Manitobans were added to the Winnipeg homelessness snapshot as chronically homeless. This means that half of what the minister claims to have accomplished in 29 months was wiped out in 30 days.

Can the minister explain what her government intends to do to reverse this trend?

Ms. Smith: And, again, I want to, you know, educate that member on what it takes to actually support people coming out of encampments, making sure that people are successfully housed. Unlike members opposite, who cut, slashed, boarded up our social housing, we put over 2,100 Manitoba Housing units back online that they took offline.

We are wrapping around support services so we can make sure people are successfully housed, onto a path of success, something members opposite didn't do. We are actually putting 509 more social housing units coming online this year, and we're going to continue to do that work, unlike members opposite, who didn't listen—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Bereza: At the pace the minister is going, it will take 99 years to fulfill her commitment to end homelessness.

Does the minister stand by her government's commitment to end homelessness or will she admit she doesn't have the answer to Manitoba's growing homelessness situation?

Ms. Smith: You know, I wanted to thank all the partners that have come to the table that are helping us to build, build, build housing right across our great province, unlike members opposite, who didn't build one single social housing unit all their seven and a half years.

We are adding to that. We've approved 42 projects through the Rental Housing Construction Incentive that will help develop 300 housing units here in our great province. We've announced even more projects that we're going to continue to build support.

But you know what? It's not just about building and putting people in housing; it's about wrapping around those supports and making sure that people are successful, unlike members opposite that don't

understand what it means to actually support people and help—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Manitoba Institute of Trade and Technology Closure Income and Employment Supports for Staff

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): Honourable Speaker, the closure of MITT will cost dedicated Manitobans their jobs and their livelihoods. These are skilled workers, families and communities that will fill—feel the impact immediately and deeply. At a time when families are struggling, this government is offering uncertainty instead of solutions.

So I ask the minister: What is the plan to support workers and provide income during this transition?

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Honourable Speaker, as the member well knows, as we worked through Estimates yesterday, folks are gainfully employed at MITT, and I want to thank the leadership at both institutions, both Red River College Polytech and MITT, for working collaboratively with us to ensure there is a smooth transition.

And I would offer the member that continuing to work towards a positive solution is exactly what's happening right now, and I would urge her to be on board with ensuring that this transition supports as many Manitobans as possible to get skilled trades today, tomorrow and in the years to come.

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

Mrs. Hiebert: The government has stated that Red River College will take over some programs, but that represented—represents only a portion of the MITT staff currently—that currently provides.

Can the minister clarify how many MITT staff are expected to be offered positions under the—this transition, and is there any guarantee the remaining affected staff get hired elsewhere?

* (14:10)

MLA Cable: Honourable Speaker, I want to take this House back to nary two years ago when the federal government unilaterally made the decision to cut international students and make a real mess of immigration in this country. And at that time, I rose in this House to say that there would be impacts, but we would do all we could to support families.

We're continuing to do that work. The transition from MITT to Red River College is going very well. Leadership at both institutions have expressed gratitude for the support, and staff at both institutions are feeling hopeful about the future of having a Red River College Polytech campus in South Winnipeg, something I thought the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) would be happy about.

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

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

Mrs. Hiebert: Honourable Speaker, staff at MITT are speaking out because they still don't know whether they have a job. That's a huge issue. That uncertainty is not just stressful; it's hurting their families and creating ripple effects across the local economy.

These are big situations. These are hard-working Manitobans who deserve clear, transparent information about their future, yet this government has failed to provide even the most basic answers.

So I ask the minister again: Has—why has there been such a lack of clarity for MITT employees, and when can they expect definite answers about their jobs and their livelihoods?

MLA Cable: Honourable Speaker, once again, the member asked this question yesterday in Estimates, and I provided assurances to her that there is a process that is being followed. And unlike the members opposite, we honour collective agreements. We respect individuals, and we work to ensure that Manitobans are taken care of. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Cable: At the end of the day, the outcome of this process will ensure that trades training and additional training in Manitoba will be stronger and that even more Manitobans will be access—be able to access the training they need.

Manitoba Public Insurance Ratepayer Services

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): At the end of this process, Honourable Speaker, this minister will go down in history for closing down a 40-plus-year post-secondary institution in this province.

Honourable Speaker, I'd like to ask the minister responsible for MPI: What is he doing to improve the ratepayer service at MPI, as Manitobans have noticed

that it's gotten significantly worse since the NDP have taken power?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation): Unbelievable, Honourable Speaker. The member who sat at the Cabinet table as a minister in the last government sat by while Project Nova went up and up and up, and what did he do? He did nothing; he didn't say a word. He didn't say a word at the Cabinet table. He didn't say a word to Manitobans. He let MPI crumble in front of him, and he didn't say a word.

Now we're repairing the damage. We've got a great CEO. We've got a good, solid board, and we're rebuilding trust with Manitobans. In fact, stats are showing that our customer service is improving year over year.

Member opposite has no leg to stand on.

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

Mr. Ewasko: On December 3, I had my constituents come down to the Manitoba Legislature and meet with the minister. They want to get back to work, as many of them have been victims of accidents or they've had their licences, for whatever reason, taken away. And the minister promised that he would investigate and changes to the services by MPI would get better.

What have they received, Honourable Speaker? No contact from this minister or the department.

So I ask the minister today: Why not?

Mr. Wiebe: It's blatantly false and untrue, Honourable Speaker. The member opposite knows that when he brought individuals to the Legislature to meet and discuss issues, I took the meeting immediately. We have followed up multiple times with those individuals.

Now, if he has new casework to bring to the Legislature, I encourage him: don't bring it to the floor; bring it to my office, and let's get to work because Manitobans need to know that their public insurer is there for them. That's the tone that we've set at the top and throughout the organization. They broke the trust. They put people on strike. They had a revolving door of CEOs. They had a board that was incompetent.

We have repaired the damage, and we're going to continue to do that. We'll do that one customer—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired. *[interjection]*

Order, please. Order, please.

I would ask the honourable minister to withdraw the comments about untrue.

Mr. Wiebe: Withdrawn.

Mr. Ewasko: No rules, Honourable Speaker. It's typical of this minister.

Honourable Speaker, you can't grow the economy if the minister is unwilling to improve the MPI services to help victims of accidents with recovery issues and Manitobans, people, to try to get them—licences back so they can get back to work. I'm disappointed that the minister says one thing and yet does another. Concerned Manitobans are watching today. Today, I am delivering a letter addressed to this minister from my constituents.

Honourable Speaker, he needs to do better for all Manitobans.

Mr. Wiebe: You know—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: You know, there is a lot of work left to do to repair the damage that was caused by the PCs. I'll fully acknowledge that. Manitobans have seen how a government that is callous, that won't listen, that won't take meetings, that won't respond to individuals in a human way or even in a professional way—they've seen what the results are, and that's, I think, where this is coming from.

I'll express to his constituents, every Manitoban: We're happy to work with them, we're happy to resolve individual issues. But, more importantly, we're here to repair the damage, we're here to rebuild our public insurer here in this province, we're here to offer that stability and affordability that Manitobans—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

And I would remind all members that they shouldn't be waving documents around because that's being seen as potentially being a prop and we're not allowed to use props.

North End Sewage Treatment Plant Inquiry into Funding Source

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): We have asked this question repeatedly and still have not received a clear answer. The NEWPCC report makes it clear that without full funding, Winnipeg will hit waste water capacity by 2032, halting growth, restricting housing

and driving up costs for families, and I'll table that report in the House today. Instead of partnering with the City to get this project built and protect affordability, the minister is choosing to threaten penalties.

Will the minister tell Manitobans exactly how much is in this budget for the North End Water Pollution Control Centre?

Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): We recognize that water is so important. It's important ecologically, it's important for our economy and it's important for all Manitobans. And that is exactly why we are going to ensure that NEWPCC stays on track with key milestones that we can enforce to get it, in fact, built, unlike members opposite.

It's also why we brought in nutrient targets as well as legislation to get tough on polluters. It is also why we took immediate action on the megadairies project in North Dakota. Unlike members opposite, we care about water and are willing to do the work each and every day.

Mr. King: We know the minister, and likely other ministers, are receiving critical emails about extending the phosphorus exemption for the city. The solution to this problem is not extensions or penalties. It is simple: fund the NEWPCC properly so it can be completed. Without it, sewer rates could rise over \$1,000 per household and housing developments will stall.

So I will ask again: Which department will be funding NEWPCC?

MLA Moyes: We care about water. It's the bottom line, and that is why we're taking a comprehensive approach to our lakes and to our rivers. And it's also why we are protecting more of nature, including the pristine nature of the Seal River watershed. More to come on that.

What was the record of the PCs over their seven and a half years in office? They protected simply 0.05 per cent of nature. That is absolutely shameful.

* (14:20)

Manitobans expect better, and we are going to continue to do the good work every single day.

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

Mr. King: Honourable Speaker, Manitobans deserve much clearer answers on the future of the Red River, Lake Winnipeg and all downstream bodies of water.

If this government is finally going to fund NEWPCC—and I have my doubts—where is the money coming from? They just cut funding to municipalities by \$5.6 million, so there's no room there. The water stewardship board has been cut by \$648,000. Same story.

Will the minister be transparent today and tell Manitobans exactly the—where the money is coming from?

MLA Moyes: Honourable Speaker, where was this urgency and determination from the PCs when they were in office?

It simply wasn't there. *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Moyes: Just this morning, I met with the good people of Portage la Prairie and they were talking about their water plans. And because the members opposite didn't get the job done on that aspect or on NEWPCC, we are going to be different. We are going to partner with municipalities across our great province to ensure these projects can come to fruition.

Investment in Education New Schools for Manitoba

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson): Honourable Speaker, in 2025 we made the commitment to build, build, build our great province of Manitoba.

Honourable Speaker, it is 2026 and our government is making historic—some may say groundbreaking—investments for students, therefore—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Dela Cruz: —the future of our province. We have already hired more than 1,600 new educators, ensuring that students receive the attention and support that they need to succeed. At the same time, we are making significant investments to build new schools and communities across Manitoba.

Can our incredible, groundbreaking Education Minister tell this House about the new schools under our NDP government?

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Thank you to the member for Radisson for the best question of the day.

Our government is so proud to be building schools right across Manitoba. New schools, Honourable Speaker, are coming to Meadowlands, they are coming to Devonshire Park, to Prairie Pointe, to

Brandon, to Ste. Anne and to many other communities across our great province.

And what's more, Honourable Speaker, every single school we build will have a brand new play structure for the healthy kids and healthy communities that we're supporting.

And, Honourable Speaker, every single one of those schools is going to come with affordable, high quality, \$10-a-day child-care spaces to support the families and the local economies that rely on us. That is just one of the ways that our government is investing in Manitoba's future, giving the next generation the space and the—

The Speaker: Member's time is up.

Affordability Measures for Manitobans Concern Regarding Government's Approach

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Well, Honourable Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) is back from Ottawa. And while Manitobans are still struggling to afford everyday life, this Premier is talking about pie-in-the-sky partnerships. Instead of dealing with real relief solutions, this government is doubling down on policies that raise costs and limit opportunity.

We've put forward a clear plan raising the basic personal tax exemption to \$30,000 so Manitobans can keep much more of their own money.

Why is this Premier choosing bigger government and higher costs instead of real affordability relief for Manitobans?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Honourable Speaker, this team is doing the work every single day of lowering costs for Manitobans.

Our recent budget, of course, brought in a lift to the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit, free child care for the lowest income families in Manitoba. We're taking the PST off all food in the grocery store and, of course, free transit for kids when they—to get them to school.

We know for years, the members opposite failed to take action in making life more affordable. In fact, they did the opposite. They raised costs for renters, they raised costs for Manitobans across the province with their hydro rate hikes that they did at the Cabinet table. Manitobans know they can't trust that team, but they do know that they can trust this team to work every day to support them to lower their costs.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for La Vérendrye, on a supplementary question.

Manitoba Jobs Agreement Impact on Competition and Jobs

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Honourable Speaker, what we hear now is the Premier (Mr. Kinew) telling Manitobans they should all join a union while forcing through the Manitoba jobs agreement.

And the industry says this is going to increase costs, reducing competition and shutting out 88 per cent of the workforce.

And this morning, we heard another stat from the Agriculture Minister, and I quote: This government is providing unemployment opportunities for Manitobans, more important now than ever.

At a time when we should be making Manitoba more competitive, this government is doing the exact opposite.

Why is this Premier pushing policies that make it more expensive to build, invest and create jobs right here in Manitoba?

Hon. Mintu Sandhu (Minister of Public Service Delivery): We are building Manitoba, Honourable Speaker. We are making sure Manitoban workers are the ones who are building those ones. The Manitoba jobs agreement means good jobs, fair wages, safe work sites and real training opportunity on a major public project.

We are turning construction sites—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Sandhu: —into training sites, Honourable Speaker. We will continue to listen to the workers. Every single person who works on MJA is better off because of MJA.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Supporting Business Investment Request for Streamlined Approval Process

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Honourable Speaker, so that we don't have to increase unemployment opportunities like the Agriculture Minister would like us to see, we should follow other provinces in streamlining the approvals process through a single desk model, giving investors—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Narth: —clear timelines and one point of contact.

Manitoba still has a maze of departments, delays and uncertainty. The result is predictable: delayed projects, lost investment and fewer jobs for Manitobans.

Why is this Premier making it harder to invest in Manitoba when other provinces are rolling out the red carpet?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Deputy Premier): Honourable Speaker, I don't know if the member for La Vérendrye hasn't been paying attention, but our Premier secured a phenomenal, historic agreement with Prime Minister Carney this week for the Port of Churchill.

And, Honourable Speaker, Manitoba is leading the country in creating jobs, creating more jobs than any other jurisdiction in this country. We are taking a one Manitoba approach.

It's a shame that, on that side of the House, they're focused on division. They're focused on taking us backwards, not forwards. On this side of the House, we're focused on Manitobans first, foremost and always.

Teacher Professional Conduct Commissioner Minister's Comments—Request for Response

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): So, on this side of the House, we believe in student safety in this great province of Manitoba and we also believe in a full-time commissioner for the teacher registry.

It's unfortunate that the Education Minister, instead of standing up and apologizing for her boss, the Premier of Manitoba, she decides to double down and says, and I quote, dealing with a commissioner that needs to be dealt with. End quote. That's what she did.

I'm giving her one more opportunity. Stand up, put it on the record that she apologizes to the fact that the Premier went against an order-in-council, which is a government-produced document.

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I certainly very much look forward to working with our new interim commissioner that was appointed. The hunt is under way for the permanent commissioner who I also very much looking forward to working with.

Because that's what—on this side of the House, as our Deputy Premier has so eloquently articulated, what we're focused on, on this side of the House, is working for Manitobans, producing results for students and for families.

And that's why we know, on this side of the House, that the best investment we can make is in the next generation of young learners.

So, after years of cuts to classrooms, our government has increased school funding above the rate of inflation for a third year in a row with a 3.5 cent–3.5 per cent increase to school funding this year, Honourable Speaker. We're funding public education–

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

* (14:30)

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

Nature and Characterization of Departure

Mr. Ewasko: So I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. David Yeo on his appointment as the interim commissioner. Mr. Yeo has a long, dedicated track record of serving Manitobans within the education sector, and so I would like to personally thank David for his years of work in the Education Department and congratulations on him being appointed as the new commissioner.

So I would like to ask the Education Minister–she's had multiple questions–stand up, please, and apologize for the fact that the Education Minister said that the commissioner resigned; the Premier (Mr. Kinew) said that she was fired.

We know the truth. I'd like her to put it on the record. Apologize to Manitobans, students, parents and guardians.

MLA Schmidt: I'm glad to hear that members opposite agree that today, in Manitoba, we have an excellent interim commissioner in David Yeo. I couldn't agree more. Manitoba students are safer today, thanks to the leadership of this government and thanks to our interim commissioner, so we thank him very much.

Again, these are–our government is focused on serving kids. That's one of the reasons that one of the first things we did under the leadership of the great Nello Altomare was bring in a \$30-million universal school nutrition program to make sure that every kid could come to school.

We made some further investments, Honourable Speaker. Just this year, we also invested \$3 million to the Child Nutrition Council, thanks to the leadership of the best Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations (Mr. Simard) in the country–

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Status of Interim Contract

Mr. Ewasko: So, Honourable Speaker, yet once again, the minister will not take accountability. She wants to point fingers not only at Mrs. Taillefer, but also to the Department of Education. It's unfortunate, and it's unbecoming of a Minister of Education here in this province.

So I'm going to ask the Education Minister: So the contract that she had signed with Mrs. Taillefer which goes from April 13 to July 13, 2026, for the transition, is that still valid, or, what is happening? Manitobans, students, parents and guardians would like to know, Honourable Speaker.

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Deputy Premier): Honourable Speaker, our Minister of Education is doing a phenomenal job and will continue to do a phenomenal job. We have full faith in her.

But I want to take a moment. I'm really disappointed to see that throughout this entire question period, none of the PC MLAs, none of the critics have stood up and asked questions highlighting the fact that we've got a delegation from Portage la Prairie here, incredible representation here, that should be acknowledged, that should be thanked for what they do.

And I just want to reassure all of the representatives here from Portage la Prairie, including Mayor Knox, that we are going to continue to work with you to make sure that your constituents and those in surrounding communities have their needs met.

Thank you for meeting with our ministers. Let's keep working together to make Manitoba better.

The Speaker: The–*[interjection]*

Order, please. Order.

The time for oral questions has expired. *[interjection]*

Order.

Petitions?

GRIEVANCES

Delay in the Opening of the Portage Regional Health Centre

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, I'm bringing forward a grievance regarding health care in Manitoba, in specifically in my constituency of Portage la Prairie.

In 2019, the Portage hospital foundation, upon hearing from hospital staff about deteriorating conditions at the existing Portage District General Hospital, funded a structural and functional assessment by engineering and architectural specialists. That study indicated the hospital's structure was outdated and did not meet today's standards, necessitating replacement.

This hospital is not just old; it is literally falling apart. It is a hazardous workplace for staff, who have been caring for patients in a building that has black mold, is infested with mice and cockroaches and has a leaking roof in the OR.

Thankfully, in 2021, former premier Brian Pallister announced that a new hospital would be constructed in Portage la Prairie, and on January 14, 2026, three months ago, it was announced that construction of the Portage regional health facility was completed. The two-storey building, at 275,000 square feet, houses 114 acute-care beds. That move into—the move into the new facility was scheduled for fall of 2026.

Mayor Sharilyn Knox noted that specialized services that once required a trip to Winnipeg will now be available right here in our community, stating, and I quote: This hospital is for the whole region. It's about making sure people can get the care they need closer to home, and that's something worth celebrating.

Unfortunately, the celebration is over before it's even begun. The government, last week, informed staff at Portage District General Hospital that the opening date of the new Portage regional health-care facility would be pushed back by six months to next April. No reasonable explanation was given for this delay and, in fact, the government seems confused about the reasoning itself. Initially, staff were told that more time was required for training and systems implementation. Not long after, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and the minister insisted, no, the delay is due to staffing shortage.

So what is it? Well, a short—a staffing shortage can only be blamed on the current government's poor planning. There is no truth to the suggestion that the staff needed more training time. The on-time completion of the building ensured that the staff would have eight months to train for the new systems and be 100 per cent ready by moving date in October.

The announcements that the opening would be delayed by six months came as a complete shock to staff who have been working in unsafe, unsanitary conditions for far too long. They dedicated health-care—the dedicated—these dedicated health providers have

been holding on by a thread, counting the days until they could move into the new facility.

I think we can all agree that poor working conditions are counterintuitive to staff recruitment and retention, which is something the NDP have insisted they care about over their two and a half years in government. And yet, instead of owning up to the fact that their lack of foresight and planning is the reason this unacceptable delay, the NDP are still trying to blame the former PC government without whom this facility would never exist.

I also want to point out today that the—I also want to point out today that a number of people aren't in the Chamber here with us today. Over the past number of days—

The Speaker: Order, please.

You cannot indicate whether members are present or absent, so I'd ask the member to apologize for that.

An Honourable Member: My apologies.

The Speaker: Thank you.

MLA Bereza: Over the past number of days, I've spoken to countless staff from the Portage hospital, and their shock and disappointment has been nothing short of heartbreaking. Many tears have been shed by doctors, nurses, yes, but also by lab techs, receptionists, health-care aides, cleaning staff; all are equally upset and discouraged. These are human beings who are feeling betrayed, unheard and unsafe.

It truly speaks to the utter disconnectedness of this government that they are—either completely failed to consider how this would affect staff already suffering burnout from spending long hours under terrible working conditions, or they just don't care.

But it's not just about the staff; let's talk about the patient safety and care. In Portage la Prairie, we have a brand new, state-of-the-art health-care facility ready to open this October. It's been completed and the keys handed over to the government to allow adequate time to work through any deficiencies for staff training and recruitment. There are 114 brand new beds waiting for patients.

* (14:40)

Our existing hospital, on the other hand, is literally falling apart at the seams. This means the patient care is suffering. Given the imminent opening of the new facility, things that need replacing in the old facility are not being invested in, like bathtubs. Currently, one floor of the hospital has a broken bathtub, meaning

patients who are under care cannot have a bath. It's simply incomprehensible that the Minister of Health and the Premier (Mr. Kinew) of Manitoba believe it is acceptable to house sick patients in a facility where their hygienic needs cannot be met.

The community and surrounding area of Portage la Prairie also deserves better from this government. The generosity of our citizens have made it possible for the Portage district hospital foundation to pledge \$5 million towards an MRI at the new facility. Yet the—this NDP government has thumbed the nose at every time they offer.

The foundation is also the steward of \$200,000 donated by the local chapter of the Pink Ladies ride for cure, raised specifically for breast cancer diagnosis and prevention. Yet this new facility includes neither an MRI machine or a mammography machine. This equipment can ensure earlier diagnosis and treatment and saves lives, yet the government stubbornly refuses to accept a gift of \$5 million.

That's correct, Manitobans: a gift of \$5 million to install an MRI that will shorten the ridiculously long and growing wait-list.

The fact is there's absolutely no justification for delay in opening the Portage regional health-care facility scheduled in October. The reason for the delays seem obvious; the government has bungled its finances so badly that there's simply no money in the budget to make the transition. It's no coincidence that the opening has been pushed to April after the fiscal year-end.

But Manitobans are tiring of the spin, the NDP spin, is putting on health-care messaging: talking about net-new nurses and fixing health care, yet letting a brand new facility sit unused. The Premier has publicly stated his government inherited the Portage regional health-care facility, and it's clear this facility would not exist without the foresight of the former PC government led by Brian Pallister. It seems obvious that the government doesn't care about citizens in my constituency.

But what is truly frightening is this government seems oblivious to the fact that better health care in Portage la Prairie will alleviate pressure on the whole system. A new larger hospital will mean fewer patients travelling to HSC, St. Boniface. Diagnostic equipment in Portage la Prairie will reduce pressure on places like Winnipeg, Dauphin and Boundary Trails.

In—the NDP likes to use our seven and a half years as the reason they're failing to make progress in health

care and yet cannot explain why, over the past two and a half years they've been in government, they have done nothing to help. And in the end, a brand new hospital continues to sit empty because of this NDP government.

I'm sorry that this health-care system—this health-care facility sits empty. *[interjection]*

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

I made a small error earlier. When the member stood to apologize, I failed to recognize him again, but I would just like the record to actually show that he did in fact apologize.

No further grievances? Then orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Can you please call the start of Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: It's been announced that the House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

The honourable Deputy Speaker will take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

HOUSING, ADDICTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS

* (15:10)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness. Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Yesterday, the minister spoke at length about the importance of being honest with Manitobans about drug consumption sites and spent much of her time making partisan attacks at former PC ministers. This was odd, since the same minister repeated a line she had used for years that—but that she knows is not accurate.

I want to give the minister a chance to retract her statement, and I table an article for the minister's education, since she keeps erroneously repeating that no one has died at a consumption site.

Will the minister retract her erroneous statement when presented with hard evidence, and I quote the headline: police investigation fatal overdose at a supervised drug consumption facility in London, Ontario?

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): So I don't know the circumstances under this case, and we have to go by what Health Canada tells us.

So what I will share with that member is the website to Health Canada, which is health info base dot Canada. So, again, health-infobase.canada.ca, and on their site is information from March 2020 to November 2025.

* (15:20)

And this article was from 2024, which is inclusive of these stats. So, there was zero fatal overdoses in any supervised consumption site in all of Canada according to this database, which is Canada's database. So, that member can go and look on their database.

What I am happy to say is, Manitoba is now included on this database, something when I was in opposition, strongly advocated for. We wanted to be transparent and ensure that, you know, Manitobans knew what the numbers were in terms of how many overdoses were happening in Manitoba, how many fatal overdoses and ensuring that we were transparent with Manitobans.

We were one of the only provinces that weren't included on the map in terms of, you know, representation and being transparent. And, again, I just want to preface that these are someone's loved ones, that these are people that are struggling with substance use disorders and that these are, you know, Canadians. And we have an obligation as a government to provide services, and that's exactly what we're doing.

We came into government from a failed former government who didn't take a harm reduction approach. They took one approach, which was pull your bootstraps up and just figure out yourself, and we're not taking that approach.

We're taking a four-pillared approach, which includes a harm reduction approach so we can lead people to a path of recovery. You can't lead people to a path of recovery if they're not alive. You know, it was very nice to see Bruce Oake in the gallery today.

He does a lot of educating, which is a part of our pillars as well.

If you go to one of their graduations, you get to see, you know, many jerseys hanging from the ceiling. And they continue to work with many of the men that have graduated from their program, many who come back and, you know, tell their stories and work with the folks that have—or that are graduating.

And it's transformal—transformative. Like, this is work that is generational and they're stopping a cycle. And it's because of the work of, you know, someone that's taken something that's been very tragic in their own life and turned it into helping others.

Our other pillar is, of course, enforcement. We've been working with our amazing Justice Minister to ensure that we are getting the drugs off of the street and being tough on crime and the proceeds of crime. We know we can't do that alone. We know that we have to have, you know, citizens also calling in and letting us know what's happening there on the streets and, if they know about it, that they're also helping to get those toxic drugs off the street as well.

So, you know, I also want to shout-out our Winnipeg Police Service and our RCMP, who are on the front lines of that, and even our community resource officers that are in our First Nations communities that are doing that work as well. There's a lot of members that are in First Nations that have checkpoints set up to, you know, ensure drugs aren't coming in their community because they want to keep their community members safe. They want to keep these drugs from coming into their communities. So, I want to uplift all of those communities that are doing that heavy lifting for so many years in the absence of a government that—a failed former government who weren't listening.

But they now have a government who is, you know, putting some investments in and helping to support them and investing in community resource officers to really help support the work that they're doing and that we're going to continue to do.

And again, I want to uplift, you know, Bruce Oake and the work that they do there because they do such amazing work, like so many of our other organizations on the front lines of this.

MLA Bereza: I want to let the committee know that I've had the opportunity to attend a number of graduation ceremonies at the Bruce Oake centre and to hear the amount of people that have gone through the program. They might have gone through the

four-month program and it might not have always done what they wanted them to do. They were more than welcome to come back.

I know in—you know, we should thank Scott for his advocacy and his family's advocacy for the amount of work that he has put into treatment. And, you know, we need many more treatment facilities like the Bruce and Anne Oake centre.

But we know the minister was aware of this incident that we were talking about with the death, and others, because it was included in the Aboriginal Health and Wellness submission to the federal government for the minister's own drug injection site. Quoting from those official policies in 2024: Canada experienced its first death at an SCS in Toronto.

Should the minister get her way and subject the north Logan community to a drug site, the minister and her allies have a plan to deal with the inevitable deaths. That plan is to hide them, lie about them and keep it from the public, all for the, quote, preservation and growth of harm reduction movement at large.

The plan is to put the agenda first and to hell with the consequences. The plan isn't treatment; it's propaganda. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) admitted his priority for drug injection site was like an Apple store: all politics and no substance.

When will the—

The Chairperson: Order.

So I'd like to remind the member—oh—the—even if we're quoting, all of the regulations and rules around using folks' personal names or unparliamentary language still applies, so we just would omit that type of word when we're quoting.

MLA Bereza: When will the minister budgeted—when the minister budgeted millions of dollars for Aboriginal Health and Wellness injection site, was she aware of this policy, and is she still comfortable going ahead with it now that the public knows she intentionally misled them about the real stats on these sites?

The Chairperson: So, just like in the Chamber, using language such as intentionally misleading implies a lie, so we're going to need the member to retract that statement or withdraw it.

An Honourable Member: I withdraw that statement.

The Chairperson: I have to recognize you first.

The member for Portage la Prairie.

MLA Bereza: I withdraw that statement.

Ms. Smith: Again, I will preface that member to go back to that website to look at that website. That is the accurate information coming out of all of the supervised consumption sites right across Canada.

And, again, that member continues to use stigmatizing language: drug injection site. I can assure that member that services beyond injection will be provided to whoever walks through that door, whether it's injection or consumption.

And, again, it's about leading people to, you know, the right kinds of care, something that under members opposite, they did not do. We saw people get deeper into their addictions; we saw people, encampments, rise; we saw housing be sold under the former failed government and people having to stay up under survival mode, under—you know, and get deeper into addictions because of the aftermath of what we saw under the former government.

So I want to go to something our Premier said. And our Premier is right. We need to make sure that when someone walks through, you know, into the supervised consumption site, that they have many people serving them, that whether it's primary health care, whether it's a mental health worker, whether it's—you know, they need to have someone supervising them so that they don't overdose and lose their life, that those services are going to be there, that there's a primary health-care provider there.

This is going to be a help-led model, that the safety and security of Manitobans is at the forefront of all of the work that they're—we're going to be doing at the supervised consumption site.

* (15:30)

And that member knows. That member was at some of the consultations, and that member had an opportunity to sit at the table from the community consultation that was held by the community. He was invited to, you know, participate but chose not to. I'm not sure why.

But, you know, I attended; I participated, as many others did, including the Winnipeg Police Service, who is a community partner and is working alongside because they know the value that a supervised consumption site is going to have in supporting and meeting people where they're at. Because right now, it's unsupervised. We're seeing people, you know, using in parks, in playgrounds, in businesses.

And Manitobans don't want to see that; Manitobans want to see people get the medical care that they need. They want to see people not using unsupervised but being in a place where it's medically staffed and building relationships so that when they are ready, they can get onto a path of recovery, and that was not happening under the former government.

We're going to continue to put services into the system that support and meet people where they're at. We opened up the first Indigenous RAAM clinic, which is led by Aboriginal Health and Wellness who have decades of experience in the community providing health care.

We're supporting mobile overdose prevention work that, I might add, you know, the member opposite continued to bring up that in the Chamber about them being parked at Logan and Main Street. Ten people in January overdosed and almost lost their lives at that very place. Those folks are doing life-saving work. Had that mobile overdose prevention site not been there, 10 people would have lost their life. Would that member have been okay with that? I think not.

So, you know, when the member's talking about life-saving work that people are doing on the front lines, we value that work of the government. We're going to continue to work with them, stand beside them, uplift them and ensure that Manitobans get onto a path of recovery. And that's exactly what we are working towards.

In the absence of this, we're working with our service providers, and we're going to ensure that a supervised consumption site gets open here in Manitoba; not a drug injection site, as the member keeps referring to. And his own leader, in Estimates last year, said language matters.

So that member should get on board and start using the proper language like everybody uses right across our country, because it isn't just a drug injection site; it is a supervised consumption site where people are not only using injectables but they are using other substances under a supervised medical model so people can get access to supports that they need.

MLA Bereza: So I just want to clarify a couple things here regarding the consultative event that went on at Pampanga Restaurant: that Norbert—and I apologize, I can't remember his last name—asked me not to sit at the table because the minister was there and he didn't want a bunch of back and forth.

I took his advice, and I did not; I spoke to the media. That was the same meeting where the question

was asked of the Winnipeg Police Service of what the plan was—what the plan was for this drug consumption site—and she said there is no plan.

So I just want to go back to where we were. So, I'm going to—is the minister implying that her application to Health Canada was fraudulent, as I have part of the protocol here.

Again, in 2024 Canada experienced its first death at a SCS in Ontario after 21 years of having sites operational. Please be aware that only paramedics or the coroner can declare an individual dead. This was what I was speaking of.

So, again, I have your website; we have this here. So, does the minister still stand by that there has never been a fatality at a injection site in Canada?

Ms. Smith: So, where to begin with this? I've just—you know, the member opposite—again, I want to tell the member to go to the Health Canada website. You know, zero overdoses in any of the supervised consumption sites.

Aboriginal Health and Wellness, you know, is doing amazing work. They have decades of experience and trusted relationships in the community. They are the ones that are going to be operating the site. And they've done amazing work at, you know, putting together a comprehensive—comprehensive—amazing plan.

And I don't know if that member, you know, has bothered at any of the consultations to pick up that consultation community safety plan and looked at all of the partners that are involved in that and all of the work that's been done bringing those folks to the table and making sure that people are supported, that, you know, if there are issues, that—who is going to respond, and it's going to be a community response.

And that, you know, there's so many people that are going to be helping, supporting and ensuring that people are well supported from a health model, from a policing model; that we're all partners, that we're all sitting at the table, that we're all supporting one another, that we're all collaborating.

I know the former failed government couldn't do that, couldn't get at the table with the municipal government, couldn't get at the table with the federal government, couldn't get at the table with any of the community partners, you know, was always picking fights.

We're not doing that. We're working with—collaboratively with all of our community partners. We're all rowing in the same direction. We all are

working collaboratively because we want the same thing. We want to support people well. We want to ensure that people get the supports and services that they want. Nobody wants to be addicted to substances. It's based in trauma.

And, you know, the former government didn't provide the supports and services that these folks needed, that Manitobans needed. Instead, what did they do? They sold off housing, the basic minimum that Manitobans need. It's—it was unfortunate: one transaction, 365 units gone, took seconds. It's taking us years to play catch-up. But we're listening, and we know that it's not just about putting people in houses; it's about wrapping around the supports. These are folks that need addiction supports, that need mental health supports.

And, you know, for that member to say that the police aren't doing their job, that they aren't doing it well and, like, taking a—attacking them. Like, you fired 55 officers when you were in government. We're hiring those officers back.

* (15:40)

And then you talk about safety in the community. Like, we're playing catch-up, we're trying to figure this out and work with community because of what you've—

The Chairperson: Order.

I just like to remind all members that comments and questions need to go through the Chair.

Thank you.

Ms. Smith: Sorry, I apologize for that. I get very passionate about this, and, you know, it hits close to home, especially in Manitoba because we hear it, we see it, we feel it.

And, you know, we're working with police officers, and when I hear members opposite talk about those on the front line and attacking them—they're doing amazing work. They're doing amazing, amazing work, and we're going to continue to work with Aboriginal Health and Wellness. We're going to continue to work with Main Street Project.

The member yesterday—I don't know how he sleeps—made the remark that we shouldn't be funding Main Street Project. Like, they do amazing work. How many beds would—how many people would be put on the street? How many people would be put on the street, if we were to not fund them? Like, incredible how that member insinuated yesterday.

So I want to go back to one other thing, yesterday. Somebody reached out to me about the language that was used around 'ghettocizing' and calling Manitoba housing projects. That stigmatizes. That, you know, marginalizes people. And that member never apologized for that. So, I—hopefully, that member will apologize today.

MLA Bereza: Okay, the minister is admitting her application is fraudulent. That's good to know. I want to—Shane Sturby-Highfield called a friend and asked for help getting into a RAAM clinic in 2021. And I just want to set the record straight that all the RAAM clinics that have been started here in Manitoba have been started by this PC government.

From there, he went to a detox centre and the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre. It was his third time accessing treatment services.

And I quote: I guess I really had to be ready. I really had to be ready for a life change. End quote. He has been sober since, thankful for the culture of the—the culture of hope at Bruce Oake and sharing his message to others struggling with addiction. And I quote again: Reach out for help. It's never too late. End quote.

The recovery model works. Access to treatment works. Every RAAM clinic open today was initiated by the former PC government. In 17 years, the NDP opened zero clinics. And since taking office again, the minister has opened zero clinics. We have hard evidence that treatment works, that it saves lives and it gives Manitobans their lives and their loved ones back.

In 147 pages of the budget, RAAM clinics aren't mentioned a single time.

Can the minister explain where, in either the budget or her Estimates book funding, is outlined for a new RAAM clinic?

The Chairperson: I'd just like to ask the member if you were quoting from a private or public document.

An Honourable Member: Media report.

The Chairperson: The honourable member for Portage.

MLA Bereza: Sorry. Media report.

Ms. Smith: So, while we were waiting for my staff to find that information, I just wanted to—yesterday, while I was introducing my staff, I failed to introduce one of my staff because I didn't have their information. So, I did briefly introduce them, but I wanted to give you their full CV because they're so amazing.

So Jorge is on the end there, and Jorge is currently working as my special assistant, the role he has held since November of 2024, and he brings multiple years of experience working in the private sector. He spent seven years working with Canadian Pacific Railway as a manager in rail operations and intermodal transportation. Prior to that, he worked in agricultural field, where he spent five years working with international clients in food production and crop inputs. He's also worked for the City of Winnipeg as an executive assistant for a former city councillor. And he has diverse experience, along with his management and logistical background, which serves him well in his current role. He holds a bachelor of science degree with specialization in plant psychology from the University of Manitoba. And he does amazing work in my department.

So I just want to go back to that application, and again, it's Aboriginal Health and Wellness who puts in—who is the applicant of that application. And, again, I want to tell that member to go back to health-infobase.canada.ca for that information: zero overdoses in any of the supervised consumption sites in all of Canada.

I want to go back to Scott Oake and the amazing work that they do and the funding, you know, that we provide to them because we uplift them for the work that they do, the transformative work, which is why we are investing also in the Anne Oake foundation. And we are looking forward to, you know, that opening up so that they can also serve women and their families. We know that that's a huge barrier to women accessing treatment and recovery.

And we take a balanced approach on this side, unlike the failed former government who took one approach, and that was pull up your bootstraps and figure it out. We're meeting people where they're at. We opened up the digital front door—RAAM front door—so people can access services anywhere they are in our province, you know, whether you're in the North or you're in Portage la Prairie, or you're in the south, you can access services. And we want to make sure that people can also get withdrawal management services.

So we provided funding to KIM, so they have a van that they provide health-care services out, and they go into a bunch of First Nation communities. They're in Thompson as well, you know, providing services to folks out there. I remember going to, you know, their unveiling and listening to folks who had already accessed their services and listening to their

stories and their testimonials, and just the incredible life-saving work that they're doing in terms of providing a service to people, a service that wasn't there and that was much needed.

And I think about, you know, those folks that were often not thought of under the former government. And we're a government that's listening. We're putting more services into the system because we want to ensure, no matter what service you need, that that service is there, that there's a no door—no-wrong-door policy, and ensuring that folks are getting the right types of service.

And that member, you know, put—said that we didn't open any RAAM clinics. We opened up the first Indigenous-led RAAM clinic in all of Manitoba, and I want to celebrate that. I want to celebrate Aboriginal Health and Wellness and the work that they've done, because they've done incredible work. And they're a model that is replicative of others across the country because they are moving people along a continuum.

They've helped people get into treatment and recovery. I've visited their site many times, as I have other sites. And, you know, I don't know if the member opposite has ever gone to visit a RAAM clinic, but if he has, great. I've gone out to the one in Brandon as well.

And we're going to continue to support and meet people where they're at, including youth. And I know that member across the way, we're opening up a Huddle in his community so that we can help and support youth and make sure that youth have health care and mental health supports right in their community, something they never did.

MLA Bereza: The minister can't point to a single new RAAM clinic because she hasn't opened a single new RAAM clinic; she just cut the ribbon on our initiative. I want to point out that the RAAM clinic in Portage la Prairie is on 4th Street southeast, just across from the current Portage hospital. I've spent many—much time in the RAAM clinic in Portage la Prairie.

* (15:50)

I also want to extend a welcome to Jorge, a former Aggie and—like myself. So, thank you, welcome.

So, again, I feel that I have to ask this question again because we didn't get an answer and Manitobans deserve an answer on this. So, I'm going to go right from the start again.

Shane Sturby-Highfield called a friend and asked for help getting into a RAAM clinic in 2021. From there he went to a detox centre and the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre. It was his third time assessing—accessing, sorry—treatment services, and I quote: I guess I really had to be ready. I really had to be ready for a life change. End quote.

He has been sober since, thankful for the culture of hope at Bruce Oake and the sharing his message of others struggling with addiction. Another quote: Reach out for help. It is never too late. End of quote.

The recovery model works; access to treatment works. Every RAAM clinic open today was initiated by this—by the former PC government. In 17 years, the NDP opened zero clinics. And since taking office again, the minister has opened zero clinics, except cutting the ribbon on the PC-initiated RAAM clinic.

We have hard evidence that treatment works and that it saves lives and gives Manitobans their lives and their loved ones back. In 147 pages of the budget, RAAM clinics aren't mentioned a single time. Can the minister explain where, in either the budget or the Estimates book, funding is outlined for a new RAAM clinic?

Thank you.

Ms. Smith: Again, I want to correct that member. We opened up the first Indigenous-led RAAM clinic with Aboriginal Health and Wellness. They've been doing amazing work. We are investing \$8.4 million for RAAM, and, you know, we're going to continue to support, and we've expanded a \$1-million expansion in '25-26.

RAAM, you know, I'm happy to say, has capacity because of all of the investments that we've made. Whether that's withdraw management, whether that's opening up, you know, more detox beds, whether that's ensuring that we have withdraw management services, whether that's digital front door, we've made so many investments that the former government did not make. They weren't meeting people where they're at.

And I can tell you Your Way Home has made a huge difference in terms of supporting and meeting people where they're at. Folks that might have gone deeper into their addictions are now being supported in their homes and may not have to go to treatment because they are getting supports in their homes.

And, you know, they feel a sense of hope, something they didn't feel under the former government, living in a tent, undignified, with a former government

that didn't provide any housing; in fact, left boards on—over 2,100 units.

I used to remember driving by 711 Dufferin, where I raised my two young sons as a single mom for part of my life, and being so upset that that's—you know, those units were boarded up when I would see people homeless, in encampments. I would go visit the shelters, and what's wrong with this? Like, what's wrong with the PC government? Why aren't they getting these boards off these units when we have people who are homeless that need these housing units?

And, you know, I was on the other side always advocating to get more housing online, but the former government wouldn't listen. Instead, they were selling off, they were de-investing: 87 per cent de-investment. They were firing staff in Manitoba Housing, they were firing security guards, the very people who kept, you know, the community safe. They were firing tenant service co-ordinators that, you know, helped keep community in the buildings, and they weren't putting maintenance into the buildings.

And yesterday, the member talked about Stephens, you know, and they talked about Oak Tree. We're making significant investments in that member's own backyard, so they should be thankful that our government is investing in their community and right across, you know, Manitoba.

And I want to remind that member that they don't just represent their community; they're the critic for all of Manitoba. So, you know, when they're going back to their caucus and they're sitting at that table, that—when I was the—in opposition, I was always advocating for all of Manitobans as the critic because, you know, housing is needed right across our province, and we know that it's a social determinant of how well people do, which is why we are making sure that we are not only putting people in homes but we are providing the proper supports to them.

And I want to go back to the number of overdoses under the former government. In 2022, there were 459 people—you know, these are someone's loved ones—that overdosed, that lost their lives. You know, here were families that were knocking on that government's door, asking for help, asking for support. There was a report that was given to the former premier, Brian Pallister. And he flippantly just threw it on the ground like it was nothing. And that came from medical experts, people's medical expertise that were put into that report.

And you want to know what else? Like, it was taken out and then that report was rewritten, and then it was submitted. Like, it was hidden in a second report—like, the audacity.

And then we had another minister that said that they went to Vancouver and they went into the supervised consumption site, but turns out that they just walked by and gawked, took some pictures, came back, and then that came out in the media. Like, that's the kind of former government—that's why they're on that side.

MLA Bereza: First thing I want to say is that I wasn't the former critic for Addictions and Homelessness; I'm the current critic for homelessness and addictions. All people in Manitoba—I don't represent just my community or any—I represent all Manitobans, and the Addictions and Homelessness portfolio, I'm trying to give it as much—I am giving it all of my attention. And, again, the minister cut the ribbon on initiatives that started under our government. By the minister's own admission, the most successful part of her Addictions portfolio is a PC initiative. And I want to—you know, the minister mentioned, I believe it was in 2022, 459 overdoses.

I also want to talk about the amount of RAAM clinics that this PC government opened because, again, the only thing that the minister has done is cut the ribbon on our initiatives.

So can the minister answer why in two and a half years, she hasn't allocated a single cent for a new RAAM clinic? And if there is, where is that new RAAM clinic today?

Ms. Smith: That member is taking credit for work that is done by Aboriginal Health and Wellness. That is the credit of the work that they are doing to move people into treatment and recovery. Aboriginal Health and Wellness is the one that is running the RAAM clinic.

We, as government, will never take, you know, glory for the work that front-line organizations are doing; that is their work. So, for that member to, you know, try to pipe themselves up, lift themselves up, say it's our government that did this, our government—and did that—we'll always take credit for making investments, absolutely. But they are on the front lines doing the work. So, I'm going to give them credit for the work that they're doing.

And, yes, we came in and we helped support and, you know, get that through the line. But I want to remind members opposite that they said they were

going to do this, they said they were going to do that in their last—just before the election. You know, they were starting to make investments. They were desperate. They were so desperate they were making all of these, you know, promises to Manitobans that they didn't even have the money to pay for them. They didn't know how they were going to pay for them.

* (16:00)

And I want to remind Manitobans that, like, no one can believe what members opposite say. Like, they have a leader who lied—oh, sorry. I withdraw that. I withdraw that comment.

They have a leader who said they said something and, you know, later was shown to say—shown by the media and in video that it was—in fact, they said it. And that member across the way sits beside them and still, you know, chooses to support them.

So, what I will say is, in 2023, there were 568 Manitobans who lost their lives. And we need to focus on, you know, supporting and uplifting and making sure that investments are being made, and we are doing that work. We're going to continue to do that work.

The Auditor General, in 2023, reported that the former government turned away over 1,200 people from RAAM clinics. In one single year, 1,200 people. In 2023, their redirects from RAAM clinics were approximately 70 per cent.

You know how much that is down now, under our government and the work that we've been doing in consultation and in collaboration and because we're listening and making investments? We're—because we're listening to communities and working in collaboration and working with community organizations and on the front lines and listening to what is needed and filling the gaps that should have been filled under the former failed government? Twenty-eight per cent—28 per cent. That's something to be celebrated.

And you know why we're celebrating? We're celebrating the work of the organizations on the front lines who have brought that number down. They brought that number down. Their work has brought that number down, not our government. It's our investments, yes, that they've told us that need to happen. Because they're on the front lines that are telling us that these—there's gaps.

We're not doing the work—we're not on the front lines doing the work, so we're not going to take credit for it. But we will ensure that if we have the funds and

we're going to be fiscally responsible about doing that, that we will make the investments, you know, unlike members opposite who wouldn't make those investments. You know, we're going to continue to support Manitobans and ensure that the supports are there.

And, you know, these are somebody's loved ones. We can't, you know, take our foot off the pedal. We can't continue to pat ourselves on the back like the former government did and say, just pull your bootstraps up and figure it out.

It needs to have a balanced approach, which, like I said, includes harm reduction. You can't lead people to recovery if they're not alive. You can't lead people to Bruce Oake if they're not alive. Education—Bruce Oake is educating people. He's doing it the right way. He's supporting and meeting people where they're at.

And we're also doing enforcement, working on getting the drugs off the streets. So, I invite members opposite to get on board.

MLA Bereza: Why does this member—or, why does this minister think I've been advocating for constituents that she has refused to? I remind her, she wouldn't meet with the Point Douglas community until we brought them into the Legislature. This is shameful.

End Manitoba—end homeless Winnipeg says there are 8,248 people using shelters, temporary spaces or living on the streets as of the end of March. End Homelessness says the numbers of people entering homelessness is outpacing those able to secure housing, with 104 newly homeless people in February and March. When will this change? How will this change?

Again, working with people in the Point Douglas area over and over and over, and I will—we will continue to do that. We worked with Aboriginal Health and Wellness on the RAAM clinics. We didn't just open—or, we didn't just cut the ribbon on one.

I think the member—the minister just answered her own question, saying that 1,200 people have been turned down at RAAM clinics. Does that not mean that we need more treatment centres there? I don't see anything out there at this time. And, again, why? Why is that not happening? Why is this minister not meeting with the people of Point Douglas?

The last time the Premier (Mr. Kinew) met with the people from Point Douglas, they come into our office after crying. The people of Point Douglas are trying to make a difference in their community, and this minister wants to put a drug injection site across

from a business called Pampanga. The family from Pampanga come in to the minister's office, and what did the minister offer them? An application for a \$2,500 security rebate. Is that not saying, you're going to have trouble in your area, but here's a \$2,500 rebate?

How? How is that fair to the people of Point Douglas?

Ms. Smith: I don't know if that member is not listening to the answers that I'm providing, but under their former government, the Auditor General in 2023 reported that their government turned away 1,200 people from RAAM clinics in a single year.

Under our government, and working collaboratively with RAAM folks and the clinics right across our great province, this has come down to approximately 28 per cent.

So, again, from 70 per cent to 28 per cent, because of the investments that we are making, because we are listening to those on the front lines that are telling us this is where investments need to be made. It's making a difference.

And it's not just about, you know, investing in RAAM clinics, as I've said. The PCs forgot about folks in the North, they forgot about folks in the south, they forgot about rural folks. Like, they left a whole population of people out. They were about, just pull your bootstraps up, figure it out.

And people can't get to treatment and recovery if they're not alive, and we need to ensure that there's a whole, you know, suite of services for people, ensuring that there's someone there that's providing care, compassion and support. And not everybody's at that point where they are willing to go into treatment. Today might not be the day, but if they have someone that they're building a relationship with that maybe tomorrow is.

So, I want to go back to language again. That member keeps using drug injection sites. Again, we're providing, you know, more than injection; we are providing if someone is coming in and doing inhalants or ingestibles. We want to ensure that we are keeping people alive. It's about providing a medical supervised consumption so people can, if they're—you know, if they need that support, that support is there.

And, again, Aboriginal Health and Wellness, they are all medically—they come from a medical background; they operate the RAAM clinic at Neeginan Centre, which is the Aboriginal Centre. That member

is more than welcome; I'm sure they would welcome him there. It's at Higgins and Main. They also have a primary health clinic that's right beside it. So, many people right across Manitoba go there, whether they live in the south, whether live in north, east. Like, people go there from all across Winnipeg.

And, you know, again, like, addictions touches everyone, regardless of your socioeconomic background, regardless of your gender, regardless of your race. Like, it touches everyone, so I want to remind that member that, like, we have to ensure that we are not stigmatizing and that we are ensuring that people are getting the supports that they need and that there are—we are taking a balanced approach.

* (16:10)

Again, you can't lead people to recovery if they're not alive, and right now, people are using unsupervised. They're using in our school grounds, they're using in our playgrounds, they're using in our businesses and people don't want that. People want to see someone going into somewhere to get access to supports with medically trained staff and on to a path of recovery, and they're not going to do that if there isn't the supports there.

I want to go back to, you know, meeting with Point Douglas folks. My door is always open; my phone is always on. I am always accessible to anyone and everyone. My community knows that; Manitobans know that. I've never, ever not had my door open to anyone.

So I've met with those folks multiple times. I've had how many consultations? When they had community consultations, I showed up every single time. Can I say that they were easy? Nothing's ever easy, right? This job isn't easy, but we show up each and every day because we want to make Manitoba a better place for everyone and we're here to serve everyone. That includes people who are, you know, struggling with substance abuse.

Nobody wants to be addicted to substances. It's based in trauma and we have to ensure that we are serving all Manitobans, including those. And that member keeps stigmatizing and leaving those folks out and I wish that member would start to talk about what other supports and how we can work together to ensure that we are leading people to those supports.

MLA Bereza: I will cede the next question to the member from Spruce Woods.

Mrs. Colleen Robbins (Spruce Woods): I would like to talk about your housing situations and moving addictions, homeless—I'm not sure—people into senior housing in our small communities in rural Manitoba. I've been told our 55+ is no longer a 55+ senior home, for—it was for disabilities, senior people.

Now we have many addicted people in their 20s, 30s living in this home. The seniors are so scared. One incident: They were running up and down the hall, young gentleman asking for sex from any of them, fully naked.

This has never—my grandmother lived in these homes for years and it was a beautiful home—beautiful. It is no longer that in Souris, and I've had several family members of these residents that are living in the house, I've had talks with counsellors and whatsoever.

I'd like to know when this policy changed and why they are being sent out into these safe place for seniors?

* (16:20)

Ms. Smith: So, first of all, I just want to let the member know that safety and security is our No. 1 priority. I know the member wasn't—well, yesterday—I know I can't say if he were present or not—but yesterday, I talked a lot about safety and security in our buildings, and when we came into government, the state of our buildings and the state of security and how we've reinstated and really worked hard to turn our—turn the ecosystem of our buildings around and reinstate once what was there in terms of community and helping people come out of their building—or, their units.

And, certainly, if that member does have casework, we would certainly, you know, like to meet, and my department is more than willing to hear that and figure out how we can address that. We haven't got any casework to date on what that member has brought forward, so I asked my team to look into—yes, that we know of—to look whether we've received anything into our office around Souris.

Under the previous government, what I will say is that buildings that were 55+ were—that policy was changed under the former government to allow people who were under 55 to be tenanted in those buildings. We have since started turning that back to 55+ buildings because we've heard loud and clear from, you know, folks who are living in our buildings that are 55+ and older that they want to have a seniors building back.

So we've started to do that work. We're probably, I don't know, a third of a way turning our buildings back maybe even halfway at this point. But, certainly, it's been a lot of work for our department to ensure that people that weren't 55+ had somewhere that they wanted, a desirable location, to move to, and seniors are, you know, a priority for us to ensure that they have a safe place to live, that they have an affordable place to live.

And we know that a lot of them are on a fixed income and that they have someone that's their loved one that wants to ensure that they are, you know, taken care of and they can age in place, and that's certainly something our government is well aware of and is a priority for us. So, we're ensuring that we, you know, have housing dedicated just for our seniors.

So if that member wants to, you know, after here, let us know about that casework, we will certainly look into that and do that work.

But, again, I want to go back to the state of housing when we took over and going into—you know, I think about the Kennedy strip, and we're going to be doing some—there's going to be an announcement in the next month on some—just some things that are coming out of the incredible work that's been done in that strip.

And I remember visiting, you know, many of our buildings and just seeing the state of it, and I felt like I was—I couldn't believe the state of it. I went into one suite and then there was a hole into the next suite and a hole into the next suite, and people were living in there. And the former government, you know, were allowing people to do suite takeovers. And, you know, these families were still living there, and they didn't have any recourse.

And when we came in, we changed that around. We hired back security guards. We put in a monitoring system so that we can monitor all our buildings. And we have 24-hour—a line that folks can call and there will be a response, and we can also provide you with that number, as well, for those folks.

We did a lot of upgrades and maintenance in our building because people like to take pride in their housing. We did a lot of that work. We hired tenant service co-ordinators to really change the ecosystems so that we were building community, rather than folks being afraid to come out of their suites. And we did a lot of upgrades and, you know, we're continuing to work with community.

The Chairperson: The member for Portage.

MLA Bereza: Thank you, I'll—

The Chairperson: My apologies—okay, my apologies. *[interjection]*

Sorry, I have to re-recognize you because I wasn't sure which member.

So the member for Portage la Prairie.

MLA Bereza: I just want to talk about the great work that was done. You know, when we talk about Manitoba Housing units, we—when we talk about security there, I can talk about Oak Tree Towers in Portage la Prairie and what those people went through there.

But the other thing was—is where they were most frustrated was there was a security firm there; then there was a security firm gone. Then there was a security firm there; then they were gone. These people didn't know if the security was going to be there 24 hours a day, if it was going to be 12 hours a day. And even the security firms, which I spoke to myself, they didn't know from week to week, from month to month, if they were going to be there.

So, one of the questions, again, I'd like to ask the minister is: Is the security now that is in the Manitoba Housing units, is that full-time now, and will the minister come forward that it was because of the initiative and the work that we did for all—the PC government—for all these—all the people that were living in the Manitoba Housing units?

The minister talked about schools. Aboriginal Health and Wellness application including—included a plan to hang posters up in schools, advertising the drug injection site. Is this still the government policy? And the reason I ask that is, from the consultative process that we were at, the question was asked was: Are people going to be asked for ID that come to the drug consumption site?

The answer was, at that time, was we are going to be—you know, we need to develop a relationship with people first. So, we will ask people for their ID; if they don't have their ID, that'll be okay. It's part of that relationship building.

So my question is: How do you tell if a kid is 15 years old, 18 years old, 12 years old or 20 years old? And if we are not asking for ID—so has this policy been changed? Will—the safe consumption site, will it be asking for ID of everyone that comes through the door, and if someone does not have ID, will they be allowed in the door? And how will this government plan to make sure that they are not enabling kids that

are under 18 years old to access a drug consumption site?

* (16:30)

Ms. Smith: I will go back to, you know, remind that member that he does represent all of Manitoba, and he keeps referring back to his constituency and the housing there, and, again, I want to remind that member that there's been deep investments because of this government.

And members on the other side, when they were in government, 87 per cent slash in maintenance budget—87 per cent—boards up on thousands of Manitoba Housing units thanks to their failed government. Our government took those boards off of over 2,100 units. We are making investments to bring buildings up to code, and I want to remind that member: fire life safety, exterior, interior, making sure that there's cameras, swipe cards, doors that actually work.

Under that former government those members at Oak Tree Towers were asking for those investments since 2021. They were in government then; why didn't they do it? They didn't do nothing. They de-invested, they fired staff, they fired security guards. They didn't put money into any of these buildings, and they have the audacity to come here and talk about their good work? I want to remember—remind members opposite that they didn't build one single unit of social housing. They're talking about the number of people who don't have housing today; that's because of the work that members opposite did: no work, zero work.

You didn't provide housing to Manitobans. You put Manitobans in the street: 385 units in one transaction—

The Chairperson: Just a friendly reminder to all members, all questions and responses need to go through the Chair.

Ms. Smith: Thank you for that reminder, Chair.

There was no investments made on that side from that member's government, and that member wants to say that they weren't a part of that government?

Well, that member ran for that government, so that member is a part of that government. So, if that member thinks that they can run away from their government's record, they can't; they're running with that government. They ran with that government; they're still with that government. They can't run away from that government's record. So, don't think that you can hide from what they did and continue to do. These are people that needed homes, that needed support.

So I'm going to go back to the question you asked about youth. Youth need supports too, and I've said this in the House. If a youth that is under 18 presents at—through the Chair—if there's a youth that presents at the supervised consumption site that is under 18—

The Chairperson: Apologies. Just need to remind all members that the language needs to go through the Chair—to avoid the word you.

Ms. Smith: Thank you for that reminder, Chair.

I want to go back to the question that—the other question that was raised around youth presenting at the supervised consumption site, and we've been explicitly clear—and I don't know how any clearer I can be with that member—and our Premier's (Mr. Kinew) been clear about this. If a youth presents at the supervised consumption site, they will be referred to the appropriate service. There are Huddles, there is RaY, and there are a multitude of other services that are provided to youth.

There are youth that struggle with substance use in this province that need supports as well. Is that member aware of that? Is that member aware that there are youth that struggle with substance use that may lose their lives as well? We have a responsibility to provide services and supports, and the supervised consumption site is not appropriate resource or support or service for these youth, and we've been very clear that this will not be serving youth. So, if a youth does present there, they will be referred to the appropriate service. So, that member needs to—you know, I don't know what they're trying to get at.

And then back to this poster that we're supposedly putting into schools, I would ask that member to table that poster because I'm an educator and I've talked to many teachers, I've talked to many principals, I've talked to superintendents. Nobody knows about this poster that this—that the former failed government is supposedly talking about.

So, through the Chair, I would ask for that member to table that poster.

MLA Bereza: I will cede the chair to the member from Fort Garry until the end of the day.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): It was reported today that front-line workers are asking the Province to declare a public health emergency. Fact, they've described it as a spring surge in overdose deaths. One long-time activist described it as the worst spring they'd ever seen.

And it appears the issue is an unstable, unpredictable potent drug supply, specifically drugs being cut with a veterinarian tranquilizer that naloxone doesn't have any sort of effect, and this is causing a—basically, an overdose epidemic. It's been fatal.

And I've been listening very carefully to the minister's comments this afternoon and I reviewed her comments yesterday. And I have some concerns about this because at one point, the minister lectured the opposition critic about the need to take a harm reduction approach, quote, unquote.

Yet, yesterday, the minister came out on the record and said that she was opposed to safe supply. And I'm wondering how the minister doesn't choke on the hypocrisy of that. Safe supply is a harm reduction process. The BC chief medical officer is in favour, so is the BC coroners, as well as many experts in health care, as well as those people with lived experiences.

It does two things: it gets rid of the drug dealers. I've certainly had the privilege to meet the minister's constituents and have done a walking tour of North Point Douglas and I've seen the drug dens, I've seen the trap houses that are just feet away from schools and child-care centres.

And the concern, because I don't think the minister understands her own constituents, is that her neighbourhood is become a marketplace for illicit drugs, currently. And nothing's been done. And these drug dens and these trap houses are right next to family homes. And the concern is, is that these people have to get their drugs somewhere to use them in a safe consumption site, and they will continue to use North Point Douglas, which has become the de facto market town for illicit drugs in the area. And what a safe supply does is get rid of the drug dealers. You don't need them anymore. You don't need trap houses. You don't need drug dens.

The other thing that a safe supply does is it makes sure that your drugs aren't cut with veterinarian tranquilizer and killing people. This is an expert-driven solution that saves lives. So, it's one thing for this government to lecture the opposition about this and turn around and copy their arguments.

So I'll ask this minister, on what principle basis is she opposed to safe supply?

* (16:40)

Ms. Smith: Where to start on that? For the member to make the insinuation that I don't understand my constituents—well, I'm someone who grew up in my

constituency, who has family who still lives in their constituency. I don't drive a Mercedes; you know, I don't collect two salaries. I connect every day with my constituencies because that's where I come from. I never forget where I come from. I'm there on the front lines, connecting every day with my constituents.

So, you know, can I say that to the members opposite? Yes, you went on a walk in my community, good for you. How else do you give back to a community? You know, there's people struggling every single day that need supports and services. And you can be on this side of the House advocating, supporting, helping to meet people where they're at, helping us to get a supervised consumption site open, helping us to build some more housing, helping to get more people with influence to the table to support getting more housing built, to get more wrap-around services provided.

Instead, what is that member doing? He's on the other side of the table, you know, fighting against something that should be something so simple, to get people the supports and services they need so desperately. And, yes, we are taking a harm reduction approach, which means we need to get people onto a path of supports and services. And it's many of—one of the many options, one of the many harm reduction methods that were taken.

And we've been very clear: We're not doing safe supply. We are working towards opening up a supervised consumption site. That is our focus. Manitobans have been clear with us, knocking on doors, talking to businesses, talking to those who are struggling with substance every single day. They want somewhere where they can not see people unsupervised, losing their lives in their businesses without any supports. That is our focus, to get a supervised consumption site opened.

We're investing in many different ways. And as we talked about, Justice is—you know, the meth task force, another tool. We're working on getting the drugs off the street. These are harmful drugs. They're taking people's lives. I've met with so many parents.

Do I want to keep meeting with parents? No. Do I want to keep meeting with loved ones? Absolutely not. That's why we need to open up a supervised consumption site. Parents have been asking for this. This is what they want. Families want this.

It's going to be a medically led model. It's going to be very different from what we've seen in other jurisdictions in terms of 'stafety' security. We're working with policing. We're working with downtown

community safety patrol. We're going to have wellness workers that are supporting folks. There's going to be folks that are helping folks with their mental health, which we know that is a huge driver why people are using substances. But we also know that housing is, you know, a stability, a social determinant of how well people do. And we know that people got driven into addictions because of the former government selling off housing and not providing, you know, the adequate supports.

So we're going to continue to invest. We're going to continue to take a full, four-pillared approach, and harm reduction is about leading people to the supervised consumption site where there is going to be medically trained staff that are going to help and support from a harm reduction approach, which is going to be a supervised—from a medically trained staff. And it's one more tool that we can use to support, along with, you know, our meth task force.

And I want to remind that member, like, I grew up in Point Douglas. For—so for that member to say I don't understand my constituents or understand where I come from, I was born and raised there. Like, can that member say the same?

Mr. Wasyliv: You know, I think it's concerning and troubling that the Minister of Addictions for the province of Manitoba is unable to defend the policy statement she makes publicly; that, when given the opportunity to articulate why she's against a safe supply, she cannot do it. She does not have an explanation. She cannot defend her position or her government's position. Manitobans should be concerned when policy occurs that way and the government has no rationale behind it, other than, well, just because.

But I'm going to turn now to October, 2024. The Kinew government handed over \$10 million to a private for-profit real estate investment trust to invest in affordable housing, Manitoba taxpayers on the hook for that money. We have no equity stake in it, meaning we're never getting it back, and if that money is used to make a profit, Manitobans won't profit from it.

So it appears the idea is that investors will bring that money to build more units and try to profit off those units. Now, on October 8, 2024, the CBC interviewed this minister, who claimed that that initiative would have three housing projects up and running that year.

Well it's been over a year, no housing projects; not one, not two, not three, none. A year later,

October 7, 2025, the first time True North Sports & Entertainment says they're going to come up with \$5 million to invest in this trust, and another foundation is putting in \$2 million.

Problem for that is that this is the same corporation owned by Canada's richest billionaire, that the government is subsidizing the construction of True North development corporation, that the government has signed a 35-year lease which won't disclose the terms to the Manitoba public. But we know that over a 35-year lifetime, the Province of Manitoba will be transferring to Canada's richest billionaire billions of taxpayer dollars.

That is the only company that's come forward to actually provide money for this initiative. We also know the Premier (Mr. Kinew) used his platform to do video promotions for a private investment for this REIT, for somebody else to make money off of that investment, and use his position as the Premier to doing it.

So now I think we're 18 months in and counting, and absolutely no houses or units have been announced or built. The private sector hasn't jumped on board, hasn't contributed any money. In fact, the Province's share still is the dominant amount of the money.

So I ask this minister, is this program a success? And when will there be one unit of actual housing built from it?

* (16:50)

Ms. Smith: So I don't know if that member understands what the CHAR REIT does, but they work with the non-profit sector, and I don't know why that member has an issue with building social and affordable housing here in our province.

And, again, we are coming to the table with whoever will come to the table with us, and this is, like, the private sector who is leveraging funds to come and help build and support the building of social and affordable housing here in our province.

And, again, I asked that member earlier, you know, they have folks that they know that have deep pockets and could probably invest in this CHAR REIT and support building. So, it would be nice, maybe, if they helped leverage some of their friendships and partnerships and bring them to the table and help, you know, the one-to-one dollars that we're providing.

I will let the member know that we have two completed projects that we have yet to announce, but we're, you know, awaiting that. I am eagerly awaiting

when we make that announcement and I'm sure that member will be very happy once that announcement is made. And, again, it's about building up our housing stock here in our great province of Manitoba and providing opportunities for Manitobans to have a beautiful place to live, and it's about leveraging, you know, the private-sector dollars to our government dollars one-to-one. Like, why would we not want to invest and support, you know, public dollars to come in and help build—help build housing for folks that need it?

We know right across our great country of Canada we have a housing crisis, but we're way behind, thanks to the former government in terms of housing. We could have been way ahead and, you know, we had to invest all of these dollars in almost 2,200 units. Imagine if we didn't have to make those investments. Imagine if we could have taken those dollars and put those into bringing other units online or investing those into building more units.

We've made generational investments in housing, you know, something we should be celebrating. We purchased 447 Webb. Hundreds of units for folks that, you know, are going to have a safe, stable place to live with wrap-around supports that are going to help them move on a continuum, that are going to help them realize that they can have somewhere for themselves other than a tent. It's transformative.

I've gone to visit, you know, some of our other sites that are providing wrap-around supports to folks and, you know, listening to their stories of the work that—and the relationship that's being built with the service providers, many of whom—all of them I want to lift up for the work that they're doing because it's very complex and, really, supporting these folks and what they've had to really endure for a lot of years under the former government and not having the supports and services and being able to have somewhere to be safe and secure and somewhere dry, somewhere warm, have your own bathroom, somewhere to have your own shower and not knowing where you're going to get your next meal.

This is what's being provided now, and these folks that are providing the wrap-around supports are, you know, really creating relationships to the point where these folks are ready to go into adult ed. We've—we're making investments because we know that people want to go back to school. It's generational change that we're going to see from the investments that we're making, and the folks are on the front lines are helping

to create, you know, these transformative changes for these folks.

And these investments that we're making with CHAR REIT, leveraging the private-sector dollars, why wouldn't we not want to do that? And I'm looking forward again to announcing these two projects and more to come.

Mr. Wasyliw: Manitoba is facing a housing crisis at the same time it is facing a mental health/addictions crisis. And I want this minister to succeed, because if she succeeds, Manitobans succeed. And I'm rooting for her.

Problem I have is this government's rhetoric doesn't match its actions. This government says that the housing, addictions ministry is a priority, but in the 2026 budget, it was one of seven ministries to actually get a cut when many other ministries didn't. In fact, \$9 million was removed from the non-profit housing budget.

And that has incredible knock-on effects, because the non-profit housing groups were using that grant money to apply for federal grants that actually could get housing units built, and without access to those grants, they're not able to apply for these federal grants and, therefore, can't get new housing built. That one cut has a downstream effect of preventing housing that could have gotten built in Manitoba.

And my question to the minister is: Why? Of all the things you could cut, why would you cut a fund that acted as an accelerator which—

The Chairperson: Order. Order. Order.

A reminder to all members that all questions and comments must come through the Chair.

Mr. Wasyliw: Why? The minister could explain—she made that cut.

Ms. Smith: Could the member clarify where that member got that number from, and—we're trying to look for that number and where they came to that number from.

Mr. Wasyliw: It's from the Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association.

Ms. Smith: I will let the member know that there has been no funding cut to the Manitoba non-profit association, so I don't know where that member has got that number from. So, if that member can clarify where exactly they're referring to those numbers from, line by line, then we can speak to that. But we have not made any cuts to the non-profit housing association.

Mr. Wasyliw: All right, I will—I think we are not finishing today, so certainly can provide a specific reference in the budget to where I saw the cut.

Quickly, before time runs out today, the wait-list for Manitoba Housing is the highest it's been in five years. When this government took office, it was 5,000 families; two and a half years of this government, it's now 7,500 families. Every year, it gets worse, and this government has actually gone from building 600 units to pledging about 215 this year.

Why is this minister going backwards at a time that we should be accelerating to 1,000 or more units a year?

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

ROOM 255

ADVANCED EDUCATION AND TRAINING

* (15:20)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Advanced Education and Training.

Questions will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): I just want to start off where we kind of left off yesterday during some of our—my question. I wanted to talk a little bit about adult ed and adult education, some of the programs and some of questions I had about that.

Can the minister report whether there are—I guess, how many students—or how many spaces, I guess, first, are there for adult education in the province of Manitoba?

Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I want to begin by thanking the educators and the advocates in adult education and literacy for advocating hard for improving learning opportunities and outcomes for those folks who, by no fault of their own, have fallen off and perhaps have not achieved the level of education that they have once set out for.

We know that, under the previous government, that there were no funding increases at all in our adult education system, not even cost of living. And we know that during that time the need grew. So, I'm very

proud to be part of a team who, in our first six months in office, introduced an adult education act to help formally put adult ed back on the map, and we have made investments over and above each year.

And so, last year—or, pardon me, in 2024, we increased funding to adult learning centres and literacy programs by \$1 million. That ended a decade-long funding freeze where there was no additional funds put towards it at all.

In Budget 2025, we added an additional \$250,000 to establish two new sites, helping more Manitobans graduate from high school. Budget 2026 includes a \$2.5-million increase to support adult learning centres and adult literacy programs, continuing to build up the capacity in the system that was lost during the seven and a half years that the members opposite were in charge.

We also moved forward with transitioning from the GED to the CAEC. Once again, I want to sincerely thank the folks in our department for moving quickly on that and ensuring that there was no gap in opportunities for Manitobans to get their grade 12 equivalency completed in this province. We now have a system that is responsive, that is accessible to students, and we were the first jurisdiction to be able to implement that fully. That's with Canadian content. And, to date, 78 Manitobans have received their high school equivalency certificates thanks to that transition to CAEC.

Last year, our adult education system review reached nearly 1,500 Manitobans, including learners, teachers, operators, Indigenous educators, community organizations, employers and the post-secondary community.

And why is that significant? Because it reiterates what we've said all along: that we are listening government, that we are a collaborative government and that we work with our partners to ensure that the milestones and outcomes are met for Manitobans.

We do that across government. Whether it is in this department through Adult Education or Advanced Education or through the Department of Education, Department of Health, we are a listening and responsive government, and we are working with our partners in this sector.

The member may or may not know that adult education is not funded per seat in Manitoba. It serves learners throughout the province, and in '24-25 we had 34 registered Adult Learning Centres with programming at 89 sites providing high school programming

to 7,196 learners, and 25 certified Adult Literacy Programs with 42 sites across Manitoba providing foundational literacy and numeracy programming to 1,535 adult learners.

In total, 800–8,731 Manitobans accessed adult education last year, and 1,133 graduated with their high school diploma. That is over a thousand people who now have greater opportunities because they were able to achieve that high school credential that opens doors for them.

And I would add to the record that in northern Manitoba that is the difference between an individual remaining in poverty and being able to access a good job. It is absolutely a game changer. It opens doors.

We continue to support programs that allow individuals to complete their high school education while achieving other credentials at the same time. We're continuing to listen to learners and educators across the province to ensure that our programming is accessible and available.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Hiebert: In my visiting of different Adult Education Centres and educators, it's been a really great experience for me to be able to connect with teachers and students alike. And one of the things I did hear was a concern from some of the educators that I did talk to is whether there's wait-lists or enough spaces for all the students that want to take adult education.

So can the minister report whether there are wait-lists for adult ed students, especially in rural and northern Manitoba. Are northern learners able to access spaces in their own communities, or are they having to seek spots elsewhere, whether that's having to travel somewhere to go take their classes or even just go online and not be able to be in room with a teacher.

Those are really some—a lot of people students need to learn hands-on with the teacher, and is that something that's a struggle, or do we have any information on whether or not there's wait-lists for that?

* (15:30)

MLA Cable: Again, I want to start by thanking the educators who work in this system and thank the folks who stayed in this occupation during very trying times, including receiving no increase in their wages for seven and a half years. We've worked very hard to ensure that the providers have sufficient funding. This budget is very exciting for a number of reasons, but one of the main ones is that we're able to bring the

educators up to the level that the MTS teachers are making and to be able to provide stable, predictable income for those teachers so that we have consistent training across the province.

So I can report that we have 10 sites in Winnipeg that are operating, and we know the need is great and continues to grow. And I would argue that it will continue to grow as we work to destigmatize the notion of returning to school. And I visited some phenomenal centres that are really meeting people where they're at and providing education in environments that are supportive culturally, socially, and really doing incredible work to ensure that learners can have the freedom to continue to pursue their education in a supportive environment.

I am sad that I don't have the data before '22-23, but I can—you know, it's no secret that, under the previous government, that fewer students were served and there were fewer opportunities for adults to achieve a grade 12 diploma and fewer opportunities to pursue adult literacy.

I'll just—I'll let folks know that, from the total number of learners in adult learning programs in '22-23, was 7,517; in '24-25, that number went up to 8,731. So, that is a 16 per cent increase, and in that time, the amount of additional financial support provided to the institutions that were delivering that training, that essential education, was zero.

So I am thrilled that in this budget we have earmarked an additional \$2.5 million to support adult education. And, you know, we're working very closely with all of our providers to ensure that the opportunities that are offered in the city of Winnipeg are comparable to those that are in rural Manitoba.

So we have four sites in rural Manitoba that currently do have folks waiting to attend, which is why this additional funding is so incredibly important. Across the province, online is offered, and for many families, that's actually a better option, that they can access that programming when and where they need it. And we work with all of our partners to provide excellent training in every corner of this province.

You know, this process of going through Estimates is wonderful in that we get to highlight the awesome work that is happening across government, but I'll be honest here in this committee room and say that it is also—it's making me frustrated and a little bit angry to think about the damage that was done over those seven and a half years and how difficult it's been to

really turn the page on some pretty terrible decision making.

And I'm—again, I'm grateful for the partners that we work with and for Manitobans for having the trust in our government and for allowing us this privilege to come and serve and to do it with integrity and to do it with their—our eye on serving every Manitoban regardless of the postal code that they live in.

We have great needs in this province, but that—with the great needs comes great opportunities. And I—as minister responsible, I get to go to a lot of graduations, but my favourite are the adult education graduations. It's life changing.

Mrs. Hiebert: My next question would be—and thank you for that answer. I was—I've heard a lot of concerns about waiting lists and times for adult education students and I think we need to make sure that we address those. And that's why I'm here today, is to get information and just to make sure that we know what the things are that we can improve on, because that's what we're doing.

Just in regards to The Adult Literacy Act and the provincial strategy, can the minister explain how learners, educators and communities across Manitoba are being meaningfully involved in shaping that strategy and how it will be addressed—how it will address the key barriers for adult learners that they face.

MLA Cable: I appreciate the question. You know, the member is a new member and was elected at the same time that I was in 2023, and sometimes historical context is not always readily known. But it was under the previous PC government that the original Adult Literacy Act was repealed in 2021.

* (15:40)

And in that—in repealing that act, it—quite frankly, it reduced the accountability of government to make investments into adult literacy and education, and it certainly told the folks who are working in that sector that it wasn't important to the government of the day, and we brought the—we brought the act in to signal to the sector that it's a priority for us.

And thanks to the hard work of folks in the department who I will shout-out again for being phenomenal and for weathering some really difficult years—they've engaged more than 1,500 people to help shape what adult learning looks like in this province.

And part of it is talking to the actual people who have lived experience about the barriers that exist for

them and making sure that the system that we have is responsive to those needs and not making base assumptions as to why an individual isn't participating or why they aren't successful.

And we know that there are many challenges in folks returning to education. Often it is financial, sometimes it's family issues, sometimes it's mobility. There are often issues with finding child care, having a supportive environment, having access to food. These are all issues that, through a whole-of-government approach, that we are working on addressing.

And I think it's important, again, to note that we heard directly from learners and from the folks who are providing the service to those learners exactly what they need. And you'll see that this—the changes that are forthcoming in the sector are very reflective of the needs of the community.

And Dr. Jim Silver—if you haven't had the opportunity to read his many reports on adult education and the value to society—points out a number of pieces that are essential to a successful system, the main one being the wages of individuals in the sector in order to keep top-quality teachers and instructors in the system.

We listen to experts, we work with experts and we take the advice and the research of Dr. Jim Silver very seriously, which is why we are making this tremendous investment this year.

One of the recommendations that he has made in the past and continues to advocate for is to invest where the programs are already working. So, where there's a hub model, we know that people already have a sense of belonging there. They feel safe in terms of their own personal security. Perhaps it is a well-known place in their neighbourhood that they are more likely to go and far more likely to be successful.

So we continue to work with partners to identify where those places are, where they're a success. And, just in this past year, we have opened two new sites: one at the Millennium Library, another at—in the North End, Shaughnessy Park—I was going to say Sherbrook [*phonetic*] park; that's not right—Shaughnessy Park, which—both areas were identified as high-needs areas.

And when we talk about giving folks the tools to move out of the poverty cycle and to move themselves towards a better life, it is providing supports when and where people access them. And we know that the Millennium Library is a hub of activity on any given day. And it's important that we do as much as we can to support folks who are already visiting those spaces.

Shaughnessy Park, there's been need for many, many years. The member for Notre Dame, Minister of Labour and Immigration (MLA Marcelino), advocated for many years to have an Adult Learning Centre in that area. And we work with all of our partners and continue to be responsive to their asks.

The strategy pillars are learner-centric, advancing truth and reconciliation, and we work in—

The Chairperson: Minister's time has expired.

A gentle reminder to all members to put their questions and responses through the Chair, please.

Mrs. Hiebert: I do have a question about—well, first of all, I want to say that it's so important for us to make sure that we are investing in Indigenous programs and education. I think that this is something that is all of our responsibility, and I'm very supportive of that. And I think it's important to continually do everything we can to help everyone that wants and needs benefits of education wherever they are.

Can the—there being—having been significant investments in Indigenous-language programs, can the minister explain how Indigenous communities were involved in designing these programs and how they're making—how you're making sure that they are truly led by Indigenous peoples and reflect their priorities, specifically for their culture, families and their communities?

MLA Cable: I am proud to be here as one of 10 Indigenous MLAs in the NDP caucus. It was a transformational election that brought us to this place, and it was an election that ultimately had Manitobans denouncing racist, awful advertisements that refused to search a landfill for missing relatives.

That was a very dark time in our social and political history, and each and every day I am grateful that—to know that my neighbours—the folks that my daughter goes to school with, the people that work with my son at his job—that people all across Manitoba denounced that awful, racist narrative.

And I'm grateful to be part of a government that understands the value of Indigenous people and understands our obligation in engaging in true nation-to-nation engagement with Indigenous peoples.

I appreciate the member pointing out the investments that were made into Indigenous-language programs in this province—first of their kind, tremendously beneficial for learners at UCN and at U of W. I also want to commend the folks at University of

Manitoba who have language programs and continue to offer and support learning Indigenous languages.

One of the tragedies of the residential school system was that people lost their language. And I can't begin to imagine how challenging it would be to navigate this world without having the means of expression to share joy, to share sorrow, to 'compvucate' simple things about the day—and how devastating that is to a people to not have that opportunity and to legally not be allowed that opportunity.

And I've talked—I've spoken with many survivors of residential schools and their family members who talk about the fact that they were not permitted to speak their home language, and that, frankly, it's a miracle that the language survived over these years.

So to the Knowledge Keepers and the Language Keepers who have held on to those words over the years and decades: thank you. Because you have given hope to the next generation that they are able to live their lives with 'diginy'—dignity and respect and honour, and reclaim what is rightfully always been theirs.

As with any program related to Indigenous ways of knowing and being, Indigenous people are involved at the beginning, the middle, the end. We are a government that understands the importance of honouring those relationships and honouring the identities and cultures of people all across this province.

* (15:50)

And, again, I am so proud to be part of a government whose very first act, which has changed my life in ways that I can't describe, is to name Louis Riel as the first premier of this province.

As a Métis individual, I grew up with the narrative that Louis Riel was a crook and a crazy person and that Métis people were not to be trusted. And in a small but substantial act in giving him his rightful place as the founder of our province, it has shaped how my daughter sees herself, how my son sees himself and how I am able to engage in the world in a way that I didn't have that opportunity when I was younger.

I am incredibly grateful to be part of a team that understands that the roots of this country live in our First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Hiebert: I don't think I had an answer in that to my question. Specifically, I was wondering about how Indigenous communities were involved in specifically designing the programs.

But—and I will say again, like, it is so important for us to make sure that we are always acknowledging and doing the best we can for our Indigenous communities. And it's so important for us to always do the best we can. And to me, as an ally, as well, I've had the opportunity to take specific training in Ingisnoust [*phonetic*] culture and different practices. And it's been amazing for me to learn and be—to experience that.

So, on the changes to The Adult Learning Centres Act, the minister says that this will support First Nations' self-determination. How many First Nations has the minister consulted with so far? What have they told her? And what supports will you provide to make sure these communities can actually run their own centres successfully, specifically?

MLA Cable: In our consultation process, 391 learners were consulted, which is approximately 30 per cent of the 1,500. We have four First Nations-operated ALCs, so that's Adult Learning Centre, and we consulted directly with Indigenous education directors through AMC.

I can say also that the Manitoba blueprint initiative, which is a phenomenal table of folks working together to advance reconciliation through post-secondaries and through collaborative work, has come forward with a number of recommendations, but the change to allow for—basically the change is getting us out of the way. So, if First Nations want to run and operate their own adult learning centres, they're free to do so without the need to partner with another institution, which was the prior requirement.

In so many of these processes it's really about self-determination of nations. It's about ensuring that the quality of education and the type of education that is offered to Indigenous students is reflective of their own culture and their own leadership. It feels appropriate that—this is a good time to talk about the increase in enrolment, so participation of Indigenous students across post-secondary in this province. So, between 2022 and '23 and '24-25, Indigenous student enrolment in public post-secondary institutions grew from 6,330 to 7,579 students, so that's a 20 per cent enrolment across public post-secondaries.

In contrast, from 2020 to 2020—or, 2020-21 to 2022-2023, Indigenous student enrolment declined from 6,724 to 6,330 students. So, what that says to me, what that data illustrates here is that under the previous government, Indigenous students were participating less, and in fact, year over year, we saw fewer Indigenous students participating in post-secondary education and accessing opportunities for themselves.

Was that because the programs didn't exist because of budget cuts? Was that because they did not have a sense of being supported or feeling as though they had a government that would support them through those initiatives?

* (16:00)

I can only guess, but what I can tell you is that this provincial government has been very clear with our expectations of adult literacy providers, post-secondary providers: that there is a place in every institution, in every school for Indigenous learners here and that that access to education will be supported by this government, and we will continue to ensure that Manitoba students, regardless of where they were born, continue to have access to the highest quality of education.

And I want to take this moment to thank the good folks from Yellowquill College who we've been working on to co-develop their legislation to give them the recognition that they have deserved for the last 40 years.

And I am happy to talk about reconciliation and the work that we are doing to advance Indigenous partnerships, the work that we're doing to help lift up Indigenous people across this province. I could talk all day, every day about that because our government has been consistent from day one, and we are seeing the results. The number of graduates has increased, the number of folks participating in the labour market has increased and, as you can see, there are—representation in this government should show you enough that we are moving in the right direction here.

I know that this wasn't a priority under the previous government because finding the body of a loved one who was Indigenous was not a priority, so how could we have expected that they would have put time, energy and—into folks who were living, breathing and trying to make a life here in this province.

Mrs. Hiebert: Continuing on the adult ed and the availability to make sure that we have the programs we need for those in our province that really, really want to go to school and want to further their education, return to school if they weren't able to finish school. I'm just looking at the performance measures, and it has gone down from 2024-25 to 20—like, it has—numbers have gone down in the last year, so I'm just going to bring that up.

But I just want to bring up also that targets were set to increase Indigenous student enrolment. I'm just wondering if the department—but the department only

has indirect influence on that. What specific actions have you taken to remove barriers like cost, housing, access to supports, and how will you know if these actions are actually helping Indigenous students succeed?

Though you mentioned the four—or, the minister mentioned the four rural sites for offering advanced—or, adult education, can you tell us where those are located and how that will help remove barriers for those students that are needing to go to school or wanting to go to school again?

MLA Cable: I'll begin first by speaking to the metric that the member spoke of—the graduation rate—and just note that as we work through onboarding more and more learners, we'll see that number ebb and flow. But between 2022-23 and 2024-25, we saw an increase of 16 per cent in enrolment, a 23 per cent increase in course completion and a 19 per cent graduation from high school. So, we have more learners entering and—at different points, and as we work with the many, many providers to ensure that our programming is meeting the needs of students, we'll continue to address the top priorities of those learners.

The department engaged in five focus groups with educators who were supporting adult learners in developing the strategy to modernize. So, again, we won't predetermine what the needs are of learners. Our role here is to facilitate the best possible situation to enable them to continue on with their learning.

Under our government, the EIA, so employment income assistant act, was amended to include adult education as a work activity. So, previous to this change, if you're on EIA, the expectation is is that you take—in order to move away from EIA, that you take the first available job that you're qualified for. And this small but mighty amendment gave folks the opportunity, if they chose, to choose pursuing adult education as an option instead.

So this provides income support while students are learning and sends a clear signal to folks that we want you to dream big and to take a path that will bring you to the best possible outcome in your own life. And that change has been transformational for families, to give people that opportunity to choose education. And we continue to work with our partners in EIA to look at even further supports.

Over the last number of years, we've also enhanced our partnerships with industry and started looking at opportunities for people to get their high school diploma and transition right into work. We're working closely

through 10 'interpartamental' committees to improve pathways for adult learners, to remove barriers and ensure that there is no wrong door. One of the things that we heard loud and clear was that it's—sometimes it can be complicated to make a life change. It's confusing to know where exactly to go and where the best option might be. So, in helping to ensure that different providers are working collaboratively, we can make sure that students are getting exactly what they need.

Adult learning centres help learners complete high school, upgrade courses and overcome personal challenges in a supportive environment.

* (16:10)

About a month ago I had the pleasure of going to McLeod Adult Learning Centre. The students there had begun a project where they were advocating for enhancements to adult learning and their motivation for that was their own experience. So, in that class that I visited, there were moms whose kids were now well situated in school and they had time to invest in themselves. They were young people who, during the pandemic, found themselves unable to complete high school, who had come back to complete their credentials so they could move on to post-secondary and there were other folks who were just looking to enhance the foundational pieces that they had in their own life around education.

And, you know, our role as government is to ensure that all of those situations have a positive outcome and that we are able to fill the gaps to ensure that more Manitobans are able to complete high school.

Mrs. Hiebert: I do have a question about—I in my time—spending time with teachers and students and faculty at different educational institutions, I've really been able to connect with a lot of the students, and I've had some good relationships with some of them come from that. And so one of the questions I have been asked a fair amount is, as students we know students are under a lot of stress because they need their funding in place just to keep their spot in post-secondary schools. So, the delays that they might be waiting for their information on what's happening with their funding for school through Student Aid, these delays can put their education at risk.

Right now, many are saying that it takes too long to receive student aid and they're also struggling to get timely answers when they call or email for help.

They're not—the phone calls are not being returned or the emails are not being returned.

How long is it currently taking for students to receive funding right now, at this time, as kids are getting ready to go to—applying for school? I'm sure it's getting busier during this time of year, so how long is it taking for them to get replies back right now about funding and what is the government doing to speed up the process to make sure students get faster, reliable supports when they need it most?

It can—I'm sure it's devastating, and I've heard stories about how students are waiting for replies back and it must be hard just to sit there and wait and know that you've—let the school know by a certain date and you don't get any reply back about your student aid.

So if you can just give me an idea of what the wait times are right now, specifically, and if, for sure, kids are getting replies back.

The Chairperson: Once again, a gentle reminder to all members to put their questions and responses through the Chair, please.

MLA Cable: I want to start just by making a gentle reminder to the member opposite. She had alluded to kids waiting for student aid, and we know that a large portion of our learners are not, in fact, kids, but they are adults—some with their own children, many in relationships—and I think that distinction is important to make because these are the folks that we're supporting through education so that they can be gainfully employed in the province of Manitoba.

I—when I went back through post-secondary, I was a single mom, and I can tell you how important it was to know that I had income to be able to take care of my family. And that's the lens that I come to this job with: How do we best serve students? How do we ensure that the barrier that they are facing to go to school is not a financial one?

And I'm incredibly grateful to have folks who—to work with who understand that that student experience needs to come first, and are working diligently every day to improve processes so that there are fewer people waiting.

Of course, we know that that is difficult when participation rate in Student Aid is—has increased a lot over the years, and we anticipate that with the challenges in the economy right now, that there will be more folks who will require student aid. I see that as a great investment by Manitobans for Manitobans to

ensure that we have even more people participating in this province.

So I can tell the member proudly that in 2023-24, 74.3 per cent of applications were processed within 42 days. In '25-26 that number is 83 per cent of applications are processed within 42 days. So, the average wait time has decreased while the participation is up 25 per cent, so I want to take this time to commend the folks in the department that have worked to streamline processes, that have done very unique things in terms of servicing students, including having rotations between being on the phone and using email and serving people directly at the counter, to ensure that the best possible experience happens for students.

Since 2022-23 Manitoba Student Aid has experienced a 26.4 per cent increase in funded students, from 17,705 to 22,387. The total number of Manitoba Bursary recipients increased by 17.8 per cent and Indigenous students receiving the Manitoba Bursary increased 19.9 per cent.

And why is that? It's because the participation is up. There are more students going to universities and colleges in Manitoba and, specifically, there are more Indigenous students participating than ever before.

* (16:20)

I want to thank everybody who has contributed to that change, the folks who have worked hard in recruiting, but also the families who we've gained the trust of, who feel safe to send their students to institutions here in Manitoba. They know that they'll be taken care of here. They know that going to University of Manitoba or University of Winnipeg or Red River College or Assiniboine College, that their students will be safe and taken care of and receive a top-quality education.

Manitoba Student Aid has heard positive feedback from both students and schools about the helpfulness of staff and the quality of service received. Here's a quote here: I just want to thank you for always being so quick and supportive with our requests. That's from the University of Manitoba. We really appreciate all your help and support. You've made a noticeable difference in our students' experiences. This means a lot and I just wanted to say thank you.

That speaks to the quality of care that the folks working in the department are taking with students, and that makes a real difference as to whether a student is going to continue on.

Mrs. Hiebert: I've been sitting here trying to be—and I believe I'm being really respectful and I love this critic role because I think it's so important for us to support students and teachers in education and advanced education in our province.

And the minister sits there and picks at me that I use the word kids instead of adults. I call my adult-grown, grown adult children kids sometimes because I'm older and I just happen to be quite a bit older. So, I'm sorry that that was not intentional at all. If there is somebody I offended I am sorry, but I'm sure most everybody else understood that I did not mean that in that way. Unfortunately, the minister has to try to make me look bad, which is crazy.

So I'm here to be serious; I'm here to ask questions. I have students who have asked me to find out what I can do or if I can help them with situations that they're going through, and that's part of my job as a critic. Part of my job is to bring these things forward to the minister, and I'm proud to do that. I'm proud to fight and to represent the people in my province, and I'll never apologize for that. And we just need to make sure that we support those that are working in the office that are helping these students and adults that are going to school, and we need to make sure that we're always looking at all the pictures because we can always improve on everything. And I think that's our job as legislators, to make sure that we improve and we're always striving to make—to do better than what we're doing, and there's nothing wrong with that.

So—and we know that there's a struggle going on right now with affordability. We know that students are struggling. Parents and families are struggling with tuition costs, with everything that's been going up in—across the province. Tuition, for example, and food. Those are all things are—we're hearing from students, that there's a food insecurity in students specifically.

What is the government doing to make sure Student Aid actually covers the real costs of living for students so that they can get through school, including their tuitions, their—the cost of living and food to eat?

MLA Cable: I thank the member for the question, and we do know that affordability is top of mind for everybody right now.

When we were first elected, we campaigned on a gas tax holiday; we implemented that and it helped stave inflation. We've done a number of other measures as a government to help with affordability, including freezing hydro rates and, in this most recent

budget, taking the PST off of all grocery items in grocery stores.

But we know that for many students, accessing post-secondary education is only possible through student aid, through bursaries and scholarships. Last year, we implemented a grants-only option on the Student Aid portal to allow students to apply for just the grants. If they didn't want to take on a loan with the provincial and federal governments, that they were eligible to just access grants, and that option, since it's been brought in, has served almost 1,500 students.

And Manitoba student loans—[interjection]—bless you—Manitoba student loans continue to be interest-free in this province, so that means that each and every day the provincial government takes on that interest component for those Manitoba students who have a student loan, and that amounts to a great amount of savings for students. It is one of the benefits of being here in this province.

* (16:30)

We're continuing to invest in scholarships and bursaries. So, in '24-25 the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative was pegged at \$10.5 million. That was up from \$10 million in '23-24. And that investment leveraged over \$23.5 million in matching funds for a total of \$30.2 million in bursaries, in scholarships for Manitoba students; 21,450 total recipients in '24-25, of which 4,611 are Indigenous students.

We have 15 active partners who work on this initiative with us, including all public and private religious post-secondary institutions, University of Manitoba Students' Union, the Business Council of Manitoba and the Helen Betty Osborne memorial fund.

Our government knows that education is critical for the success of our province. Our future economy lives in the classrooms of today, from K to 12 all the way through post-secondary, and in response to that, you'll see that our government has made investments to match that value proposition. Under the previous government, there were freezes and cuts year over year, bargaining was not done and folks did not have the resources that they needed to be successful in educating the next generation.

Our government is taking a different approach. We're making real investments in K-to-12 education, including in the universal meal program. Bus fare for students is now included in this budget, so if young people are taking transit to get to school, that is now free thanks to this provincial government and our

continued investments in the next generation we know will pay dividends in the future.

And you may hear a number of us talk about the seven generations here, and each and every day we come with that lens to this job. It's not about chasing the headline for today, it's about ensuring that seven generations from now we can look back on this and know that we made the right decisions for Manitobans.

I can see some of the members across the table making gestures towards me, and I will stand by the statement that the decisions that we make today will stand the test of time, and I am proud to be with a government that understands the value of education and post-secondary education.

Mrs. Hiebert: I think everybody can see what's happening at the table. There was no gestures happening. I don't know what the minister was talking about there.

But, anyway, I would like to just ask the question. So, the minister says it's critical to our students to—success and that education is critical to our students' success and the economy of the province. Yet the current Education Minister has—or, sorry, post-secondary education minister and provincial government have raised tuition the highest it's been raised in the last eight years or 10 years. Just wondering, in my mind, that it would be obvious that higher tuition costs would definitely be a contributor to barriers for students for them to pursue education.

And my question would just be to the minister, like, is there a ceiling of this? This is a very large increase for students right now in tuition. How is this going to help to make sure that our students are successful and our economy continues to grow when they can't go to school because they don't have the money because the tuition has increased in such a high amount so quickly?

Is there a ceiling that the minister is suggesting to make it achievable for students to go to school? What does this look like for students who are going to be returning to school that have these larger, higher tuition amounts now that they go—when they go back this next year?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

MLA Cable: I am happy to provide context for the world that we're living in right now because as we know, no decision that is made happens in a vacuum, and it's never without impact in other spaces.

So, I'll remind the members on the other side of the table that during their administration's time, year

over year, they cut funding to post-secondary institutions and their operation grants. During that time, they also didn't bargain any collective agreements, which meant that there was a growing deferred deficit for institutions that this government took on.

I will also remind the members across the way that nary two years ago, the federal government unilaterally made decisions around international students, and that has significantly impacted the operating environment that we are working in.

With all of that being said, we are a government that understands the importance and the value of post-secondary education. And we continue to work with our partners to ensure that it is accessible, it is affordable and that it is quality. We know that the graduates of our institutions here are some of the most accomplished people in the world.

In fact, I was at a gala two nights ago for the Business Council that were honouring their business person of the year. And there were three tremendous honourees, and two of the three were graduates of the University of Manitoba. And I think that that is something to be incredibly proud of. We know we have top quality education here, and we also know that we are lucky to have survived the seven and a half years of the PCs.

I'm just going over this chart here so that we can be certain that we know exactly what happened. So, in 28—in 2018 and '19, under the previous administration, we saw a 6.6 per cent increase. And then the following years, it was 3.75, and the difference from last year's tuition increase is 0.5 per cent.

I would just like to remind everybody here that we've continued to enhance bursaries and grants for students, and we continue to work with our post-secondary institutions in true partnership, unlike under the previous administration where we had students' unions, faculty, staff picketing outside this building nearly every month for a new issue. We have good working relationships, and we're working together to ensure that there is stability and sustainability in the post-secondary sector.

The previous government, their formula was 5 per cent plus CPI in seven—2017-2018. So, based on that formula—the legislated tuition increase allowance—we saw 6.6 per cent, 7.5, 7.2, 5.5 and 8.3. And while I do agree wholeheartedly with the member that we need to keep education affordable for students—that's the goal here, affordable and accessible—we also need to be entirely up front about the historical situation,

the funding situation that existed under the previous PC government and the environment that we're working in right now.

And I'm so proud of the institutions here and the students who continue to advocate for things like bringing back international student health care that was also cut under the previous, short-sighted PC government. And we continue to work towards remedying those mistakes and enhancing opportunities for Manitoba students.

What I will say to the students who are watching now on affordability is that we're continuing to work hand in hand with institutions and enhancing our availability of scholarships and bursaries, but really and truly we are working to ensure that there is a sustainable system that has your future in mind at all junctures.

* (16:40)

Mrs. Hiebert: I would like to just ask a quick question from the minister about what you're doing right now to make sure students feel safe and staff feel safe on the Manitoba campuses, especially given the safety concerns that have happened over the last year or two with threats in the schools or different things that have happened at the schools. When students experience safety issues on campus, such as sexual violence or harassment or stalking—anything that's a safety concern is such an incredibly serious matter that we all need to really pay attention to.

So how is your government working with post-secondary schools to respond quickly and make sure that we have stronger protections in place and support—that there's support in place to prevent it from happening again or happening at all? What kind of things are being done right now to ensure that we have safe campuses for our staff and students?

MLA Cable: You know, like every Manitoban and like every parent with a student on a Manitoba post-secondary campus, we take the safety and security of students very seriously.

And when I became minister, the first thing that I—one of the very first things I did was to bring in legislation to strengthen the sexual-violence policies for institutions. I know a number of the members on the other side of the room here were not in support of those enhancements, but that really ensured that there was some accountability.

I'll remind the member that post-secondary institutions are independent and they make their own

decisions regarding how they spend specific budgets. However, every institution has been through some level of security review, and enhancements have been made across many, many campuses. Assiniboine College monitoring—are monitoring buildings with full-time staff.

University of Winnipeg has a \$3.5-million budget for campus security. University of Manitoba has made physical enhancements to security at student residences. There's improved patrol coverage at BU, including a 24-7 safe walk and security guards on campus. A mobile patrol and safe ride service at Red River College Polytechnic and UCN is using online tools to help inform students about safety and security.

But we know that safer communities means safer campuses. And, unlike the previous PC government who defunded the police, we have made enhancements to our policing capacity in this province. We've added new officers across the province and enhanced security measures.

I want to take a moment, actually, to thank the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) for all of the work that he has done to help enhance the safety and security across the province. While we know that the funding had been previously frozen under the previous government, increased investments under the Minister of Justice have meant that there are more—even more officers on the street and more options in and around campuses to keep students safe.

I haven't had the opportunity in any formal way to acknowledge a hero, really: Alexis Bukarz. She was unfortunately victim to a terrible incident on one of the campuses, and I was privileged to meet her and her family. She is doing very well now, but she serves as a great reminder as to what unchecked violence against women looks like, what—how much further we need to go to ensure that the women, girls, two-spirit, gender diverse folks in our lives are taken care of.

And we know that, as a government, it's up to us to set the tone. And that's why we continue to call out homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, because it is up to us to show Manitobans what is expected of them in relation to their neighbours, in relation to one another, and it really shows that we prioritize the safety and security of all people.

I want to thank all of the folks on post-secondary campuses, also, for really being so considerate and caring about what—how they care for folks when they come onto campus. And we know that for parents, when they're sending their young people to school or

as adults return to post-secondary, that safety is—and security is—sometimes top of mind, but learning should be top of mind.

So we're doing all we can to ensure that students on every campus feel safe and secure and they know that there are supports available to them, that there are people nearby, that they have access to all sorts of supports to ensure their safety.

And, again, I want to thank Minister Wiebe for prioritizing investments—*[interjection]*

The Chairperson: Order, please.

* (16:50)

I would advise the minister to address members and colleagues by their title or their constituency name.

MLA Cable: I apologize, honourable Chair. Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) was who I was referencing.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): First and foremost, I want to put a shout-out there to all our educators, whether it's from early learning right through to post-secondary. I know how important it is that our educators, you know, help mould our children, both from a younger age and even as we go into our adulthood and attend post-secondary institutions.

So I want to put a shout-out to those that are in our classrooms and supporting and delivering those tools to help our young people grow.

I do want to say that it was our government that implemented—and I'm going to be specific and make this a constituency question in related—or related to Agassiz. So, it was our government, a number of years ago, that worked with ACC and brought forward to the community of Neepawa the nursing program there. And with the new hospital, that's an important component for—to have those nurses be educated and stay in our community and hopefully retain that nursing staff once they complete the program. It will help complement, obviously, the workload that the new hospital will have.

Having said that, I'm just wondering if the minister is able to share with us here if there is any sort of new—or any consideration moving forward in a working relationship with ACC to deliver other programs, whether it's through trades or whether it's a continuation of something in the health-care-related field, specifically a training program in the community of

Neepawa that obviously will help our growing community and add to our economic growth out there.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

MLA Cable: Yes, there are program expansions happening all over the province, Neepawa in particular. A senior official in our department meets regularly with the CFO from the town who I've also met with a number of times. We know how successful the original placement of those LPN seats has been, and that's why we've encouraged AC to add it to its list—its permanent list of rural rotating, and that is what's happening there. We're also waiting to launch a rural rotating paramedic program, which will undoubtedly benefit the folks of Neepawa.

We are looking at other ways to enhance health-care aide training, and looking at how we can ensure that the adult learning programs that are running in individual communities are also helping to contribute to that health-care workforce. I know that people in the area are very excited for the hospital to open, and it's—I found it unfortunate that there wasn't really a staffing plan attached to the institution when it was thought of, but we're doing what we can to make sure that, regardless of where you live in the province, that you have the professionals that you need there.

That's part of the motivation, as well, to have the combined laboratory and X-ray tech program out of Assiniboine College, because we know that those folks are essential to emergency rooms and urgent-care rooms operating successfully. We've enhanced programming, really, across the province to ensure that there is—there are more health-care workers. The internationally trained nurses program has been very successful, and we're continuing to work with Red River College to put more graduates through that, even in the face of the federal government making significant cuts to a number of programs that would ideally help support that transition.

We—the Department of Advanced Education and Training works very closely with the Department of Health on these initiatives and with the regional health authorities to ensure that the staffing needs are met in a timely way but also with quality providers in each and every community. The health of rural communities impacts the larger centres as well; we know that.

And when we are able to provide more care in community, closer to home, that takes pressure off of our urban emergency rooms, our urban urgent-care centres. And—was thrilled to be in Brandon last week

as we opened the new beds for the new wing of the hospital. And that was only possible to open that wing because we have trained professionals that are ready and—ready to staff that.

And so I want to thank the municipalities and the health authorities for having such an open dialogue and open relationship with us to trust that when you relay the needs of your community to our government, that we're able to respond with policy changes and investments that ensure that Manitobans all across the province get the care that they deserve.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Hiebert: Just speaking about health-care shortages, one of the things that has been brought forward is—as we're facing in Manitoba our health-care shortages—

The Chairperson: Order, please.

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

CHAMBER

FINANCE

* (15:00)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Finance. At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

Could the minister introduce the staff that are joining him? Minister of Finance? Introducing the staff?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Okay, happy to do so and happy to reintroduce my DOMA—Director of Ministerial Affairs—Paul Bretscher, and our team member from Treasury Board, Jeff McCulloch.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): So we have staff member Levi Cottingham with us.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Narth: I'll—as we know, the MLA for Midland, unable to be here today, so we started in on Estimates for Finance yesterday, so we'll try to pick up where

she had left off, but there may be a bit of overlap, so excuse me for that.

* (15:10)

I want to start off with what's become a reality of Manitoba's dependency on transfer payments for the federal government and our dependency in general on the federal government. Now we're seeing more than one third of Manitoba's revenue coming from federal transfers.

And I'd just like to ask the minister how that is a sustainable economic model for our province.

MLA Sala: So, appreciate the question.

What I can share with the member is that when we came in, we inherited their structure, of course: '23-24. And in that year, it was a 33 per cent of overall revenues, as a percentage of revenues for Manitoba. This year we're roughly at the same at 36, so just a few points higher there.

And, of course, you know, as the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has committed, we want to make Manitoba into a have province, and so that's the important work that we're doing when it comes to advancing project in Churchill. We know that the Premier has been successful in partnering with the feds, and we're now bringing in over \$200 million in investment to support Arctic Gateway Group and more investment in that opportunity.

And, of course, our recent budget also brought in a \$10-million commitment to support Churchill Plus, which is going to help us to bring more private-sector capital to bear in potential development of an energy corridor that would help to support bringing western resources to Europe and beyond, and perhaps commodities and otherwise in through Churchill into western Canada.

So, that, I think, shows our vision and our, you know, and obviously the big projects that we're helping to move forward. But I think in addition to that, it's worthwhile and a value to talk about the broader work that we're doing to help support the growth of wealth and job creation here in our province.

I'll talk briefly about a couple things other than, of course, Churchill, which is our biggest priority project to create good jobs here in Manitoba. There's been so much good work that's happened over the last two years in a very short period of time. One thing that I'll speak to maybe first, because it's near my heart as the Hydro Minister, is the important work we're doing

on energy. If I think about where we were when we came into government, we were in a position where there were real concerns about energy capacity in the low 2030s, and that was a direct by-product of the former government's failure to develop any new energy at all.

So, of course, I don't have to share with the members that if you don't have the energy you need to support business growth or investment, you're in a pretty tight position. So, that was a pretty firm bottleneck that we saw when we got in, in terms of more economic growth, making Manitoba into a have province, and we've responded to that in very short order. We brought in our affordable energy plan, we're already moving forward with 600 megawatts of new wind development in partnership with First Nations and the Métis nation; we're going to make sure that we have the energy we need to keep growing. So, I think that's a sort of important foundational first layer.

I also want to talk about some of the other really important things that we've done so far, for example, bringing in a critical-minerals strategy. We know how incredibly important critical minerals are to our future economic growth. We're proud to be doing the work of unlocking that opportunity and to be encouraging investment in bringing those minerals out of the ground and to be supporting the ability to do that in a way that's the most environmentally, labour- and climate-friendly way that those minerals can possibly be extracted.

So we have this unbelievable opportunity, and we're leaning into that with that strategy, and I think the centrepiece of that strategy is the creation of a single-door approach where investors know they can come to Manitoba and deal with one single desk that will help them navigate provincial-, federal-, municipal- and First Nations-related contacts and help to support them navigating those social-environmental regulatory processes.

Proud of the opening of a gold mine. We know that there's a potash mine opening soon in southwest Manitoba, and we know that there's a lot of other mines that we're hoping to see go live in the years to come thanks to the work we're doing in leaning into that opportunity.

So I share that again by way of speaking to, I think, what is clearly one of the foundational major growth opportunities that we have. And the world knows that we have what they need, and it's exciting to see the progress that we're making on that.

Of course, we talked about Churchill, but we are making those important investments in trade-supporting infrastructure, like investments in CentrePort, which we know is a phenomenal multimodal port that's going to help Manitoba to lean into our historic role as a place through which stuff moves to the world. We think about our previous role as the gateway to the west. CentrePort and those investments unlock those future opportunities to lean in to our strategic position centrally here in Canada and to, again, create a lot of opportunity and new investment here in our province.

You know, I'm running out of time, so there's so many other things I can speak to in terms of the important work we're doing to lay track to continue to see more major investment here in our province, but I'll maybe save that for a future answer to treat the members opposite to more insights into the good work we're doing to support economic growth here in Manitoba.

* (15:20)

Mr. Narth: Yes, and to that, I think while we're speaking to the transfer payments and the future growth of our economy, we're really focused on this year's budget to see where that direction will come from out of the budget.

In the last two years, we see that the transfer-federal transfer payments have increased by approximately \$1.8 billion, if I'm correct, but the minister can clarify that. He's identified 33 per cent increase in transfer payments. That's substantial.

We had also heard from the minister that the Port of Churchill is one of the projects that their government feels will offset our dependency on federal transfer payments in years to come. Within the budget, we don't see any clear commitment to-budgetary commitment for the Port of Churchill, any projects that would support the growth and development of that in the immediate years to come.

In fact, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) had mentioned numerous times within this Chamber on the official record, as well as out in the public through the media, that the Port of Churchill is a generational project. And I think we understand that as being something that will not steer the financial position of our province overnight; definitely won't be in this fiscal year. So, I'd ask the minister to point to what exactly is being done in Budget '26 that would support the growth and development of the project in Churchill.

But along with that, and more importantly—and I don't want to pile on too many questions because the

minister didn't have the opportunity to completely finish answering the last question—but together with, you know, the answer of Port of Churchill being the silver bullet to cure the economic dependency on the federal government, what's the contingency plan? If we see a continual slow to our economy—we see very meagre performance in the provincial economy over the last three budgets over the last three years. We are now leading the country in least—one of the least performing, not leading the country in one of the highest performing economies, with GDP growth identified as around 1 per cent.

So, if we were to continue—have a continued slow of—slowdown of our provincial economy, is there any plan for how we would be able to offset transfer payments if something would happen federally or with the other provinces that we wouldn't be able to expect the same amount of transfer that we currently have?

MLA Sala: So, appreciate the question. I'll start with a clarification, just because in the member's question there, he'd made a statement. I just want to make sure we're crystal clear.

In the last year of the former government, the total transfer payments as a percentage of overall revenues were 32.9 per cent. For us, they're now up to 36. So, effectively, it's approximately one third revenues, marginally higher than they were under the former government's, again, last year, last budget. So, I just want to clarify that.

But to the other questions that were posed. So, one, in regards to Churchill, I know the member noted that he hadn't identified any Churchill-related investments in the budget.

But, as I mentioned in my previous answer, the budget contains not only over \$200 million in new investments in AGG in partnership with the federal government but also a \$10-million Churchill Plus fund.

Now that Churchill Plus fund is specifically focused on trying to do the work of bringing in investment towards that energy corridor that we've discussed. That is also being supported through the standing up of the Manitoba Crown Indigenous Corporation. And all of this is about focusing on the standing up and development of an energy corridor that would ultimately lead to Churchill.

And so I think those are—that's a sign that our government is serious in trying to ensure that we do what we can to bring in that investment. And a lot of really important work is happening in the background

with the relevant companies that, I think, one would hope to see us engaging around those opportunities.

More broadly, I mean, you know, the—our Premier (Mr. Kinew) has been super clear about our goal, which is to make Manitoba a have province. And so I do appreciate the question from the member, which is, you know, is Churchill the entire answer? And I would say that we've never communicated that it is the entire answer to ensuring that Manitoba can become a have province; it's a piece of that larger picture.

In my former answer, I was happy to outline, I think, some of the building blocks that we're putting in place that, I think, are going to be important to long-term, serious economic growth. And when we look at Manitoba and we look at how we move forward and how we create—bring in that investment and create that growth, I think it's clear that it's about leaning into our strengths.

And our strengths, as Manitobans know and as people know around the world, is, first of all, our location and the transportation and logistics opportunities that that brings; the minerals that we have in the ground—we've got 47 of the world's 50 critical minerals. I think we've leaned into that to ensure that we're taking advantage of those opportunities, again, to bring in serious investment into Manitoba to unlock that opportunity. And, of course, all of that is supported with the important investments and work we're doing to ensure that we have the energy we need.

But I'll also talk about some of the other things. You know, again, it's not just about Churchill. It's about critical minerals. It's about the work we're doing to invest in trade-supporting infrastructure.

But there's some other really exciting things happening, too, that I'd speak to. One, I think that \$3.8-billion capital plan that we announced in budget is critically important. We know that to take advantage of the opportunities we have with new Canadians that have moved here, we have to unlock that opportunity and that potential to help them grow, help their families to root here in Manitoba through investments in important community infrastructure like new schools, ensuring that we have the resources that they need to decide to make a life in Manitoba. So, I think of those as important economy-enabling investments as well.

Beyond that, I'll speak to, you know, last year we announced important investments, increases in investments in tourism. We know Manitoba is an incredible

place to be. We want to bring in as many of those dollars from out of province as we can to bring in people to visit our beautiful province. And I think that leaning into that is, again, one more piece of the work we're doing to unlock more growth.

And then, of course, you know, we've heard a lot about issues with access to capital for many years in Manitoba. And I think we're making really important steps on that front to increase access to capital and encourage more investment. And I'd speak to the great work that's happening with modifications to the small business venture tax credit that is drastically opening that up. It's going to see more investment, more, I think, VC interest here in Manitoba. We're seeing our tech sector is very frothy at the moment. I think folks are super excited about what that promises. And that's in addition to changes we made to our accredited investor definition.

Why is that important? Because that's going to help to ensure that even more people in Manitoba can invest in local startups, local companies, again solving some of those challenges that entrepreneurs were seeing about access to capital, especially at the smaller cap side of things.

So, again, proud to outline, I think, a lot of the exciting work that we're doing. This isn't just about Churchill. This is about so many things. And there's so many incredible opportunities that we can advance, and I hope that the member sees that we're doing the work to make sure we create investment and more growth here in our province.

Mr. Narth: I just wanted to clarify that the stat that the minister shared of 47 out of the 50 critical minerals was actually 30 out of the 34 critical minerals, and 47 minerals was the actual statistic that he was wanting to share, just to clarify the record.

* (15:30)

But further to that, I'd just—I'd like to ask if—ask the minister if it is a consideration because of how dependent the Province of Manitoba has become on the federal government, especially as we've seen in the last two years, specifically since 2023.

The dependency growth on—and reliance on the federal government has become so substantial to the Province that this has to be a consideration for the minister when growing the economy because it's a balancing act between growing the economy and potentially losing transfer payments or continuing to have the provincial government performing at the weak level that it is.

So I'd like to ask the minister if that is—plays into consideration when deciding whether or not to make moves on creating and developing policy that could further expand and develop our—the economy of our province, things like reducing taxes for businesses, reducing taxes for individuals, you know, things like reducing the personal tax exemption and also further supporting businesses. These are things that lending institutions, investors, as well as the businesses that we have operating and looking to expand in our province, have identified as—of areas that need improvement and areas that could see substantial—could see the benefit of substantial growth if this government would entertain those changes.

So, again, my question would be to the minister: Are these deciding factors in whether or not to make Manitoba more attractive to businesses and also make life more affordable for Manitobans? Is it a decision that's being made right now between potentially limiting our transfer payments or expanding and growing our economy?

MLA Sala: So I think that one of the first things we should speak to is the fact that, you know, when we came into government, in terms of long-term economic growth and policy decisions from the former government to support that type of growth, I regret to say that we came into a context where not only did we face the prospect of not having the energy we needed, the electricity we needed, to meet the needs of a growing economy, but there was no evidence of there having been any work to ensure that we had long-term sort of economic investment in Manitoba, no major projects to speak of. And so that did leave us in a position where we were starting from a more challenged place.

And so, you know, I just want to make sure that, on the record here today, we talk a bit about reality of where we were when we got in, and I think that speaks to the great progress that's been made.

When it comes to transfers and, sort of, the questions I'm hearing from the member opposite, I would say that the Canadian health transfer and the social transfers are important and obviously underpin our ability, in many ways, to cover costs associated with a lot of the services being provided to Manitobans, just like provinces across the country.

And, in fact, just like provinces across the country, when it comes to the health transfer, for example, which is currently at 5 per cent but slated to go down to 3 per cent elevator—I think it's in '27-28. We're advocating for them to keep it at that 5 per cent

because we do feel that, when it comes to the health transfer and the social transfer, there's a contract there and we do need to see adequate levels of support from the federal government in helping to support those costs, just like they do across the country.

To the broader question, I understood the question from the member to be focused around, are we actively making decisions that will preserve us being in a position of being a recipient of bigger transfers? What I would say to that is, our focus is delivering on what the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) commitment was, which is to make Manitoba into a have province.

So I talked a lot about already some of the—I think the important work we're doing on that front, whether it's Churchill, whether it's critical minerals, whether it's leaning into our logistics and transportation opportunities. I strongly believe that we are showing the way forward when it comes to ensuring that we unlock those opportunities, and we are focused on creating jobs and creating opportunity.

And I think one thing that speaks to that: in Canada there were 16,000 jobs created last month; 10,000 of those jobs were in Manitoba. And so I think that, you know, that speaks to some of the momentum that we're seeing being generated here through our work.

We're going to keep working to ensure that we set the stage and we put the foundational blocks in place for long-term economic growth, I'm sure something that the member is, himself, wanting to see in our province. If he's got other specific areas of economic opportunity that he feels we should be leaning into, I'd be curious to hear him maybe offer some of those thoughts today as part of our Estimates discussion.

But I think, from an objective standpoint, it's hard to look at the work we're doing and not agree that we're really leaning into any and all of those strategic vectors, opportunities that parties want to see us lean into as a province. I can share that when I go and we do our investors tours and we meet with investors and credit rating agencies, we hear about, you know, the opportunities as they see them in Manitoba and we hear great feedback about the fact that we're leaning into those larger vectors, those big opportunities.

And, again, we're proud of that work. There's more to do, certainly, but it's important to remember where we were, which was in a position of relative stasis to now in a position where we're seeing momentum. We're laying down the foundational blocks, and I think it's inarguable that we're making good progress on that front.

So, again, invite the member, if there's areas where he thinks we're perhaps not leaning into that we could otherwise maybe see some opportunity, invite him to offer those. But I'd be really curious to know where he sees gaps because, again, I think we're leaning into every single opportunity we have here. We're doing it in a good way, in a strategic way and in a way that will hopefully see continued momentum and growth here in our province as a result of that.

So, with that, I pass it back to the member.

Mr. Narth: I'm hearing each and every day from Manitobans across our entire province, those that are looking to expand and further invest in our province, as well as those that are looking to make new investment in our province, that I think we've been identified on a regular occasion in a very diversified economy here in Manitoba, so there isn't any one specific large industry that any investor will point to in Manitoba. We've got great opportunity, but we don't have a track record in this province of any single item or select few large-scale investment items in our province.

The problem is that those—the independent start-up businesses that we're so proud of: the Versatile tractors, Westfield industries, Maple Leaf Foods—you know, those that have started out as small independents and have grown into worldwide leaders—started out as a small business in Manitoba.

* (15:40)

And, right now, those businesses—the new generation of those businesses are feeling that they're being ignored by this NDP government. They look at a complex and convoluted process to obtain the approvals and the permits to grow and expand and develop their businesses, and I think that's where we're really lacking some opportunity.

And what led me into my question prior is that it almost seems intentional, to keep the opportunity of our province limited so that we don't jeopardize the dependency on equalization payments from the federal government, because if you grow, you really need to grow, and it may be a scary place for this government to take that risk.

So my pointed question here, honourable Chair, is the equalization payments that we're currently receiving from the federal government. Would it be an elimination of those payments to—for the minister to consider our province as a have province? So, minister has made a number of comments saying that the goal is to see Manitoba as a have province and not

a have-not province, so at what point—does that mean no more equalization payments? Not transfer payments in general; I'm not talking about the health transfer or social transfer payments but just equalization payments. Would that be the point where the minister would consider Manitoba a have province?

MLA Sala: Just to answer the question simply: By definition, not receiving equalization payments makes us a have province.

Mr. Narth: That is exactly the answer that I was expecting, because I think that's the answer that everyone could agree on, whether it be economists, lenders or Manitobans. And I think it's the goal that everyone desires.

So since we speak of that, and knowing the position of the province right now as one of—if not right now—the largest per capita recipient of equalization payments, when does this minister and the government see that Manitoba would become a have province?

MLA Sala: So I think, you know, the question of achieving that state of being a have province starts with us righting the ship.

And, of course, the member will know when we came in, we inherited a \$2-billion deficit, which was quite a challenge for us to navigate and for Manitobans to navigate. And so we're starting the journey towards getting to this destination by fixing the mess that we had to clean up.

And I'm really proud of the fact that we—when we started, we inherited a \$2-billion deficit. One year, we reduced that by 40 per cent, which was, I think, an accomplishment in its own right. And then, just jumping ahead to the budget we just released, we just posted the lowest deficit by GDP of any province in the entire country. And I think that that is something that we can be incredibly proud of, and that didn't happen by accident. That happened through significant, significant effort not only on the part of the amazing folks supporting us and Treasury Board and Department of Finance and the entire, of course, government team, but through a lot of really hard work that happened, of course, on the political side, through our teams really bringing in a very focused approach. And with a \$498-million deficit posted, that would be a 75 per cent reduction on the deficit we were left when we came in.

And this, of course, all leads towards a balanced budget next year. That's the beginning of this journey. I want to remind the member about where we were

when we got in. Not only did we have this horrifying deficit position that we inherited, but we also had, again, nothing in the way of projects, nothing in the way of momentum. That was a pretty difficult record to inherit.

And, you know, if there's things that the member wants to share that clarify where or how I'm incorrect in those assertions, I invite him to offer those. But I can say, as somebody who had a pretty good line of sight on where we were when we got in, it was pretty tough sledding. We inherited quite a—I'll say a challenging situation. And it's kind of amazing to me that in only two and a half years, we've turned this ship around and we took a very difficult fiscal position. We took a lack of vision and foresight about, you know, where we needed to go as a province and we've now brought that to bear. We've brought, I think, an exciting vision of one Manitoba with a lot of, I think, really exciting economic direction.

We're now writing our fiscal position and are, again, 75 per cent reduction relative to where we were when we got in, heading towards a balanced budget next year. I would say, you know, instead of, at this point, working to identify what that far-off goal is, which we are pursuing, right now the focus is on cleaning up the mess that we were left and righting the ship. I think we've done a great work in doing just that, and excited about the continued progress we're going to make as we head into our next budget.

Mr. Narth: As much as I appreciate the answer, I'd like to clarify that under the previous PC government—the most recent PC government—they saw two actual balanced budgets. And those are real results. I don't think that there are many Manitobans that are looking at the financial position through the last two budgets that we've seen the results of, and now the third NDP provincial budget, that we are anywhere on track to a balanced budget next year. In fact, we see increased spending, increased taxation nearly everywhere we turn.

Honourable Chair, we see, you know, in plain sight the spending increase in this budget of \$1.5 billion. You know, I think we can accept that if that's—those are expenditures to help grow the economy, that would play to the minister's plan for being on a track of balancing a budget. But with spending more money and seeing no additional results, it's really hard, just by basic fundamental facts, that we could see a balanced budget. It doesn't make sense. If you don't have substantially more growth, but yet you have more spending, it—that doesn't balance.

So, honourable Chair, I'd like to ask the minister, with seeing a \$1.5-billion increase in spending in the budget, what measurable results are Manitobans going to have from this increase?

* (15:50)

MLA Sala: I just want to make sure that we're speaking clearly on the record here in responding to misstatements, or maybe the member misspoke when he said nobody believes us about our fiscal position, but I'll remind him—I would say some very qualified organizations would disagree with his commentary there: for example, DBRS, whose headline for their report was Balance Within Reach; or the Bank of Montreal, whose headline for their report on our budget was Surplus is Calling.

So I'll put my money on these financial experts and their perspectives on the quality of our budget and what we put forward, and I'll put our trust in their perspective, and I think Manitobans would likely do the same over perspectives brought forward by the members opposite.

In terms of, again, you know, our overall spending and approach to management and of our cost structure, I can't help but want to just respond to say that we were left with a \$2-billion deficit, and so I think that is obviously a very challenging place to have started.

I'll remind the member—he's probably had the benefit of hearing me talk about the MNP report that we had developed shortly after we got in. The goal of that report, just to remind the member, was to have an independent take on that \$2-billion deficit and to understand ultimately what happened and what led to that deficit number.

And so, again, for the member's benefit, I'll share a bit about what that report said. MNP found, with no uncertainty, that there was a number of risks—or decisions that were made that constituted a high level of risk. They identified that there were some, I will say, rosy projections as it relates to government revenues. There—I also identified that there were some extremely rosy projections regarding Hydro revenues.

They also identified that, post-budget and before election, a number of major expense decisions were made that weren't factored in with the former government's previous report out at Q1, at the end of July before the election. So, I think it's an important thing to, sort of, dwell on momentarily, even though it's probably not fun to hear about, that ultimately the former government went out at the end of July,

three months before the election, told Manitobans what was an—entirely a fiction about our fiscal position.

Again, when you look at Hydro, there was a \$500-million-plus net income position that had been put forward. Hydro knew at that point their water was going to come nowhere close to that, probably off by hundreds of millions of dollars. We ended that fiscal year off-target by hundreds of millions of dollars. That wasn't shared with Manitobans at that Q1 report out.

And I think we just—again, it's important we're talking about fiscal management, transparency. All these things go together. It's concerning—and this isn't partisan to say—it's concerning that, at the end of July, your team went out and told Manitobans that your fiscal position was hundreds of millions of dollars better than it was. And that is fact.

And MNP, an independent accounting firm, again—which is, I think does good work by anyone's measure—spoke to that in that report. And so, again, just important to remind everybody as to where we started and how it happened that we had a \$2-billion deficit.

In terms of our approach to fiscal management, again, I think the numbers speak for themselves. We're doing really good work, making progress, getting to the balanced budget commitment, the goal, next year. This year's budget, just in terms of expenditure, you spoke to what you framed as a concerning increase in expenditure.

Well, I can share, year over year, just through volume growth and price growth, governments can expect their costs to go up. But this year, relative to Q3 last year, we saw 4.6 per cent increase in expenses, and we're going to see a 9.7 per cent increase in revenues. And it's on that basis of that delta between those two that we're positioning ourselves to deliver on the goal that we've set for ourselves and we committed to delivering on for Manitobans.

Last thing I want to say before my time's up: the member alluded to what he called—he's characterized as balanced budgets under the member's opposite.

What I'll say is that, when Manitobans are experiencing horrific health-care—experiences in accessing health care due to massive cuts to health care, our kids were not getting the support they needed in schools, our municipalities were not getting the support they need—it's nothing to brag about that you deliver a balance if you're falling short on literally every single measure. Because if you simply are willing to just slash

expenditures in every department, it's not hard to balance.

The question is: Can you deliver fiscal sustainability while delivering what Manitobans sent us here to deliver on?

Mr. Narth: Well, the minister shared some snippets of what different agencies had said in some quotes, and I have one to share with the minister, and it's from Moody's. And the report had said that the Province's plan, and I quote, to slash annual deficits last estimated at more than \$1.6 billion for the fiscal year that ended in March, does not appear in—to line up with the government's own economic growth projections, and economic growth leads to more tax revenue.

So, then, in the minister's response—the response that we just heard from this minister—we heard that—when I had asked, you know, what are we getting for the additional \$1.5 billion of expenditure in this budget, and the response from the minister, as everyone has just seen, is that costs go up as the population grows, and the province grows, we have to spend more money.

So we saw what the minister had said, and I didn't—I don't know if I caught the exact point of increase in spending, but I think it was 4.7 per cent—*is what the minister had just said—*increase in spending, but we've also identified that we've seen only a 1.1 per cent increase in economic growth.

So if we plan for seeing a balanced budget next year, I don't think we would just portray to the Manitoban voter—the average hard-working Manitoban that's out there paying their taxes and hoping that this government is looking out after their best financial interest—that those two figures line up.

If spending is increased by 4.7 per cent and our economy is only growing by 1.1 per cent, you know, the quote from Moody's seems to be on point, that it doesn't make sense, that economic growth will equal government expenditures. And without that, I'd like the minister to explain how we could possibly see a balanced budget until the point when we can have economic growth equalized with government expenditure.

* (16:00)

MLA Sala: I want to start out by just speaking to a comment that was made, like, by the member, which seemed to suggest that he feels we're not getting any value for our government's investments, \$1.5 billion in new spending. One thing I can speak to is \$1 billion

of that is on health care. And the member might know that his team did a lot of damage over seven and a half years in government to our health-care system.

I'm proud that over the last few years, we have made massive investments in health care because that was the order of the moment due to the level of damage that had been done. We had health-care workers fleeing the system; the member would know that. Closures of hospitals, closures of three ERs here in Winnipeg. Just a disaster by any measure.

And so, yes, that \$1.5 billion is creating huge value for Manitobans, and a large part of that investment is doing the work of repairing—continuing to repair the damage that was done by the members opposite during their tenure. And so we're proud to be making those investments, and a big part of the value being produced by these investments is new health-care workers. And so, we're proud that we've brought in over 4,000 net-new health-care workers into the system to support Manitobans, again, after years of seeing people flee.

And we would argue that those are unbelievably high-value investments, because you can't grow your economy and do that kind of work unless you have a reliable health-care system—*[interjection]*—thank you so much—that people know is there when they need it. And so, I'm proud to be making an investment of that significance and proud to be on a team that is focused on actually ensuring Manitobans can get the health care that they deserve to get access to.

A couple points I want to identify. The member wrongly asserted, as his colleague did yesterday, and I'm happy to just clarify for him, the real GDP number for 2025 was 1.6 per cent, not—I think he said 1 or 1.1. That number was revised upwards and is now 1.6. So, Manitoba was in the bottom third of the pack, but we were not last, as is being asserted. And, of course, more good work to do in continuing to grow that, but important that we're clear and accurate here when we're speaking on the record.

As it relates to the relationship he's trying to establish between those levels of growth and government revenues, government revenue growth has driven much more on the nominal GDP side. And so I can say that in 2025, estimated nominal GDP growth is 4 and a half per cent, and for 2026, estimated at 4.2. So, that's, I think, a much more important indicator as to what might lead to some revenue growth, not the numbers that were being referenced earlier.

So, happy to put some facts on the record about where Manitoba actually stood in terms of our GDP position in 2025, and hopefully that answers the question that the member posed.

Mr. Narth: Thank the minister for that response. It changes some things, but it doesn't change the entire story.

And I'd like to ask the minister, if the numbers don't align the revenue with expenditure, fundamentally we don't have a balanced budget. So, until that time—so we're still going to need, if we still see increased spending as we are in this budget, and it's been identified—you know, I think no matter where it's spent—sure we can say that a billion dollars is additionally spent in health care, are wait times improving? Do we see improved delivery in health care?

But I think that would be in Estimates for health care, so I don't want to dive down deep into how poorly health care is actually performing under the current NDP government because I don't think there's a single Manitoban that feels that health care is improving under their leadership.

But, fundamentally, we won't see a balanced budget until revenue—government revenue—matches government expenditures. And right now what the minister is portraying doesn't. So, we're going to need to see economic growth or increase in tax revenue. I don't think there is any other way.

I know the minister has a background in business and economics as well, but I think it's quite simple and plain to show to Manitobans that there are only two ways of seeing a balanced budget when you project a certain level of expenditure. So, in budget 2027—and what Budget 2026 is lining up for—would need to see either substantial economic growth, increase in tax revenue or cuts to services.

So which one of those is the minister presenting for the next year's budget?

MLA Sala: So just speaking to the question, which I appreciate, the bigger story here—which, again, it's important to remind the member of—is the \$2-billion deficit starting point. One year: 40 per cent reduction down to \$1.2 billion. This year's deficit post: \$498 million—that's a 75 per cent reduction. So, that's the trajectory, and I think, to answer his question—I'm not sure if he misheard me—but I want to just restate so it's clear: 4.6 per cent growth on expenses, 9.7 per cent growth on revenue.

So back to your question about the sort of basic math, and how does this work? That's how it works: revenues exceeding expenditures, right? And the path that we're proposing is clearly outlined in budget for him to review if he wants to know more about how we're proposing those things will align next year.

But I think something that's really worthwhile highlighting—that does speak directly to what he's asking—is the amazing work that's been done here in reducing our overall debt-servicing obligations. So, when we came in—the structure we inherited under the PCs, 9.9 cents in '23-24 of every dollar were going towards debt servicing. So, that obviously represents a significant expense.

What's happening this year? As a result of our deficit-reduction work—and the good work that we're doing, I think, in building strong relationships with credit-rating agencies and investors—that is now down to 8.9 cents. What does that mean? That means we have \$200 million—actually I think it's more like \$240 million—in additional dollars that we can use to invest in health care and education and making Manitoba into a safer place to live, among many other investments.

* (16:10)

That work and—that we've done, we're going to see continued reduction in the scope of that debt servicing out to '27-28. I think we're forecasting that to go down to eight and a half. That will mean that we'll have over \$400 million in net-new money that we're going to be able to put to use towards investing in the things that matter.

So, as part of your question, I think it's important to not only talk about the overall structure here, which is seeing expenses—expense growth come under our revenue growth, but adding to that, we're seeing this remarkable reduction in the scope of our debt servicing. And I think that shows really impressive progress relative to where we were when we came into government.

We inherited—again, a much more significant amount of our overall revenue was going towards debt servicing when we inherited the PC cost structure. Thanks to the work we've done, that's now gone down by almost 1 per cent to 8.9, and we're going to see that continue to reduce as we move forward. So, that also is unlocking a whole bunch of new dollars that we're going to be able to put to good use, and hopefully that helps the member understand a little more about how we're going to deliver on that goal for next year.

Mr. Narth: I can see the desire, but we've seen over the last couple budgets that there's been a gap between desire and reality with the budgets of this NDP government. And I don't blame the minister. I think it's direction of the province under this Premier (Mr. Kinew) that there's very little to work with and very little will to achieve those desires and goals.

This government has presented a budget last year projecting a deficit of \$794 million, and keep in mind that last year's budget, there was the two forms of the budget: a contingency budget for a looming trade war; there was concern of investment that needed to be made in different industries to prop up and stabilize them as we navigated economic uncertainty. That didn't come to reality. For the most part, the CUSMA agreement was undisturbed by our trade partners to the south, and we didn't really see the significant investment into industry that was claimed in the contingency budget. So, we saw a \$794-million projection.

Today, the minister and the government is admitting that that deficit had grown to a \$1.6-roughly-billion deficit, more than double what Manitobans were told. And that's even more than the contingency budget that was presented by the minister. You know, that's not just a small miss; that's significant.

So, we—as we could buy that plan, and Manitobans could buy that plan last year, and the projected amounts to see the end in sight of debt spending by the Province and a path towards a balanced budget, but we didn't see the results. And, you know, I'd think that that's a fundamental failure in financial planning.

So my question, honourable Chair, is how did the government get it so wrong, then? And now, when we see warnings by organizations like Moody's saying that the projection is unrealistic for this year, they've got a good reason to believe that, and I think Manitobans have good reason to believe that too.

So could the minister answer how things have gone so wrong and why they won't go in the same direction this year?

MLA Sala: I appreciate the question and, you know, again we'll talk about the work that's been done. So, we started with that \$2-billion deficit. First budget, we reduced that PC deficit down by 40 per cent. Second budget, we did have extraordinary events that the member is no doubt familiar with. We had the most extreme wildfire season we've had in Manitoba in over 30 years. That had an unbelievably detrimental impact on over 30,000 Manitobans—were displaced.

And there were significant costs that were incurred ensuring that those Manitobans received the support that they needed during those difficult times.

We hope that that was, again, a one-year extraordinary event that we don't want to ever see repeated because of the impacts on Manitobans and, of course, the environmental destruction that was created. But that was an extreme wildfire event that led to expenditures that were over \$350 million to provide the supports needed.

On the Hydro side, the member might be aware that Hydro, on any yearly basis, can experience fluctuations in hydrology. The important question is, how are you budgeting and how are you approaching that question? Last year, just like this year, we took a very modest approach to forecasting Hydro's net income. Their net income projections, as modest as they were, were ultimately off by an estimated \$700 million. The reason for that is because we had the worst drought since 1941-42.

So, again, just going to let that sink in. Almost a period of 80 years we hadn't seen hydrology issues of that scope, and, ultimately, that led to an enormous variance at Manitoba Hydro.

I'll further share with the member, as somebody who is a student of Hydro, one thing I've learned is that the reality is on any yearly basis at Hydro you can have these massive fluctuations, both positive and negative, and really we maxed out the potential on the negative side there. But, again, that was built off of a modest net-income projection and, ultimately, that's something that we do not expect to see repeated.

Going forward, we're, again, this year, \$490-million deficit; that's down 75 per cent from the deficit we inherited, showing further progress. And, you know, when it comes to confidence in that and our ability to deliver on that, I'm proud to share, I think, some more quotes that the member might benefit from hearing.

Here's another quote for—quote from RBC: Manitoba is the seventh province to table its 2026 budget and the new numbers look not as challenged as several others. The report goes on to note: Manitoba claims the smallest '26-27 deficit-to-GDP ratio, is one of the few provinces charting a path to balance.

I'll read a quote from BMO. Quote: The bottom line, Manitoba looks to be on track to achieve surplus by '27-28, despite a backdrop of elevated uncertainty. The province's diverse economic base and attractiveness for infrastructure projects leaves it well positioned to benefit from efforts to boost Canada's resilience.

And the last quote I'll share from CIBC, quote: The medium-term projections show the government still achieving its objective of balancing the budget in fiscal '27-28 and maintaining that in the following fiscal years as well.

So what we're seeing from the market, we're seeing from our major FIs in Canada, is a positive response to the numbers we've put forward in our last budget.

And I just have to go back—the, you know, the crux of the question asked. And the attempt is to try to undermine, of course, the credibility of the work we're doing and leaning heavily on the result from last year. And, again, I'll say to the member, one of the amazing things is that, ultimately, we've been able to continue, even in the face of those significant in-year challenges last year, to hold steady, hold strong and to continue to keep Manitoba on a good path, even in light of those extreme challenges.

* (16:20)

And I think a really important detail is that even though there was a \$700-million variance at Hydro—there was a \$350-million variance due to wildfire expenditures—had we not had those expenditures, we would have been right on track with the budget with the number we printed. So, that's a very important thing to highlight.

The member clearly knows that we don't have the capacity to determine the overall amount of rain coming down. He would know, though, that we do have the ability to determine a budget or a net income figure for Hydro that is modest and reasonable, which is exactly what we did.

So, again, had it not been for those extraordinary events, we would have been right on track. Manitobans have every reason to trust our government and the numbers we put forward.

Mr. Narth: Last year, I'm sure we'll all remember that, out of the infrastructure budget, expenditure for emergency measures was slashed—significantly slashed. And then we went into that disastrous wildfire season, you know, the worst we've seen, and the damages and the costs that it put onto Manitobans and our provincial economy.

So this year, we didn't see an increase. We didn't see that rebound to the levels that were set into place under our PC government. So, some may question whether that would be irresponsible or not of this government, after seeing the devastation and the additional cost—some may argue unnecessary additional

cost—because of needing to be as defensive as we were instead of offensive in our wildfire combat operations.

Why—when we see \$1.5 billion in additional expenditure, why would we not be budgeting additional funds for emergency measures so that we don't need to see that type of a cost on the backs of the Manitoba taxpayer?

MLA Sala: So appreciate the question about the work that we're doing to make sure we keep Manitobans as safe as possible from the impacts of wildfires.

I think this year we've brought in, again, reasonable dollars in budget to ensure that we have money there to respond to emergencies as they arise; there's a \$50-million budget line in place. There's also a \$100-million rev contingency there to respond to, perhaps, revenue losses that might be—might occur as a result of natural disasters or otherwise. And there are other investments as well that are being made to support our ability to respond.

I think the—one of the areas that I'm proud to talk a bit more about is the work that we've done to increase investments in preparedness, and I'm talking about year over year, like, recurring investments that are going to help to ensure Manitobans stay safe. And so I'm going to talk a bit about those increases here. The member identified that there were no increases to EMO, so I'm happy to outline for him some of the major increases that we're bringing forward to help, again, keep Manitobans safer.

So we have made in this budget a \$1.2-million investment to add 19 firefighters to help improve response capability and to sustain preparedness levels and to help better co-ordinate between different levels of government and otherwise during wildfire events. There's an additional \$1 million in new money; this is, again, structural, long-term funding, year over year, to add 15 more staff to EMO.

So the member had said in his question, why didn't we make any new investments in emergency management? Fifteen more staff and \$1 million a year additional funding to support that.

There's \$459,000 in new funding to support four more conservation officers to support wildfire work, \$1.2 million to upgrade the Manitoba Wildfire Service's weather information and fire-mapping systems. So, that's going to help with modelling and predictions and enable more lead time for evacuations.

Of course, there is—we've made an announcement about investing in a new attack and fire base in Thompson.

That's needed and, I think, very important, and we're currently in negotiations with that municipality on building that.

We've invested more in expanding wildfire training and creating some opportunities in partnership with northern First Nations communities. Another \$1.1 million for aerial firefighting services, and, of course, there's a \$75-million investment for three new water bombers that we have now ordered. The first plane is coming in 2031; can't come soon enough, but, unfortunately, there's a very long runway to get access to these things, so it's a good thing our government got in line because, again, for years the former PC government did not take that important action to ensure that we had access to those kinds of—those types of planes to do that important work.

So I hope that this helps the member see that there have been extensive investments beyond just simply those having, sort of, dollars put aside for responding to emergencies. We are making the necessary investments—and I hope he agrees—to make sure that we're even more ready should we face another wildfire season like the last one or ready for any wildfires that Manitobans might be faced with in the years to come.

So, again, we remain committed to continuing to make more investments, all with an eye on ensuring that we minimize the risks associated with, you know, wildfires and some of those horrible impacts that we saw last year.

Mr. Narth: Maybe I'll just clarify that a little bit more. In a previous response when we were talking about the revenue versus expenditures in the province, we were told that, you know, it was needed to be done, the increase in expenditures, at a rate of approximately 4.7 per cent because of just the growth of the province and the increased rate of costs for the Province.

Then we saw a \$100-million budgeted line item and budgeted money for emergency measures under the previous PC government. The NDP, the new NDP government, held that for their first budget and then last year, had cut it in half. So, we saw it go from \$100 million down to \$50 million, and then, unfortunately—no blame to the government for sure; it's Mother Nature—a lot of the costs were borne by the reality of one of the most severe wildfire seasons that we've seen in Manitoba history.

* (16:30)

But after seeing that and the three—more than \$300-million cost that had been on our province, the minister had just clarified the tremendous expenditures

that they've seen. So, \$50 million, which was a cut of 50 per cent to the budget, but then an increase of \$1.2 million, \$1,459,000, \$1.2 million and \$1.1 million. And some of those expenditures, the 1.2 and the 1.1, are announcement commitments in the future with no dedicated commitment this year. So, you know, we see roughly a 2-and-three-quarter-million-dollar additional commitment outside of the \$50 million, which still comes a long way from the \$100 million.

So I'd like to ask the minister why he would be comfortable with that large of a cut to our preparedness and readiness for another wildfire season, seeing as though we're only one year out.

So we know that—everyone understands that weather patterns and cycles don't generally change immediately overnight. So, we've seen, in the north-west corner, above-average snowfall; we've seen in central north where a lot of that wildfire had happened, below average; and in the south, which I'm most familiar in my home communities, we've seen widespread devastating wildfires—again, below normal, drought-like conditions leading into the spring.

So is it irresponsible or is it just poor planning to have allowed that budget to be cut in half for this financial year?

MLA Sala: So, happy to respond to this question. And maybe I'll just start by saying we're confident that we're ready for what comes. And as a government, I think we've made reasonable investments in preparing for whatever comes with emergency measures budgets—that, again, \$50 million and \$100-million rev contingency.

I just want to speak to this just briefly. The first budget we brought in, we had—we did bring in a \$50-million emergency line. And, again, those dollars are there if only—or only to respond to emergencies. In that year, we only spent 30 from that line and we let 20 lapse. The following year, we budgeted \$50 million and we had a \$350-million expense as a result of it being a historic wildfire year.

So those dollars are there, of course; they're there to respond if needed. But the reality is that, should we face extreme, unique, sort of, in-year challenges as we did last year, we will respond to them. And we will ensure we make those expenditures as needed to take care and support Manitobans.

The question there is: Is the amount reasonable? And I think, again, the examples I offered, that in our first year, we budgeted 50, underspent by 20, which just ended up lapsing, again, because these are only to

be spent in the event of emergencies. I think that speaks to the nature of that budget line.

Much more importantly—and I think this is—really bears repeating again—is the importance of these investments we're making structurally in the long term, which are actually real investments in fire preparedness and readiness, as opposed to just socking away dollars in case you have an emergency, which may not be spent in any given year. Instead, again, we're not only ensuring that we're we have dollars budgeted if required to respond to emergencies, but we're also making very real structural long-term investments in fire readiness.

I outlined those already but, again, quickly—it's great to have a chance to talk about this good work that we're doing—\$1.2 million to add 19 firefighters; \$1 million to add 15 more staff to EMO; \$459,000 to support four more conservation officers; \$1.2 million to upgrade Manitoba fire—wildfire services, weather information, fire mapping. These are real, structural long-term investments.

I hope the member can hear what I'm sharing here and can recognize why these investments are the kind of investments that Manitobans really want to see us making in fire preparedness. This isn't just about having dollars in a bank account to ensure that we can respond if something happens; it's about actual long-term investment and making sure we're genuinely in the best position possible to respond to these crises should they emerge.

And so, again, having said that, we continue to be ready with the emergency expense line along with \$100-million revenue contingency. Manitobans can count on us being ready should we face more challenges this year and the—in future years.

Mr. Narth: So I'd like to move on from here, but wanted to paint a picture on the projection for both revenue and expenditures for the Province and identify some of those largest outliers.

So we've seen that, you know, the largest outliers on both sides would be the devastating wildfire season for expenditures and a reduction of revenue for drought on Manitoba Hydro. So, you know, when—I appreciate the minister identifying that in the first year \$32 million out of 50 was spent. That was a cut of half of the budget from \$100 million to 50 and then we saw \$300 million.

So if we were to use rough math, a more realistic average there would be the \$100 million that our previous government had budgeted. But, nonetheless,

that's the justification of this government, this minister. But to make it clear, you know, we see that right now we've got big reliance on not having any unforeseen expenditures and we also—we're betting everything, we're betting the fiscal farm on Manitoba Hydro becoming profitable overnight.

So we see that, you know, the budget has been showing a pattern over the last couple years, and now a continuation of that, an over-promise and under-deliver, and then revise the numbers later. So, I think the minister has done a good job at portraying what the desire is of the financial position of our province, but we're not seeing the reality.

So I'd ask, if I'm clear on that, we need to have the projected revenue of Manitoba Hydro—that's one of our largest dependencies—and without that, we're going to be left with a very similar situation as we had been this year. So, the—if we see a similar year, a drought-type year for this summer season, we could be seeing, instead of a \$500-million deficit, we could be hedging around that \$1.6 million again.

* (16:40)

Just to be clear, if we were to see a similar Hydro year to last year, we've built no other contingency into this projected budget.

MLA Sala: Appreciate the question. I'll just speak to one item first here, which is the question about, again, the reasonableness of our investments in emergency preparedness and emergency expenses.

So I think it's worth sharing—I already shared that in our first year, we budgeted \$50 million and we spent 30, so 20 lapsed. The year before, which was the last PC budget, there was only \$29 million in expenditures.

So, again, we had every reason to believe that if we're looking at recent history, reasonable analysis would suggest \$50 million is not an unreasonable amount to have in place for emergency readiness. Again, \$29 million in expenditures in '23-24, \$30 million the next year. I think the member can see why the number that we put forward is reasonable if you look at recent history.

I think the other thing he spoke about was Hydro, and he's repeating the false claim that we heard yesterday as well from his colleague. And I understand they're here to maybe do politics, but I'll share with him some information that hopefully will help him understand the reality on the ground a little more clearly.

This year, when it comes to Manitoba Hydro's net-income position, we've estimated—or there's a \$140-million net-income target that they have and that we have included as part of our budget. That \$140-million net-income position and that forecast is based off existing reservoirs where they are right now today, which I can share with the member, of course, are lower than average.

And so that net-income number reflects and bakes in the existing position that we find ourselves in, leading off of last year, which is—which, as I've shared, was a historic drought year that we faced, and, of course, we had the corresponding impacts.

And so, if you take that into account, you can see that the net-income position Hydro's brought forward and ultimately we've brought forward is eminently reasonable. It's based off of our existing position, which, as I've shared, is our reservoirs are lower than average. So, it's, I think, a very realistic outlook on where Hydro is likely to be. But, again, we can only control so much in terms of, you know, the amount of rain that we see come into Manitoba or through our water—through the various water tables that we have coming into Manitoba.

And so I think an important piece that I'd add to that, one of the important things we've done to help ensure Hydro is in an improved fiscal position, is we eliminated the capital tax that they used to pay to government. We did that last year. Last year, we also reduced the debt guarantee fee that Hydro was paying to government. This year, we're reducing that even further. The net impact of those changes—the elimination of the capital tax and the reduction of the debt guarantee fee—is seeing over \$200 million in new dollars being left in Hydro's coffers.

So we've taken those actions to help improve Hydro's fiscal position. That move, in addition to, I think, a very modest approach to forecasting their net revenue for this year—net income—I think puts us in a position where we are to the best of our ability forecasting a reasonable landing place for Hydro this year.

So to in any way infer or suggest that we're banking on Hydro to have some kind of an unusually good result this year or that we're not budgeting realistically is patently false. And I think it's important to just reflect on what I just shared about the important work that the experts at Hydro are doing—and that they've done—to put us in a place where we have the best line of sight on our net income possible.

Last year's result, again, was the result of an extraordinary year which was the worst drought year since 1941-42. Do we expect that to be repeated this year, as the member is suggesting, as a risk? No; that was, again, the worst year in almost 80 years—or over 80 years. That is not something we're expecting to see repeated. Again, nature will do what nature does.

So what we've done is, on our side, we've ensured that we've brought forward the most reasonable, responsible net-income projection possible, and while we're doing it, we're leaving more dollars in Hydro's coffers to make sure that they can stay fiscally healthy.

Again, we've done more this year by further reducing that debt fee that we were charging. And, again, we're proud to be doing that work to make sure Hydro can continue to stay sustainable for years to come while they deliver the important energy that Manitobans need.

Mr. Narth: You know, I was going to move on from that until I heard the minister's justification is a simple sleight of hand. The minister had said that the position of Manitoba Hydro and the predictability is going to be increased significantly because of the elimination of the capital tax on Manitoba Hydro, essentially saying that it's taking money from one pocket and putting it into another and that that's going to change the predictability of the financial position of our province when, in fact, that capital tax—and I welcome the minister to correct me if he thinks that I'm wrong—was transferring money from Manitoba Hydro to the provincial government in general revenue, which we're considering the revenue of Manitoba Hydro as part of the revenue for the province.

So to convey that to the people of Manitoba that, you know, that sleight of hand is going to make a financial difference to the position of our province, I think is misleading. It's robbing Peter to pay Paul; doesn't make a difference at the end of the day for Manitobans and the predictability of our budget.

So I'd ask the minister if, in fact, it makes a financial bottom-line difference—and the bottom line is where we look for a balanced surplus or deficit—making that change does not change the feasibility—or the viability—fiscal viability—of Manitoba Hydro.

MLA Sala: So I want to start by just being really clear that the member is entirely wrong in the assertion that these changes have not created some type of benefit for Hydro. I would invite him to read the GRA which was recently put forward; and I'm sure maybe he's taken a look at that already. If he has, he might have

missed the sections that referred to the impacts of that—those changes that we made and how that has significantly improved Hydro's financial position.

And so while we do operate in a broad summary government environment, these changes were, like, bringing significant benefit to Hydro and their overall position, and I—really importantly are facilitating them doing the work that wasn't done for many years—for seven and a half years—specifically investing in the infrastructure that Manitobans need to make sure we have access to reliable energy.

* (16:50)

You know, that GRA and the IRP that was recently released by Hydro, that we were proud to stand behind, outlines the significant investments that we're making in energy infrastructure over the years to come. And, ultimately, those new dollars that we're leaving in Hydro allow Hydro to make investments in renovations to—or fixes to bipole that are going to be significant to ensure that that line, which is quite old, gets the repair that it needs, the attention it needs. Obviously an incredibly important piece of infrastructure.

And then, in addition to that, of course, all the new energy that we're proposing to bring online that—and the approaches for that have been outlined in the IRP—these are incredibly important investments. And the best, I think—the impact of that \$200 million that we're keeping back in Hydro is that not only can Hydro make those investments that need to be made and do that in a way that ensures they stay financially healthy, but it also allows them to do that in a way that ensures rates remain affordable.

And so the impact of that change—I don't think I can overstate how incorrect the member is in stating that he feels that that isn't having some type of an impact in terms of Hydro's net-income position or their overall fiscal position and their ability to invest. It, in fact, is underpinning their ability to continue making those generational investments while we continue to keep rates low. And, you know, I would argue that Hydro rates are something that all Manitobans care deeply about.

The member would know, as a government, we've placed a significant amount of focus on doing everything we can to keep rates low, including these investments in Hydro, by ensuring that they can keep more of those dollars in their coffers, in addition to repealing the bill that the members opposite had brought in during their time, which was bill 36. It had a number

of names, but, ultimately, that bill was focused on moving rate-setting from the Public Utilities Board over to the Cabinet table. So, we know that for years there was, again, a number of—we'll call them unique—approaches to raising costs on Manitobans, raising Hydro rates.

We know how impactful energy costs are on the average Manitoban's wallet. And so, again, these investments are important in helping to manage rate pressures while Hydro can do the work that they need to do in making significant investments that hadn't been made for many years under the members opposite, in ensuring we have state of good repair with our existing distribution transmission infrastructure, but also in ensuring we have the firepower we need to make those significant new investments in new capacity while we keep energy affordable.

So very, very important, I think, change that we made and, again, I'd invite the member to go to that GRA to get a maybe a stronger sense of why those investments were important and why they are actually directly beneficial to Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Narth: I think it concerns me, and I think it concerns many Manitobans who have more of a long-term memory and remember the last time that the NDP were in government and how they had nearly bankrupted the Crown corporation.

Mismanagement, overspending and poor planning had led to a bipole project being a complete financial disaster for the province, as well as the Keeyask Generation Project that took nearly seven years for the previous PC government to straighten out; it was an absolute mess that the previous NDP government structurally had put Manitoba Hydro—along with the poor planning, irresponsible decisions in financial investment with those Hydro projects.

So, you know, when we look at Manitoba Hydro and the issues with Manitoba Hydro, it seems to be an easy scapegoat for this minister and this government. I don't think all of the loss that the Manitobans are bearing through Manitoba Hydro can be attributed to water levels, drought levels; these are issues that the NDP, when they were last in government, had established.

And now they're going back to their old ways. They talk about expanding generation capacity while we see that Manitoba Hydro is carrying over \$25 billion in debt. Like, you know, that's—it's nice that it's hidden away and we don't need to see it front and centre, but in reality, as the minister had said, that

the capital tax is beneficial so that Manitoba Hydro is able to carry more debt or have access to more debt for further investment.

These are things that Manitobans should be concerned about because this is a Crown corporation which we all can agree has great value to our province, but, you know, there's some serious issues here. When the Crown corporation, Manitoba Hydro, which we're now very dependent on in this 2026 Budget to carry the revenue of our province and, you know, we're hoping for a net profit this year, we see that that Crown corporation is now carrying more debt than half of the countries in the entire world, and that's a fact. Manitoba Hydro carries more debt than half of the countries in the entire world. That should be alarming to the minister; that should be alarming to the Premier (Mr. Kinew), the rest of the NDP government and every Manitoban.

So, you know, my question to start—and I don't want to dwell on Manitoba Hydro; hopefully we can move on from here—but since it's such a significant portion of the loss that we had seen last year, and since it makes up so much of the potential revenue for this year's budget—and we saw that that was overshoot last year—I'd like to ask the minister: How realistic are the numbers this year for the net profit for Manitoba Hydro, knowing that, you know, there's much more to play financially than just drought conditions? And when can we—when would Manitobans be able to see further investment to expand capacity in Manitoba Hydro?

MLA Sala: So I just want to respond to what the member is claiming here, which is that there's a significant reliance on Hydro net income. I thought I did a reasonable job earlier of helping to—sort of

helping him to understand why the net-income amount is very modest and built off of a position that reflects our lower water levels, but to his claim that we're heavily reliant on this as part of our overall revenue picture: \$140-million net income or revenue for Manitoba or for Hydro represents 0.5 per cent of our overall revenues. So, that doesn't really square with his claim there. I think it's important to just speak to those words he put on the record.

In terms of the question he's asking, again, which was, like, what is the level of credibility or accuracy of that net-income projection—we have a lot of confidence in the amazing professionals and leaders at Manitoba Hydro who do the hard work of water forecasting and looking to develop these projections.

These, I think, are some of the best of the best and incredibly talented group of people we have at Hydro, and we have confidence that when they give us data and share projections and look to help us understand what they expect to see as a net-income position, that they're doing that on a basis of credibility and they're doing that on a basis of data and that they're very well informed.

And so, again, we have confidence that the number we've put forward is both modest and reasonable, that it is, in fact, in no way something that—

The Chairperson: Order.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

The Deputy Speaker (Tyler Blashko): The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 16, 2026

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