

**Fourth Session – Forty-Second Legislature**  
of the  
**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**  
**DEBATES**  
and  
**PROCEEDINGS**  
**Official Report**  
**(Hansard)**

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Second Legislature**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
AL TOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GORDON, Audrey, Hon.	Southdale	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah, Hon.	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan, Hon.	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	McPhillips	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg, Hon.	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
REYES, Jon, Hon.	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew, Hon.	Lagimodière	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Kirkfield Park	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 11, 2022

*The House met at 1:30 p.m.*

**Madam Speaker:** Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill 45—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2022**

**Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance):** Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the First Minister, that Bill 45, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2022; Loi d'exécution du budget de 2022 et modifiant diverses dispositions législatives en matière de fiscalité, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Friesen:** Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce Bill 45, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, for—2022.

The bill implements numerous tax statutes and other administrative changes, most of which were announced as part of Budget 2022. As well as some additional priority legislation, these measures lower taxes for Manitobans and for businesses, provide one-time assistance to families with minor children and low-income seniors dealing with inflationary pressures. They provide certainty for residential and agricultural property owners, respecting their 50 per cent school tax rebate in 2023 and enhance Manitoba government's service delivery, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed? [*Agreed*]

**Bill 46—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act**

**Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure):** I move, seconded by the—secondly by the Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations member, that Bill 46, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act, be now read for the first time.

**Madam Speaker:** It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, seconded by the honourable Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations

(Mr. Lagimodiere), that Bill 46, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce Bill 46, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act.

This bill amends The Highway Traffic Act to create a new offence for travelling on a highway that is closed due to bad weather conditions, flooding or construction. This bill will make Manitoba's roads safer by addressing concerns raised by the RCMP about motorists ignoring highway closures, as this is a dangerous behaviour that puts lives at risk. The new offence and the association penalties—associated penalties will make it clear that driving on the closed highway is not permitted in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed? [*Agreed*]

Committee reports?

**TABLING OF REPORTS**

**Hon. Cliff Cullen (Acting Government House Leader):** I'm pleased to table the revised Estimates in the committee—for the Committee of Supply.

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable Minister of Health—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

**International Day of the Girl**

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Acting Minister responsible for the Status of Women):** October 11th is International Day of the Girl. Across the world, we use this as an opportunity to highlight the role girls play as powerful voices for change in their families, their communities and their nations.

International Day of the Girl is celebrating its 10th anniversary, having been declared in 2012 at the United Nations. Plan International Canada worked in partnership with the Canadian government on a two-year campaign to lead the work on having this day recognized globally.

I encourage you to reflect on the many challenges that girls have faced due to their gender, just over the past decade alone, and also think about the amazing young women and girls who've achieved great things and will continue to do so.

The burdens that girls are facing are huge. These include inconsistent access to education, nutrition, legal rights and medical care. Many struggle to find protection from discrimination, violence and forced marriage.

Madam Speaker, regardless of these challenges, girls are making an impact around the world and creating immense positive change in their communities.

At the time the United Nations declared International Day of the Girl in 2012, we were in the immediate aftermath of Malala Yousafzai being shot by a Taliban gunman in an assassination attempt in retaliation for her activism. Think about the great things she has accomplished since that time. This is just one example of a girl with the determination to lead the way as an activist, and proves that one is never too young to shape the future and empower others.

We do not need to go very far to find our own remarkable examples of young trailblazers right here in Manitoba. One of these won our Empower Women Award in the youth category last year.

Divya Sharma is a determined, driven young woman with a passion for giving back to her community. She is a strong voice and leader in her high school and is the youngest member of the Asian Women of Winnipeg board.

After seeing the challenges that front-line workers faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, Divya collaborated with various organizations across the country and helped to provide over 16,000 care packages to health-care workers, first responders and essential services workers.

We were so proud to be able to recognize Divya Sharma last year, and I cannot wait to see who receives our youth and adult category of the empower awards this year.

I know that we received multiple nominations, and I commend those who submitted the nominations to ensure that the efforts of these outstanding young women are recognized.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** October 11th is International Day of the Girl, a day when we celebrate girls and commit to ending the systemic barriers that prevent them from having equal opportunity.

One of the issues that girls across the world face is gender-based violence and we know that this happens in Manitoba, too. For girls, it is often experienced in schools or online through social media.

Girls as young as 15 have reached out to me about bullying and sexual harassment and even sexual assault that they have experienced. A 2019 survey done by the CBC found that sexual violence between students in schools was highest in the Prairies.

More must be done, including teaching young people media literacy, and age-appropriate content regarding consent. Noni Classen, director of education for the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, has noted that schools have a unique role, as they have both a responsibility to create safe environments and an opportunity to have these conversations which students may not be having anywhere else.

As we celebrate International Day of the Girl, I would like to highlight two students who I have had the pleasure of working with on the issue of gender-based violence in schools. Christine Blanco, Elsa Watt and her mom, Jennifer Watt, have been researching gender-based violence in schools across the province and discovering how prevalent the experience of violence is for girls in Manitoba.

As legislators, we owe it to these students and to all girls in Manitoba to tackle the issue of gender-based violence by listening when they ask for what they need and working together to prioritize the policies and programs with the greatest impact on Manitoba girls. Every girl deserves to feel safe in school and to have the opportunity to reach her full potential.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Does the member have leave to respond to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

\* (13:40)

**Ms. Lamoureux:** I rise today to recognize the 10th anniversary of International Day of the Girl.

This year's theme is *Our Time Is Now-Our Rights, Our Future*.

Madam Speaker, while there are many topics we can discuss, I want to raise attention to the ongoing need for continued and more supports towards the opportunities of girls and women here in Manitoba.

We are very aware of the glass ceilings that are still in many traditional male-dominant sports and professions that are preventing girls and women from making contributions to these fields. This causes me to reflect upon STEM—science, technology, engineering and math—who intentionally focuses on under-represented groups. We need more groups like this for all ages.

We are also aware of other barriers that are making it difficult and often impossible for girls and women to pursue education and employment opportunities.

At a provincial level, we could be doing more through affordable and accessible education, health benefits, whether you're a student, a child or a parent. We could also be doing much more to ensure girls and women are not having to delay or withdraw from their own education and career choices due to not having access or funding for child care.

Madam Speaker, girls in today's society face tremendous barriers on top of the many expectations they often feel internally.

We must continue to challenge the norms and beliefs that prevent girls and women from having the same opportunities as anyone else and that is why we take time today to recognize the 10th anniversary of International Day of the Girl.

Thank you.

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### National Food Truck Day

**Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River):** October 11th is National Food Truck Day. This day started in 2015 to celebrate the variety of food trucks that are in operation all over North America and the hard-working people behind them.

The food truck model makes it convenient and accessible to try new food or old favorites. Although their operation has been limited in the last couple of years due to COVID-19, food truck rallies and festivals offer great opportunities for communities and individuals to try new gourmet and ethnically diverse foods from all over North America.

Winnipeg is home to a variety of food trucks that can be found all around the city. During the summer, Broadway is filled with many food trucks and vendors. Additionally, St. Norbert Farmers' Market is home to food trucks, like The Red Ember, and vendors who sell their favourite cuisine to the many patrons at the market.

Imagine a local fair and community event without the famous mini donuts or lemonade trucks. There are options for everyone—from fries and poutine to falafel, tacos, ice cream and more. These trucks make it easy to find something that appeals to anyone.

The Tourism Winnipeg website provides a map of the food trucks in the city for those interested or you can find them wandering around the city until you see or smell something you like.

The food truck industry can be said to be representative of Canada and of Manitoba as a whole. Food trucks allow hard-working individuals to start their own businesses and be their own bosses, while sharing aspects of their culture with their communities through their food. This multicultural hard-working industry absolutely deserves the recognition that National Food Truck Day provides.

Thank you.

### Union Station Community Safety Groups

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Community safety is a growing issue in Union Station and many Manitoban communities.

I regularly hear from folks who are concerned about community members navigating poverty, struggling with homelessness, addictions and unmet basic needs. People recognize that a lack of deeply affordable housing, access to mental health and addictions services like safer consumption sites and lack of meaningful and safe connections are contributing to the rise in safety issues.

I have yet to encounter anyone who doesn't think we need to approach these issues with compassion, harm reduction, an anti-racist and a decolonial lens to ensure we're providing care and resources which meet people where they're at.

People have a right to be safe in their communities and know that their government prioritizes their well-being no matter where they live in Manitoba.

Fortunately, good people are filling the gaps in services which have been cut and underfunded by this PC government.

Spence Neighbourhood Association has a new initiative called Community Connecting nights. Starting in November, they'll be hosting community safety meetings the first Tuesday of each month on the—at the MERC on Langside.

Additionally, Thrive community safety—Thrive Community Support Circle recently developed a group which has started safety patrols that aim to create positive visibility and foster safety in the neighbourhood. I had the pleasure of meeting with Thrive's safety patrol club recently. They're wonderful people who care deeply for others, and they're looking for more members to join their walks. I encourage you to reach out if you're interested in joining or supporting their initiative. And you can even get one of their great T-shirts, which I'm proudly wearing today.

I'm honoured to recognize the efforts of grass-roots organizations and neighbours who are doing what they can to make a positive difference. I call on this government to take lessons from these folks and start doing their part to foster well and safer communities.

Today, we're joined by members of Spence Neighbourhood Association and Thrive's safety patrol club. I ask my colleagues to join me in welcoming and thanking them for their very important work.

Thank you.

### **Iranian Plane Crash Memorial**

**Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte):** Good afternoon, Madam Speaker. Today, I rise with sadness and sorrow but also with a sense of hope and renewed optimism—sadness and sorrow that 1,007 days ago, 176 innocent lives were taken from this world on flight PS752 when it was shot down by two missiles from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, more commonly known as the IRGC—176 lives in which 138 of them had direct ties to Canada and 55 of them were Canadian citizens.

But the sadness and sorrow doesn't stop there: 107,000 days later, more injustice and the unspeakable atrocities are still happening in Iran by the IRGC and the world remains mostly silent.

On September 16th, 2022, Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old female, was murdered for not covering their head as IRGC morality police deemed it inappropriate. And since then, 194 innocent lives, including 19 children, have been killed in the protests to demand for justice for Mahsa Amini.

While people are being killed for the right to choose what they wear, right here in our own backyard, people in Quebec are being fired and discriminated against for choosing to wear what—the same clothing right here in Canada.

Yet with all this sadness and sorrow, there is a renewed sense of hope and optimism, a renewed fight for justice for the people of Iran.

On October 1st, I was honoured to take part in a tree planting in my riding of Fort Whyte at Scurfield Park organized by the Iranian Community of Manitoba, in which they planted 176 trees, for the precious souls taken on flight PS752.

The trees are merely the first phase of a beautiful memorial that will be completed in the next coming year. I invite all of you to come join me and the Iranian community for a cup of tea under these new trees.

The call for justice and action in the world is growing louder and louder by the day, and justice will prevail for the people of Iran. This is the hope and optimism I feel, and I am proud to stand in solidarity with the Iranian community and justice everywhere.

I would now ask my colleagues to rise today and recognize those from the Iranian community that are fighting for justice and are joined us here today.

*Bitra Akhtari, Arian Arianpour, Poupak Azad, Maryam Bagheri, Kourosh Doustshenas, Saeideh Mirzaei, Mehrdad Afshari Nezhad, Jozy Oliver, Nafiseh Rezaei Roshan, Shervin Shahidian, Foruzan Shemirani.*

### **Punjabi Language Education**

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** I rise today to raise the concerns of my constituents about their access to Punjabi language education.

Manitobans of Punjabi origin constitute a significant portion of provincial population. There are over 33,000 people in Manitoba whose native language is Punjabi and over 27,000 others who speak mostly Punjabi at home. In fact, Punjabi is the fourth most widely spoken language in Canada.

Punjabi Canadians have contributed in no small measure to the socio-economic development of Canada and Manitoba in significant fields such as education, science, health, business, and politics.

Additionally, thousands of Punjabi international students contribute millions of dollars to our economy. Thousands of Punjabi immigrants arrive and settle in Manitoba on a regular basis.

During their struggle to settle as new Canadians, they make numerous sacrifices which include having to witness their children disconnect from their cultural roots.

A lot of Punjabi parents have to send their children to religious institutions, cultural academies, private tutors and family friends to learn Punjabi language and other cultural values. This takes extra effort and resources, which are not affordable for all Punjabi immigrants. Therefore, families with both young children and adult members feel a strong need for Punjabi language education at Manitoban institutions of learning.

\* (13:50)

For years, there have been Ukrainian, Ojibwe, Filipino, Cree, Hebrew and Spanish bilingual programs running in different school divisions in our province. A similar Punjabi bilingual program can be offered in Manitoban schools.

A Punjabi bilingual program will not only provide education on the language, but also expose students to Punjabi culture and traditions. Furthermore, this will be helpful in preparing multilingual professionals who have higher cultural tolerance for diverse ways of life. It will also better prepare students to manage cross-cultural situations and relationships.

I would like to thank the hundreds of constituents who have signed a petition calling on the government to take steps to start teaching Punjabi language at all levels of education in Manitoba.

I also acknowledge members of the Punjabi community: Harjeet Kaur Sandhu, Ravinder Gill, Deepak Kochhar, Harinder Paul Sharma, Saroj Bala, Parmodh Chander and Veena Kumari Vasudeva who have joined us today.

Shukria, Madam Speaker.

### **Supports for Neurodivergent Adults**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Madam Speaker, neurodiversity is present in a variety of individuals, including those with learning disabilities, autism and ADHD. Understanding of and support for them is a very important issue in Manitoba today. I will explain why.

Individuals who are neurodiverse tend to be very creative and often have new ways of looking at things and solving problems. When they are better understood and better supported, they can be major

contributors to our society and to social, environmental and economic progress.

When individuals who are neurodiverse are not supported adequately, they struggle, often drop out of school, can sometimes be involved with CFS and can develop secondary mental illnesses like anxiety and depression. They can also sometimes develop addictions, experience homelessness, become juvenile delinquents and be victims of, or commit, crimes.

A recent survey showed that homelessness and crime are the top two issues in Winnipeg today. To address this—these issues, we must better understand and support those who are neurodiverse. Not only will better understanding and support for them help reduce homelessness and crime, it will also enable them to achieve their potential and contribute to Manitoba in very positive ways.

How do we better help those who are neurodiverse? An important step is to recognize that those who are neurodiverse and have an IQ greater than 75 continue to need supports after they turn 18 years of age.

Newfoundland has already made support for individuals with autism after age 18 based on their need, not simply on their age. Manitoba needs to make this change to help neurodiverse individuals transition from youth to adulthood in a successful way.

Thank you.

## **ORAL QUESTIONS**

### **Grace Hospital Beds and Staffing Levels**

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Madam Speaker, the Grace Hospital is in crisis—13 nurses have quit the intensive care unit there since the summer because the situation is so bad.

That's according to front-line workers. Nurses are overworked. Their message is simple. Things are not okay. PC cuts are making things worse.

The PCs cut nine beds from the Grace Hospital. That's according to the annual report of the WRHA, which I will table for the benefit of the Cabinet and the Premier.

These are the facts. The cuts are making things worse and driving nurses out of the front lines.

Why is the Premier cutting health care at the Grace Hospital?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** Again, the Leader of the Opposition continues to put false information on the record within this Chamber. He knows full well that we're investing over \$1 billion more than the previous NDP government ever did in health care alone, Madam Speaker.

Now, we recognize that there are health—or, that there are human resource issues within the health-care system, but that is nothing, of course, Madam Speaker, that is unique to Manitoba. Been working with my counterparts across the country and, indeed, the federal government, in looking at this very serious issue. And that's why we continue to call on the federal government for the Canada Health Transfer.

We will continue to work with my counterparts across the country to ensure that we have the human resources there to run our health-care system.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, the No. 1 health human resource challenge we have in this problem is that we've got a PC government that is driving nurses out of the health-care system.

At the Grace intensive care unit—that's just one site—since this summer, 13 nurses have left our health-care system. That's coming at the time we can least afford to lose any more nurses. Everyone knows that this is the result of PC mismanagement. They closed the emergency rooms, they closed the beds, they fired the nurses and now it's the remaining health-care staff who are left to pick up the pieces.

When will the PCs stop cutting health care in Manitoba?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Once again, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition's preamble and his question—there's a litany of false accusations there. But we will continue to put the facts on the record.

And the fact of the matter is that we have a plan moving forward when it comes to increasing nursing positions in the province of Manitoba. We made that announcement some time ago; we are working towards that goal of 400 more seats in the province of Manitoba, to train those nurses.

We recognize, Madam Speaker, again, this is not something that's unique to Manitoba. It's something that we're facing right across this country. But I can tell you, while we have a plan, the NDP has no plan.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, this government can't even plan an annual general meeting for PC members.

I don't know if that's because of incompetence on the part of the PCs or whether the leadership is just afraid to face their grassroots members, but I'll tell you what: on this side of the House, we think it's a mistake to cut 13 ICU nurses from the Grace Hospital. We say it's a mistake to cut nine beds from the same Grace Hospital. This is a time where we need every single available person working on the front lines of our health-care system. We can't afford to lose any more.

When will the PCs agree and stop cutting health care in Manitoba?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, Madam Speaker, I can detect that the Leader of the Opposition is sensitive to the fact that he has no plan or vision for the future of our province. But the fact of the matter is, we do have a plan.

We recognize that there's a challenge with respect to human resources and including nurses when it comes to our health-care system; again, nothing unique to Manitoba. It's something that every province is facing across the country, and that's why we have a short-, medium- and long-term plan for increasing those positions, Madam Speaker. We will continue to work in that direction with a plan that is putting more seats into our health-care system.

The Leader of the Opposition has offered nothing when it comes to a plan for human resource challenges in the health-care system. Shame on him.

#### **New Highway Access Road in Brandon Conflict of Interest Concerns**

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

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** You know, Madam Speaker, we learned that the Minister of Infrastructure vetoed the government department in order to help a PC donor with a project in Brandon.

This project will cost everyone in Brandon, or at least contribute to the rising costs, to the extent of hundreds of dollars per year for folks living in Brandon, Manitoba. The minister's own department said that this project, and I quote, increased the risk of accidents, and it was in direct violation of the law.

And yet, this minister pushed it through anyways, at the behest of this Premier.

Why is the Premier pushing through a project that is going to cost the people of Brandon hundreds of dollars per year?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** Well, Madam Speaker, we will always put the safety and the environment and economic development ahead of anything. The Leader of the Opposition, again, has no plan or vision for the future.

\* (14:00)

But when it comes to transportation, I can understand why you would be a little sensitive, Madam Speaker, because the fact of the matter is, the NDP—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** —government, while they had 17 years to fix the infrastructure in this province, left us with a significant investment—with a significant deficit—with a significant deficit, Madam Speaker.

And, Madam Speaker, we will continue to clean up the mess of the 17 years of an NDP government. We don't want to go back to that.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, the Premier and her minister have created a mess here.

Again, the department said specifically that the developer of this project—and I'm quoting here—failed to address the department's concerns. They said that they did not prepare a study by a qualified engineer. And finally, they said that this project does not meet, quote, standards nor does it conform to established policy, end quote, Madam Speaker. These are the government's own conclusions.

The only reason that the project ended up getting approved by the same government is because this minister vetoed the government's decision, overruling the professional civil service in the name of a PC donor.

Why did the Premier overrule her own department to help a PC fundraising contributor?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, Madam Speaker, I can see why the Leader of the Opposition is hesitant to put facts on the record when it comes to infrastructure,

because the facts of the matter are they left our government with a significant infrastructure deficit right across the province of Manitoba.

That's why in the last—we announced in Budget 2022 a commitment of \$2.5 billion over the next three years. That's \$500 million a year, Madam Speaker, that will go towards cleaning up the mess of the previous NDP government.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, here are the facts about this project in Brandon: The government says it will increase accidents. It says it is against department policy and that it violates The Water Rights Act.

Now, instead of listening to the professional public service, the minister overruled. He vetoed their decision all in the name of a PC donor who contributed the maximum allowable to the PC's leadership campaign, Madam Speaker.

This looks like political interference. And what's more, it looks like it's going to cost the people of Brandon hundreds of dollars a year on their water bills.

So, the question remains for the First Minister: Why did she veto a civil service decision to benefit a PC donor?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, Madam Speaker, again, we have a plan for the future of infrastructure projects in the province of Manitoba where the NDP has no plan and no vision for the future—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** —of our province, Madam Speaker.

Things like twinning the Trans-Canada Highway to the Ontario border, the Highway 75 refurbishment, St. Mary's overpass, the Winnipeg one-million Perimeter Highway freeway initiative, and the list goes on and on and on, Madam Speaker.

We have a plan for the future of our province. Where's the NDP's plan?

#### **New Highway Access Road in Brandon Road Safety and Wastewater Concerns**

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia):** According to the Minister of Infrastructure's own department, a Brandon developer is pushing forward a project that, quote, increases the risk of accidents, including a higher potential for more severe accidents. This

project is, according to the department, a, quote, direct violation of The Water Rights Act.

So the department rejected this proposal twice; that is, until the minister stepped in and personally intervened and approved it anyway. And that will mean drastically higher water bills for the people living in Brandon.

Why is the minister personally pushing forward projects that mean more accidents and higher water bills?

**Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure):** I just want to thank the member for the question.

Madam Speaker, when it comes to the city of Brandon, the bypass that goes around the city of Brandon is much like the Perimeter Highway, Madam Speaker. And the—and when it comes to the actual city of Winnipeg, the actual Portage Avenue, Pembina Highway, Henderson Highway, Main Street all go right up to the Perimeter Highway for economic development. This is the focus that we're looking at Brandon.

Brandon is a growing community, and we want to make sure that economic development happens in the city of Brandon. And if we're allowing them—the access to—for this development to happen so there can be economic growth and opportunities for the city of Brandon. And everything is actually north of the bypass, giving the opportunity for making sure No. 1 safety is the safety concerns for all Brandonites.

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** But the minister's own department thought this project should be rejected. In fact, it was already previously rejected by the Highway Traffic Board.

But the PCs, they're not interested in the facts. They're willing to push it through anyway.

The project will mean more accidents, it violates the law and it will mean higher water bills for those living in Brandon. That's what the government's own internal documents say.

So why is the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) willing to stand behind this minister and continue to push higher water rates and unsafe conditions on the people of Brandon?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Madam Speaker, our priority—No. 1 priority is safety for—when it comes to Manitoba drivers.

And when it comes to the city of Brandon in this situation here, Madam Speaker, we're going to be looking and reviewing the plan that the developers are going to look at.

We're also going to create a plan for our Highway 10 when it comes to the safety, making sure that we get reduced speed zones, much like these—the city of Winnipeg. When Portage Avenue—if this member across the aisle would like to—if it was in the past, he would not even want Unicity to grow.

This is the opportunity for Brandon to grow up to the—when it comes to the bypass, Madam Speaker. And we're going to allow Brandon to grow—continue growing for—economically, making sure that we also look at the safety of going around the city of Brandon.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Concordia, on a final supplementary.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Madam Speaker, these are direct quotes from the department: This project will, quote, increase collisions, quote, end quote. It does not, quote, meet standards or conform to established policy, end quote. And it's in direct violation of The Water Rights Act. These are just a few of the reasons that the government's own department rejected it—twice.

But this PC government and this minister are willing to push it through anyway. The PCs have tried to hide their interference, all to help one of their friends, who's donated thousands of dollars to the PC party. That's just wrong, Madam Speaker.

Why is the minister pushing projects that mean more accidents and higher water bills for the people of Brandon?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Madam Speaker, the other member across the aisle, he was been in the government for 17 years with the NDP government. They didn't want development happening anywhere in this province. They put so much red tape.

Here's an opportunity now to make sure this province grows, every corner of this province right now, and we're going to do that Madam Speaker. We're going to make sure we focus on economic development, at the same time focusing on safety for all Manitoba's drivers.

### **Lions Place Seniors Residence Concern Over Potential Sale**

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Madam Speaker, Lions Place at 610 Portage Ave. is the largest non-profit seniors building in our province.

It's important that social housing be preserved. Seniors are rightly concerned that the building will be sold to an operator that's going to charge them market rent. When this issue emerged a few years ago, the government said they were working on a solution, but the financial agreements expired.

Where's the government's concern to date? Will they take action and ensure Lions Place is not sold?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Acting Minister of Families):** I thank the member for Union Station for the question. Once again, Madam Speaker, member-members opposite are late with their communication. They missed a meeting.

Manitoba Housing, I want them to know, is committed to working with non-profit and other housing providers to ensure the efficient delivery of affordable housing for all Manitobans, including Lions Place. That is why the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) met with the group representing Lions Place—the voice for that group—on October 3rd.

We will continue to meet to move on issues that are important to the individuals at Lions Place, Madam Speaker.

\* (14:10)

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Union Station, on a supplementary question.

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, Lions Place has operated for decades for the benefit of seniors. A sale threatens the long-term affordability for seniors; many of them have lived there for years, Madam Speaker.

Hundreds of social housing units have already been lost under this PC government. We should not lose, and we cannot afford to lose, any more. Seniors at Lions should continue to have affordable rent.

Will the minister take action today and ensure that Lions Place is not sold?

**Ms. Gordon:** Again, the Minister of Families has met with representatives from Lions Place and discussions are under way.

But I want Manitobans to know that it was our government that endorsed the bilateral agreement under the National Housing Strategy in 2019, and is—

and we're also encouraged by the federal government's commitment to support non-profit housing providers, Madam Speaker.

Since 2016, 755 new social and affordable housing units have been developed, as well as 320 new shelter beds.

Madam Speaker, we're taking action on housing, and we will continue to do so, even at Lions Place.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Union Station, on a final supplementary.

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, this minister knows that a meeting is not a commitment or a guarantee to those seniors.

I wrote the minister about this matter, and unfortunately, the minister's response included no commitment to review—or, sorry, rather, renew or new funding to help Lions be viable today and into the future. The action committee at Lions Place is also looking for leadership from the minister to help seniors' rent remain affordable.

We're talking about hundreds of seniors, Madam Speaker. This is the largest non-profit seniors building in the province. It needs to be preserved.

Will the minister take action and ensure 610 Portage Ave. remains with the Lions for now and for well into the future?

**Ms. Gordon:** Meetings are where our government listens and develops a plan, and I encourage the NDP opposite to take a page out of our book: listen and develop a plan.

So, we are listening to representatives at Lions Place to develop a plan, Madam Speaker, because our government knows that the non-profit housing sector plays a key role in affordable housing. Lions Place is one of those housing facilities, and we want to ensure the residents there continue to receive the housing that they need today and in the future.

### **Exchange Income Corporation Medical Aviation Services Contract**

**Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** Well, we're seeing the impact of the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) plan to privatize medical aviation services.

Just last week, Madam Speaker, a mother and her little newborn from a northern community had to wait over 24 hours to be medevac'd to Winnipeg after her infant experienced seizures. We can well imagine how scared and worried the mom must have been.

Critical services like medical aviation should not be sold off to the highest bidder. The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) should be ensuring medical aviation services are publicly owned.

Will she do so today?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** Members opposite know that due to patient privacy laws, I cannot speak to specific cases on the floor of this Chamber.

I would like to remind members opposite that it's medical practitioners, medical professionals, that are making the decisions at the bedside, Madam Speaker.

And I do want to speak to what the member has raised, to share that Shared Health's child transport team, and—it specializes in the care of transport for infants and children—were in regular contact with the families, Madam Speaker.

And we will continue to do our part to ensure that individuals in the North have access to care.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for St. Johns, on a supplementary question.

**Ms. Fontaine:** We know that the Premier has a financial interest in Exchange Income Corporation, a company looking to bid on medical aviation services.

Earlier this year, the Province issued an RFP for medical aviation services, Madam Speaker. The submission—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Fontaine:** —deadline ended in September.

Manitobans deserve to know who this essential medical service will be sold off to, Madam Speaker.

Will EIC get the medical aviation services contract? Simple: yes or no, Madam Speaker.

**Ms. Gordon:** It's a pleasure for me to rise in this Chamber to put facts on the record, Madam Speaker—something the members opposite have not done.

Our government is committed to enhancing critical-care capacity in Manitoba and more—modern medical aviation fleet is a vital component of that service. And so an RFP was issued, Madam Speaker. It will ensure safe, timely, reliable and consistent care, standardized universal care among air ambulances, help to build a more modern critical-care service that supports the evolving needs of Manitobans.

And I'm pleased to see that the member for St. Johns is interested in knowing about the RFP, because it will provide excellent aviation—

**Madam Speaker:** The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary.

**Ms. Fontaine:** A mother and her little newborn had to wait 24 hours to be medevac'd out from their community to Winnipeg last week, Madam Speaker. That shows how important timely medical aviation services are.

The quality of these services are suffering because of the PCs' privatization plans. And the Premier has a financial interest in EIC, a private company bidding on medical aviation services.

The government's RFP for medical aviation closes—it closed in September.

Can the Premier tell us whether or not EIC will get this contract and whether or not she recused herself from this deal?

Miigwech.

**Ms. Gordon:** The RFP process is an independent process, independent of government. The decisions are not being made here in the Legislative Building, Madam Speaker, something that I understand is new for the members opposite.

Madam Speaker, the RFP, again, will ensure—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Gordon:** —safe, timely, reliable and consistent care, standardized universal care among air ambulances, help to build a more modern critical-care service and more.

It is a public process. It's independent of our government.

We look forward to the results of that.

### Northern Health Services Private Agency Nursing Costs

**MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** Earlier this session, my colleagues raised concerns about the accelerating use of private nurse agencies.

This situation is even worse in the North, and I'll table a freedom-of-information response: \$5 million was spent in just the first six months of 2022. The North is now on pace to spend \$10 million a year on

agency nurses. This is more than four times what it was just a few years ago.

What is the minister doing to address the growing reliance on private agencies?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to talk about exactly what our government is doing: \$19.5 million to add 259 nurse training seats this year, Madam Speaker, on track to meet our goal of 400 new nursing seats; \$4.3 million for 37 additional nurse training seats at University College of the North.

I was pleased to be part of the graduation ceremony for the college of nursing last year where we welcomed over a hundred new nurses to the health system. One hundred and forty-nine nurses are taking additional training within the system, and I have more to share with the members opposite.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a supplementary question.

**MLA Lindsey:** We know that this government, when they first got elected, cut nurse training seats. Now trying to play catch up is going to leave us short.

Madam Speaker, \$5 million in the Northern Health Region on private agencies in just six months. The use of private agencies is accelerating. It's getting worse. Northern region—all across the North.

\* (14:20)

Meanwhile, Thompson, now, is running 26 per cent nurse vacancy rate. Same time, they've shut hospitals down throughout the North because they don't have nurses. They don't want to hire enough agencies now, because they've created this nightmare of themselves.

So, will the minister reverse her cuts, ensure more nurses are working in northern Manitoba today, not some day during the future?

**Ms. Gordon:** It's my pleasure to rise in the House to put on the record their cuts and their closures, Madam Speaker.

When the NDP were in power, they closed 16 emergency departments across rural Manitoba. These changes affected—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Gordon:** —over 100 communities, Madam Speaker. In fact, there were rural EDs that had been temporarily closed for 15 years under their watch due

to the staffing issues. That is the legacy of their government that we are now having to clean up.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a final supplementary.

**MLA Lindsey:** You know, Lynn Lake used to have a hospital, Leaf Rapids used to have a hospital, Snow Lake used to have a hospital until this government's cuts caught up with them. They're trying to contract out all the health care in the North, and that's what they're doing.

The approach is undermining the public system. Nurses in the public system are being mandated while private agencies are provided more money, more flexibility. This is eroding the public system; the Northern Health Region on track to spend \$10 million on private agency nurses this year.

So what is the minister doing to attract full-time nurses to the public system going forward, rather than discouraging them?

**Ms. Gordon:** I'm pleased to rise to put some information on the record about what we are doing in the North and rural communities.

In Budget 2022, our government has committed \$812 million, Madam Speaker—the largest single health-care commitment in Manitoba's history—to improve rural and northern care.

It will lead to over 30 projects that will also include a northern intermediary hub to ensure individuals receive care closer to home, Madam Speaker. We will continue to take action when they did nothing. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

#### **Non-Disclosure Agreement Legislation Request for Support for Bill 225**

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** I'm very pleased this morning—Bill 225, to reform the abuse of non-disclosure agreements, passed second reading and will go to committee.

Unions exist to protect workers, and we want to make sure that that's happening. That's why it was disturbing to hear a while ago that former—the former head of the Winnipeg Labour Council, Basia Sokal, had to resign because complaints were being ignored and she's still being hounded. She filed a complaint of sexual harassment and sexual assault, and when her union dismissed the charges and she expressed her disappointment online, she was sued by defamation

by her alleged assailant. The case just wrapped up in August.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) support our NDA reform bill to prevent survivors from being silenced and go further, encourage people to speak up?

**Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services):** Well, as I understand it, the House sat this morning and debated the legislation and I understand it's moved to committee.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for St. Boniface, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Lamont:** I am pleased to say that Ms. Sokol prevailed in her two cases, including she won her case and won at the Court of Appeal just in August, and I table the judgment.

This is what she was sued for saying, without naming anyone, quote: Just this week, I was once again reminded of how little faith workers must have in their representation when my own union dismissed sexual harassment and assault charges against another member following an 18-month investigation against a member who was and continues to be very active in the union. I was the only one who came forward formally, but I can certainly imagine that following testimony of several other women at the hearings, I will be the last.

That is difficult to read, Madam Speaker. Now, we know there is more to do to prevent cases like this.

Will the Premier and the PCs support our bill that will, as a start, end the abuse of NDAs in Manitoba?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, as the member opposite well knows, we don't discuss—or, able to discuss individual cases in the Legislature here. That's his prerogative to bring them up if he wishes.

The particular legislation that I believe had some reference to has moved to committee, and we look forward to hearing from Manitobans on that issue.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for River Heights, on a final supplementary.

#### **Services for Neurodivergent Adults Needs Based Assessments**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Madam Speaker, currently adults who are neurodiverse, who have—as example, a learning disability, autism or ADHD—are being denied access by this government to

community living and disability services if their IQ is above 75.

Newfoundland and Labrador have now recognized that access to services should be based on the nature of the disability and on a person's needs, rather than on IQ.

When will the provincial government make the changes needed so that neurodiverse adults with an IQ above 75 can access CLDS services on the basis of their needs rather than on the basis of their IQ?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Acting Minister of Families):** I thank the member from River Heights for the question.

We have significantly increased the budget for CLDS. In Budget 2022, we will continue to do our part to ensure that children and families across this province have the care and access to care that they need. And I want to point out an example: \$4 million to ensure that 270 vulnerable youth exiting care continue to receive benefits and supports.

That's just one example, Madam Speaker. We will do so much more here in this province.

#### **MOUs Signed with First Nations Forestry Revenue Sharing Agreements**

**Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River):** Our government has signed many memorandums of understanding with Indigenous communities related to forestry operations on their traditional territory.

Can the Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development explain why this is a significant step forward towards Indigenous economic reconciliation?

**Hon. Greg Nesbitt (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development):** Well, I'd like to thank the member from Swan River for that very timely question.

Madam Speaker, we recognize that Indigenous communities should benefit from forestry operations on their traditional territories. That is why our government is proud to have signed these historic memorandums of understanding with five First Nations, which are first of their kind in Manitoba.

We are looking forward to engaging with more Indigenous leaders on our First Nations to ensure everyone benefits from Manitoba's resources. These communities will now see 45 per cent of revenues collected from timber dues returned to their rights holders.

The timber dues collected through the management of Manitoba's forests are just one of many economic benefits that are a part of our government's ongoing commitment to enhancing Indigenous participation in the forestry sector.

### **Path to Reconciliation Act Timeline to Develop Strategy**

**Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook):** Well, to segue into my concern: earlier this year, the Auditor General determined that the PC government failed to live up to their legal responsibility to implement a reconciliation strategy. The Auditor General found that the PCs have no strategy for reconciliation and no plan for when they will implement one.

Six months after this report was released, we still haven't heard anything on when we might see a reconciliation strategy implemented.

Can the minister tell us when he will put forward a reconciliation strategy here in Manitoba?

**Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations):** Why, yes, we accept the Auditor General's report on the Department of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations. And with respect to advancing the 'reconciliation' strategy, our government is committed to advancing the reconciliation strategy through meaningful engagement with all Manitobans and informed by Indigenous peoples.

And we have developed an engagement plan which will serve as the basis for this work, which is expected to begin shortly.

\* (14:30)

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

**Mr. Bushie:** Use of the word shortly, but it's been six years since The Path to Reconciliation Act was passed. Yet, despite the act requiring the PCs to implement a reconciliation strategy, nothing has been put forward.

In fact, the 'audijay' general found that the PCs have no strategy and no plan for when one will be implemented. The Auditor General said, and I quote: Without a strategy, efforts toward reconciliation are hampered, ultimately lacking focus and vision. End quote.

This PC government should commit to implementing a strategy today.

Can the minister provide a timeline for when this—his government will implement this reconciliation strategy?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** As I said, the engagement plan needs to be built on the basis of continuing work with all Manitobans, including Indigenous leadership. And with that, the member opposite should know, if he talked to the member next to him—from Thompson—that we have been working on trying to develop this plan.

Unfortunately, due to changes in leadership right now, we continue to try and get people to the table to talk about this important engagement.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Keewatinook, on a final supplementary.

**Mr. Bushie:** Indigenous communities and peoples don't want to hear more excuses.

Madam Speaker, we know the former premier, Brian Pallister, did not take reconciliation seriously. During his time as premier, he failed to implement a reconciliation strategy despite a legal responsibility to do so.

Now, the current Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has also failed to implement a reconciliation strategy and it's been now nearly a year since she took over as leader. At this point, it is unclear whether the PCs will ever implement a reconciliation strategy.

Can the minister outline a timeline for when his government plans on implementing a reconciliation strategy for Manitoba?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Our government has been a government of action.

We have been reaching out to Indigenous communities, to First Nations leadership. We have been reaching out to the SCO, MKO, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

And actually, in March of this year, when we reached out to then-acting member for Thompson, at this particular time, to engage, he advised that it would be premature for us to do that until we have a new grand chief in place.

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

### **Department of Agriculture Office Closures and Staffing**

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** Madam Speaker, the PCs have gutted Manitoba Agriculture: hundreds of

positions left vacant; dozens of offices closed; lending activity to producers declined by 11 per cent last year.

Altogether, it means less service and less support for producers.

When will the minister address the cuts his government has made to the Department of Agriculture?

**Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Agriculture):** I welcome a question on agriculture. It gets—allows me to get up and talk about all the great things that we've been doing.

This government has increased vet seats by 33 per cent. That government has done nothing.

Before I get to the rest of the answer, I just want to say thank you to all of our farmers and producers out there and wish them a good stress-free—stress-free harvest, Madam Speaker. It's that time of year that they're out there producing food for us, and I just want say thank you to all the producers.

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

## PETITIONS

### Disability Services

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Currently, adults with—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Gerrard:**—specific or non-specific disabilities or a combination of disabilities, such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dysgraphia, 'dyscalcula,' auditory or language processing disorders and/or non-verbal learning disabilities will be denied access to services under the Province of Manitoba's community living and disability services, CLDS, if their IQ is above 80.

People with these or other borderline cognitive functioning issues also have extremely low adaptive skills and are not able to live independently without support.

Recently, it has become widely recognized that access to CLDS should be based not solely on IQ, which is only a measure of a person's ability to answer questions verbally or in writing in relation to mathematics, science or material which is read.

Very often, persons with specific or non-specific disabilities or a combination of these disabilities have specific needs related to their executive function for support when they are adults or are transitioning to adulthood, which are not necessarily connected to their IQ.

Executive function is the learned ability to do the normal activities of life, including being organized, being able to plan and to carry out plans and adapt to changing conditions. Those who have major defects in executive function have a learning disability requiring assistance under CLDS to be able to make a contribution to society and be self-sustaining.

Provision of CLDS services to individuals with specific or non-specific disabilities or a combination of these disabilities and have the potential to make an important change in a person's life.

Newfoundland and Labrador have now recognized that access to services should be based on the nature of the disability and the person's needs rather than on IQ.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to change the requirements for accessing community living and disability services so that these requirements are based on the needs of individuals with specific or non-specific disabilities including executive functioning or a combination of disabilities rather than solely on the basis of their IQ.

Signed by Vona Guiler, Jayna Veldhuis, Ken Carter and many other Manitobans.

**Madam Speaker:** In accordance with our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

### Louise Bridge

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Over 25,000 vehicles per day cross the Louise Bridge, which has served as a vital link for vehicular traffic between northeast Winnipeg and the downtown for the last 110 years.

(2) The current structure will undoubtedly be declared unsafe in a few years as it has deteriorated extensively, becoming functionally obsolete, subject

to more frequent unplanned repairs and cannot be widened to accommodate future traffic capacity.

(3) As far back as 2008, the City of Winnipeg has studied where the new replacement bridge should be situated.

(4) After including the bridge replacement in the City's five-year capital budget forecast in 2009, the new bridge became a short-term construction priority in the City's transportation master plan of 2011.

(5) City capital and budget plans identified replacement of the Louise Bridge on a site just east of the bridge and expropriated homes there on the south side of Nairn Avenue in anticipation of a 2015 start.

(6) In 2014, the new City administration did not make use of available federal infrastructure funds.

(7) The new Louise Bridge Committee began its campaign to demand a new bridge and its surveys confirmed residents wanted a new bridge beside the current bridge, with the old bridge kept open for local traffic.

(8) The NDP provincial government signalled its firm commitment to partner with the City on replacing the Louise Bridge in its 2015 Throne Speech. Unfortunately, provincial infrastructure initiatives, such as the new Louise bridge, came to a halt with the election of the Progressive Conservative government in 2016.

(9) More recently, the City tethered the Louise Bridge replacement issue to its new transportation master plan and eastern corridor project. Its recommendations have now identified the location of the new Louise bridge to be just to the west of the current bridge, not to the east as originally proposed.

(10) The city expropriation process has begun. The \$6.35-million street upgrade of Nairn Avenue from Watt Street to the 111-year-old bridge is complete.

(11) The new Premier has a duty to direct the provincial government to provide financial assistance to the City so it can complete this long overdue vital link to northeast Winnipeg and Transcona.

\* (14:40)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the new Premier to financially assist the City of Winnipeg on building this three-lane bridge in each direction to maintain this vital link

between northeast Winnipeg, Transcona and the downtown.

(2) To urge the provincial government to recommend that the City of Winnipeg keep the old bridge fully open to traffic while the new bridge is under construction.

(3) To urge the provincial government to consider the feasibility of keeping it open for active transportation in the future.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

### **Provincial Road 224**

**Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Provincial Road No. 224 serves Peguis First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation and surrounding communities, and the road is in dire need of substantial repairs.

(2) The road has been in poor condition for years and has numerous potholes, uneven driving surfaces and extremely narrow shoulders.

(3) Due to recent population growth in the area, there has been increased vehicle and pedestrian use of Provincial Road 224.

(4) Without repair, Provincial Road 224 will continue to pose a hazard to many Manitobans who use it on a regular basis; and

(5) Concerned Manitobans are requesting that Provincial Road 224 be assessed and repaired urgently to improve safety for its users.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure to complete an assessment of Provincial Road 224 and implement the appropriate repairs using public funds as quickly as possible.

And this petition has been signed by many, many fine Manitobans.

Ekosi. Thank you.

### **Lead in Soils**

**Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) In December of 2019, the provincial government's commissioned report on lead concentrations in soil in Winnipeg was completed.

(2) The report found that 10 neighbourhoods had, I quote, concerning, unquote, levels of lead concentration in their soil, including Centennial, Daniel McIntyre, Glenelm-Chalmers, north Point Douglas, River Osborne, Sargent Park, St. Boniface, West End, Weston and Wolseley-Minto.

(3) In particular, the predicted blood lead levels for children in north Point Douglas, Weston and Daniel McIntyre were above the level of concern.

(4) The Weston Elementary School field has been forced to close down many times because of the concerns of lead in soil and the provincial government's inaction to improve the situation.

(5) The lead exposure especially affects children aged seven years and under, as their nervous system is still developing.

(6) The effects of lead exposure are irreversible and include impacts on learning, behaviour and intelligence.

(7) For adults, long-term lead exposure can contribute to high blood pressure, heart disease, kidney problems and reproductive effects.

(8) The provincial government currently has no comprehensive plan in place to deal with the lead in soil, nor is there a broad advertising campaign educating residents on how they can reduce their risks of lead exposure.

(9) The lead—instead, people in these areas continue to garden and work in the soil and children continue to play in the dirt, often without any knowledge of the associated risks.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take action to reduce people's exposure to lead in Winnipeg, and to implement the recommendations proposed by the provincial government's independent review, including in—creation of an action plan for the Weston neighbourhood, developing a lead awareness communication and outreach program, questioning a more in-depth study and creating a tracking program for those tested for blood lead levels so that medical professionals can follow up with them.

This has been signed by many, Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Any further petitions?

The honourable member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux)—or, I'm sorry, the honourable member for Notre Dame.

### Home-Care Services

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Home-care workers in Manitoba provide skilled and compassionate care that helps better the quality of life for thousands of Manitobans.

(2) Robust home-care services are proven to reduce the strain on health services and demand for hospital beds.

(3) Home care reduces demand for long-term-care beds as it allows people to continue living in their own space.

(4) Studies show that a third of the 200,000 Canadians living in long-term-care homes could stay home with proper home-care support.

(5) Investing in home care saves money, as daily services cost half the price of a long-term-care bed and one-seventh the daily cost of a hospital bed.

(6) The provincial government's cuts to home care in Manitoba has resulted in chronic staffing issues that caused the WRHA to cancel 27,000 home-care appointments in the month of April 2022 alone.

(7) Many clients in Manitoba only receive home-care services once a day, whereas countries in—countries such as Denmark offer up to six visits a day.

(8) Home-care workers in Manitoba are paid poor wages, are offered little benefits, lack sick time and are overworked, resulting in difficulty retaining and attracting workers.

(9) Home-care workers have been without a contract since 2017, due to this provincial government's interference in labour negotiations.

(10) Investing in home care is a proactive approach that would save the Province millions of dollars as well as allow more Manitobans to age in place.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care to immediately increase investment in home-care services so that home-care workers can be paid a fair wage and clients can receive the level of service they require.

This has been signed by Evan Krosney, Eva Murphy and Cherryll Rodriguez and many other Manitobans.

**Madam Speaker:** Any further petitions?

If not, then grievances?

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

*(Continued)*

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

#### House Business

**Hon. Cliff Cullen (Acting Government House Leader):** On House business, pursuant to rule 34(7), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan). The title of the resolution is Calling on the Federal Government to Stand in Unity with the Manitoba Legislature and Support Religious Freedom.

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Fort Whyte. The title of the resolution is Calling on the Federal Government to Stand in Unity with the Manitoba Legislature and Support Religious Freedom.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Cullen:** Would you call Committee of Supply.

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the House will consider Estimates this afternoon.

This House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

#### ROOM 254

#### ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE AND PARKS

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook):** 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 Environment, Climate and Parks. Questioning for this department will continue on a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley):** Hello again, Minister. Last week, we—I had started to ask about your department's process of developing an energy policy for the Manitoba government. And if you could now talk about the scope of the energy policy, and if this policy will include Crown corporations like Manitoba Hydro.

**Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks):** Welcome back *[inaudible]* Wolseley and her team, and it's certainly great to be here to talk about energy today, on this beautiful, sunny, fall afternoon.

And to the question on energy strategy and Crown's involvement, absolutely, particularly Manitoba Hydro and Efficiency Manitoba are—have been and continue to be at the table when it comes to Dunskey, that we spoke about last week, leading the strategy of course.

Dunskey, well recognized, certainly offer the member to look up their history and their record. They operate in several states along with Canada as well in several provinces and territories, so. Great record and looking forward to, again, continuing to work with them.

Particular when it comes to Hydro, for instance, the integrated resource plan, or the IRP, this strategy will help form that IRP as they go forward to as well. We know how important an integrated resource plan is for Manitoba Hydro; they've never had one, and they will have one, and a lot of it will be driven out of the energy strategy. And Dunskey's report, of course, which we're looking forward to releasing later on this year.

And also Efficiency Manitoba, as you know and the member probably knows, that there's a three-year plan currently in place with Efficiency Manitoba. The

energy strategy will also help develop the next three-year plan for Efficiency Manitoba as they go forward with the process of, again, on conserving energy but also working with Manitobans and industry to ensure that we get to that path that we need to be with reducing our energy consumption.

So, I'll leave that for now and I look forward to your next question.

**Ms. Naylor:** Can the minister explain if there will be greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets as part of the energy policy?

**Mr. Wharton:** Again, thank the member for the question.

And again, Dunsky's report really focuses in on five main areas that they're leaning towards, and we'll talk about the path to net zero shortly. But currently, the current state of energy, of course, is an area that we looked at in Manitoba, and the net-zero scenario would be the second one. Innovation scan, of course, working with stakeholders on innovation and new technologies. A hydrogen feasibility study and, again, further enhance 'stakehold' engagement was all part of that process.

And really it's not a target date on the path to net zero; it's really a journey on getting there. But certainly we know that with the work that the Dunsky consultants have done in relationship with stakeholders throughout the province, we know that that path will be a lot more clear as we continue forward. And Dunsky provides us with more of an understanding, provides Manitobans with more of an understanding exactly what that path will look like.

**Ms. Naylor:** So, I just want to be sure, I mean, I'm hearing a talk about paths, I'm hearing you talk about net zero. Can you say for certain that there will be a greenhouse gas emission reduction target as part of the plan?

**Mr. Wharton:** So, how we get there, again, is going to be rolled out in the report. You know, to say we're there in five years or 10 years is probably not something that we can commit to, obviously, because we haven't seen the report. But certainly we know that in the report we're looking at alternatives to, of course, gas and oil, and those are the things that we need to focus in on in order to get down that path of net zero and reduction in GHG.

So, you know, geothermal heat, renewable electricity we talk about, transition to electric vehicles, which, again, our government is very pleased on that

path as we go forward with not only electric vehicles and working with industry and the like, but also getting more charging stations available. And I know that it's an area that we and the department are focusing in on particularly in our parks, where we know that we need a reinvestment after two decades of no investment—as a matter of fact, reductions in our parks—we know that we need to make an investment.

And inclusive of that investment the recommendations, of course, of Manitobans. We've see a path forward there with respect to charging stations. So now you take a trip up to Whiteshell—hopefully, we don't have the same spring issues that we had this year where we can't get on our docks and our boats. I know a couple members that—from the other side have places up there and they enjoy that beautiful Winnipeg River system, and certainly hope they can get up there too. But, if they go up to a provincial park and they want to spend the weekend and they have an electric vehicle, they'll be able to charge their vehicle, we hope, very soon too, as well.

So, again, focusing on the transition to electric vehicles, hydrogen feasibility, geothermal, renewable electricity, these are all areas that will help set that pathway forward.

**Ms. Naylor:** Thank you, Minister. I'm not hearing about specific emission reduction targets. But I will ask if the minister or his department plan on publishing the government's energy policy publicly and when we can expect—when the public can expect to see that plan.

\* (15:10)

**Mr. Wharton:** Certainly, as I mentioned earlier on in one of my answers, we were looking towards the end of this year—calendar year, towards the later fall to have the reports made public.

Of course, that's what this government does and we're intend—we're going on that path. However, we did request that Dunsky do further consultations with Indigenous folks.

So we are still anticipating to have a late fall, end-of-calendar-year release, based on the information that we've been provided on the consultations—further consultations, more in-depth consultations with First Nations and Indigenous people.

**Ms. Naylor:** So I recall a lot of energy around the original Manitoba Climate and Green Plan. So, is that still guiding the work of this department, or is that old

report just languishing while the minister awaits the Dunsky report?

**Mr. Wharton:** The member from Wolseley has a copy of the Manitoba Climate and Green Plan. Okay. This one didn't need to be dust off, because it's been working pretty hard. Let's just run through some of it, just to kind of tie to your question of, is it sitting on a shelf somewhere. No, it's not sitting on a shelf; it's actually getting worked very, very hard.

Four pillars, as a matter of fact, and I know the member knows the four pillars. We have climate, jobs, water and nature. And I'll just run through some of the areas for the record and for the member, too, as well, on some of the areas that we've touched on already in the plan, of course, based on the four pillars.

So, the first one was, again, mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, and I know that the member had asked about greenhouse gas emissions as well. And the efficiency trucking program provided \$5.9 million for technology and devices to improve fuel efficiency and reduce emissions. I recall that announcement made by my—the former minister and my colleague, at—I believe it was at Gardewine. And it was an excellent opportunity for showing how private sector is being engaged and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions as well, and taking, really taking a lead in partnership with governments, particularly our government, to ensure, you know, that these technologies are getting implemented to help reduce that.

So, again, the program led to retrofitting over 2,474 units. Units like—you know, I come from a trucking business, so I kind of have a little bit of a background on what they're doing, and they go from courier vehicles to shunt vehicles, which are vehicles they use in their yard to move trailers around, to panel vans and right through to the big fleet, the tractor-trailer units, where their tractors are actually looking at better ways, more efficient ways. And also electrifying the fleet; we know that new—newer technology costs a lot, but we know that the environment and us not moving will cost our environment in the long run. So we continue to do that.

\* (15:20)

This particular program has reduced approximately 70,000 tons of cumulative greenhouse gas emissions while building Manitoba's expertise in clean technology in the trucking sector.

The member knows we're one of the largest trucking hubs in—well, per capital, in North America. We're the centre of Canada. We have some of the

largest trucking firms in the world that are stationed here working out of Manitoba, and particularly out of Winnipeg. So, obviously, a very, very important sector for Manitoba, for the economy and for our environment. So we're taking action along with the private sector to do that.

Another area that Efficiency Manitoba established was to meet legislative targets for electricity and natural gas savings. So, Manitoba and Canada have committed—again, this was an announcement that I'm sure the member's aware of—\$32.3 million over three years with the Efficiency Manitoba plan. So this is part of that plan that we talked about earlier, on how Crown corporations are playing an active role in the reductions of the—not only the use of energy, but also moving to clean energy and also reducing greenhouse gas emissions all in parallel.

So we know that Efficiency Manitoba is looking at Manitoba's natural gas demand-side management programming, effectively doubling Efficiency Manitoba's program. So we're moving away from—Efficiency Manitoba likes to expand and they're expanding. So what they're doing is they're moving away from residential-based support and programs to actually industrial, and moving—kind of getting out of that comfort zone that we all look at—we need to work on our residents.

But we've got to look at industry because industry is playing a role and they want to play a role, especially the private sector. So, certainly, we welcome that and, again, essentially, Manitoba—Efficiency Manitoba currently offers 35 programs across residential, industrial, commercial and agricultural customers.

There's another one: agriculture. We know we touched on ag earlier and that plays a big part in one of the pillars, as well, and I'll touch on that maybe a little bit later on, because we've still got lots of time to talk about the four pillars.

Basically the power sector, Manitoba has the cleanest electricity generation in Canada. Well, recently I went up to a conference in Yukon up in Whitehorse, and we—all the environmental ministers from the provinces and territories met and we were the envy of the meeting, the federal-provincial-territorial meeting, because 99.7 per cent, essentially, of our grid generation is renewable sources. So, what a great platform to stand on and really trumpet the fact that we're already 99.7 per cent there. So the bar has been set, there's no doubt about that.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable minister's time has expired.

**Ms. Naylor:** I appreciate the minister wanted to use the opportunity to talk out the clock on what he perceives as the merits of the Manitoba Climate and Green Plan.

My concern is that very few targets have been met, and many of those targets weren't particularly meaningful. So—and now the government is spending money to create a new plan.

So, will there be targets, greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, specifically in the new plan that are a significant improvement on the original Manitoba Climate and Green Plan?

*Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Mr. Wharton:** Well, hello, Mr. Chair, pleasure to meet you.

Thank you—thank the member for the question, and if I heard the member correctly, I believe you were referring to a new plan that's been introduced that takes us away from the original made-in-Manitoba climate plan. I just want to be clear on that.

**Ms. Naylor:** I'm referring to the Dunsky plan that you said would be released by the end of this year.

**Mr. Wharton:** Great, thanks for clearing that up, appreciate it.

As we talked about earlier, there are the four pillars in the plan and the first one being climate talks about energy as well and I—what I'll do is I'll provide—well, again, the member has a copy so I—maybe at page 10 in the Climate and Green Plan will illustrate what I'm going to present to the table right now.

So, in the four pillars, there's actually four subsets of the pillars as well. So one of them is clean energy and energy strategy. In that first pillar with climate too, as well, we have the carbon pricing, we have sector emissions reductions and adaptation. So those four subsectors make up the climate pillar in the four-pillar plan.

The next one is jobs, of course, and we talk about jobs. It's innovation and clean tech, so good, well-paying jobs in the new clean energy sector; financing and investment, green infrastructure and skills and training, so those are four subsets of the jobs pillar in the plan.

Thirdly is water, which consists, again, of agriculture and land use, wetlands and watersheds, which our

government is expanding on, of course. Our wetlands are important to—obviously to our climate and we—our government recognizes that and that's why we've acted on that subset in the pillar and we'll continue to on water quality and flood and drought as well.

\* (15:30)

And then finally, on the nature pillar, we talk about parks and protected areas. Glad to be working on a number of initiatives on that front, as well. Wild species and habitat, conservation and forest and natural areas.

So, again, the energy strategy makes up one subset of a pillar and climate, and as we continue to move forward, the member will see more outcomes on the subsets in each of the four pillars.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

**Mr. Chairperson:** Sorry, I didn't have my mic on, my apologies.

The member from Wolseley.

**Ms. Naylor:** Can the minister talk a little bit about the Navius Research project? I'm not sure, you know, what pillar this is applying to, but I understand that they've been engaged by the government to do research for the climate plan, and I'd like to know what they have done to date and how much they've been paid.

**Mr. Wharton:** I thank the member for the question on Navius. And, essentially, in 2019, an RFP was put out, and Navius was the successful bidder on the RFP to provide government with a host of information with respect to emissions reductions.

And, again, they were, and the scope of the work, of course, would be public in the RFP. And, certainly, the emissions reductions, and they focused on alternatives like, again, we talked about electric vehicles, but geothermal heating, hydrogen, heat pumps, many other areas where they could focus in on, which would actually benefit Manitoba Hydro as well, since Manitoba Hydro was so engaged in the Dunsky report and also pillar 1 in climate, where they can provide up-to-date information, specs call it, if you want, on what actually will help reduce emissions by doing their thorough investigation when it comes to heat pumps and hydrogen and the like.

So, certainly, we're looking forward to having that as part of the pillar 1 in climate.

\* (15:40)

Again, many, many areas where the pillars have, well, getting to tentacles and reach out and invite other experts to come to the table to provide Manitobans with the best technology as we move forward to path of net zero.

**Ms. Naylor:** I'm just going to repeat my original question: How much has Navius been paid to date?

**Mr. Wharton:** We want to make sure that we provide the correct information, so we'd be happy to get that information to you shortly; and I didn't want to hold up the clock any more.

So, if that's okay with the member, we could move on to another question and then revert back once we provide the information.

**Ms. Naylor:** We'll be in Estimates again tomorrow. Can the minister commit to providing that information tomorrow?

**Mr. Wharton:** I can commit to providing it any time today or tomorrow or the next day.

**Ms. Naylor:** I'll just ask the question tomorrow.

Has the provincial government completely accessed funds available to them as part of the Low Carbon Economy Fund?

**Mr. Wharton:** Again, thank the member for the question on the Low Carbon Economy Fund or LCEF.

Great program. Started, I know, right across the country, it was just pre-COVID, and certainly we were pleased to sign on at \$66.8 million through the LCEF program. To date, we have spent—well, actually, not us, it's through two funds, actually. The efficiency trucking program and Efficiency Manitoba, \$38.2 million has already been spent on programming.

It was about—almost a year during COVID where, obviously, the challenges of rolling out programming, whether it be residential or industrial, we know that the world had shut down for some time. So there's a bit of a delay in continuing those—that fine programming that was done up.

\* (15:50)

So we, along with other jurisdictions—the feds have provided an extension to go ahead and ensure that we don't lapse—and we will not—the LCEF funding. And we're looking forward to having that pool basically delivered to Manitobans by fiscal '23-24.

So, pretty much on track, no different than other jurisdictions. COVID threw a wrench into a lot of areas, as we all know and we all lived through. And, certainly, we're pleased to see that Efficiency Manitoba has really ramped up now, post-COVID and moving forward with the LCEF fund to ensure it gets into Manitobans' hands.

**Ms. Naylor:** So my understanding, then, is there's about \$28 million not yet spent of the Low Carbon Economy Fund. The minister can correct that if I have that number wrong and that the federal government has provided an extension into '23-24.

So when is the exact expiry deadline with the extension and where will those additional funds be spent?

**Mr. Wharton:** Kind of a—thank you, Mr. Chair—two-part question. First of all, by March 2024, the LCEF funds will be spent. And second is a little bit longer.

So, again, as the member knows, departments will be going into Estimates very shortly for their fiscal—'22-23 fiscal years. And certainly don't want to prejudge the outcome of the department going to Estimates, but I can tell the member that there will be, of course, an ask for a more—casting a larger net, per se, involving municipalities, private sector, industry, to tap into the remainder of the LCEF funds to help communities throughout the province and, of course, in Winnipeg as well.

So we're looking forward to getting into Estimates and moving that needle. We know we are motivated and we will have that \$28.6 million fully spent by March 2024.

**Ms. Naylor:** I'm going to move on to asking some questions about parks now.

How much money has been paid to the company RA Outdoors—I realize they also maybe go by the parent company, Aspira—as part of their administration of park passes and the sale of other permits? And if the minister could outline how much the government has spent year by year since they contracted with RA Outdoors.

\* (16:00)

**Mr. Wharton:** Thank the member from Wolseley for the question and just wanted to get on the record, too, just a little bit more background information too as well about e-licensing and how many e-licences or permits are being generated.

So, Manitoba issued over 398,000 licences and permits, generating over \$10.2 million. The licensing initiative is consistent with our commitment to—again, we want to make sure we're maximizing value and ensuring that advancing innovative technology solutions and also reducing red tape and delivering enhanced public services for Manitobans, and that's exactly what this has accomplished.

Approximately 60 per cent of the licensing sales remain online. The online service was, again, greatly enhanced through public service levels and eliminated the pre—the need for preprinting and distributing paper. I mean, people couldn't even get a licence if they wanted to come up for a weekend, even a—for tourism, so, obviously, a great economic driver too, as well. For anybody wanting to come up here and hunt or visit one of our great parks, certainly, this provided that opportunity. And, again, the implementation of the new licensing system, again, improves collection of data, also compliance and enforcement too, as well, and certainly aids in our conservation officers when they are doing their job.

The question, also, from the member was how much was Aspira fees collected? Fees collected for fiscal '21-22: \$1.329 million.

**Ms. Naylor:** I have actually asked if I could hear how much was collected year after year, over the last—I believe, it's been three years since these permits have been in use. But I appreciate getting the number for '21-22.

Can the minister explain what role his government sees for private companies in the administration and operation of parks in Manitoba?

\* (16:10)

**Mr. Wharton:** I thank the member for the question.

The member knows that for several years parks have maintained—national parks have maintained agreements with commercial operators in provincial parks essentially for decades. That certainly hasn't changed under our government and certainly was that way during the former government.

You know, and it's been said many times in the House, and I believe I put it on record here last week as well, is our parks are not for sale, contrary to what the opposition would like to provide information to Manitobans. But we know that they're not, and certainly Manitoba government is working with their commercial operators to enhance that experience for Manitobans when they visit our provincial parks.

Also, looking at more partnerships with Indigenous folks as well going forward. We have parks right throughout the province, as we know, and some of them border along communities—First Nation communities—and certainly there has been a lot of discussion with—led by First Nations and Indigenous folks with us—the whole of government, actually, through NR as well, on how we can continue to foster partnerships and grow together and ensure that not only are we enhancing the experience for visitors, but also enhancing a partnership with the Indigenous as well.

So, yes, I think I'll leave it there. I'm sure the member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor) has another question on some of the great commercial operators have been running in our parks for decades.

**Ms. Naylor:** Can the minister talk about—well, the agreement signed with the private company in St. Ambroise provincial park. You know, when—my actual question previously had been about administration or operation of parks, not specifically selling off parks, but that's an example of an operation—a private operation—that has been introduced under this government.

Does the minister believe that this is, in fact, a good model and that there ought to be more of this being emulated in other areas of the province?

**Mr. Wharton:** I thank the member for that question.

Again, I'm sure we can all remember the—oh, call it the 300-year flood in 2011 when essentially both east and west, north and south Lake Manitoba were—areas were devastated. And, certainly, St. Ambroise was one of those areas as well, being at the south basin, taking that north flow, pretty much essentially wiping out the whole area.

Again, I take the member back to my earlier comments about—first of all, obviously, our parks are not for sale. We know that. But the member—I talked to the member about commercial operators have been there for decades operating, providing services to Manitoba park-goers. And some—and often regions, too, as well, where really, it's remote, which makes it a challenge for anybody, whether you're providing it—a commercial service or even from the public side.

So, certainly, any enhancements we can do to ensure those parks remain open and accessible is what the focus is. And this is an important takeaway for the member as well: the government retains full administration and control over all commercial operations in all our parks.

**Ms. Naylor:** Can the minister tell this committee whether or not there will be an increase in protected areas in the province this year?

\* (16:20)

**Mr. Wharton:** I thank the member again for the question and—on protected areas. Of course, Manitoba will continue to recognize the importance of these protected areas for sure.

Myself and—actually, my team and I were up in Yukon at Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, CCME, in August, just this past August, and we were able to engage with many—in many productive discussions with our territory and provincial colleagues, but also the federal minister, as well, Mr. Guilbeault.

And we were able to carve out a little bit of time for a one-on-one with the minister, too, as well. And we did talk about protected areas and how important they are and how fortunate we are in Manitoba, particularly in our North, to have some great areas up there, too, as well.

And, you know, Manitoba will continue to build a network of protected, conserved areas, absolutely this basically—to conserve ecosystems and maintain biodiversity in many areas across the province.

So, I also wanted to put on the record, too, as well, for the member, that we're—when we're looking at protecting protected areas, it is of the utmost importance to include discussions and partner with Indigenous folks as well. And, as a matter of fact, we have met—the department and myself inclusive, two times already on this particular issue with Seal River and also had a meeting recently with the Fisher River Cree Nation as well. And working with them on how we can partner on ensuring that areas within the territory are protected.

So it truly is a partnership. It needs to continue to be a partnership as we go forward, and certainly we want to be leaders in Manitoba when it comes to protected areas.

**Ms. Naylor:** I'm aware of how little land in Manitoba has been protected under this government; it's actually really a tragedy over the last six years. And this was a significant commitment of the former government, and there was, in fact—you know, I just recently went looking for that information on the government website about that commitment, and it's disappeared now from the website.

So I hear the minister saying that this is important, that he's partnering with Indigenous communities, but I'd really like to know what the targets are and what kind of commitment this government will make to increasing protected areas in this coming year, in this coming budget.

**Mr. Wharton:** Threw you off a little that time. I was quick to answer. And, again, thank the member for the question.

And just take back and rewind to the comment the member from Wolseley made about the former government and what their plan was. Well, I'd certainly welcome the member to provide that plan, because certainly nothing was done for 17 years under the former government.

Unlike the former government, we have a plan, and that plan, as I spoke to earlier in my first answer, is ensuring that we talk about targets.

The member talked about targets. Well, let's talk about targets. We won't set targets. The government won't set targets. Why would we do that alone? I guess I'm going to ask the question of the member. We need to ensure that targets are set in partnership with all the key stakeholders, including Indigenous folks, particularly in the North, where we have a vast land that needs to be protected for sure, and finding that balance in concert and lockstep with Indigenous partnership and other stakeholders that will be at the table, that are at the table, as I mentioned in my preamble the Fisher River and Seal—or Seal River and Fisher River Cree Nation, to name only two.

So, certainly, we're on the right path, and we will continue to go down that path to ensure that we do move forward. And I know we've made a commitment to do that, and we will continue to see it through.

**Ms. Naylor:** I do want to correct the record. The number of—the amount of land that was protected under the previous government was substantial, particularly in the last few years, and it was a commitment that was made and was followed up on. It's been less than 1 per cent of Manitoba's land that's been protected under this government in the last six years. So it's a fair question to know what kind of targets are in place. And I hope the minister's aware that many Indigenous groups across the country have called on the protection of 30 per cent of lands by the year 2030, and so it would be really good to hear that the government's even thinking about this a little bit.

\* (16:30)

So I'm going to ask the government again: Knowing that, in fact, there's been this call for 30 per cent of land protection, does this government have any intention in the next year to protect any lands in Manitoba?

**Mr. Wharton:** Again, I certainly would welcome a copy of the member's statement regarding the protected areas that the member referred to under the former government.

We know that, certainly, there was a lot of land that was, essentially, looked at during a number of issues. And we know that during the Bipole III issue, and I know the member's probably familiar with Bipole III and the 540 kilometres of torn-up land halfway around the province to run a bipole line back to the east part of the province was a—certainly a—if that was part of the plan, and I—probably was, I guess, but I don't know how they accounted for it, but they obviously did something with it when they were pounding an east-side road through protected forest and not running a hydro line down it, didn't make sense.

Anyways, I digress a bit. Provincial parks play a major role in protecting Manitoba's natural landscape. Manitoba has developed a draft provincial park strategy to sustain Manitoba's parks.

Again, parks are going to play a massive role in how we move forward with protected spaces, protected areas. And certainly, that will include, as I said in my first two responses, two partnerships sitting around the table ensuring that the interests of Indigenous, the interests of other stakeholders and a partnership with the federal government, as well, who is also leading the charge in protected areas where we have open discussions and ensure that we map out a balance between protected areas, industry, stakeholders, Indigenous, of course, at the table playing a very predominant role.

So I think I'll leave it at that, and if the member still wants to go on land, I think I've got another couple of answers for her.

**Ms. Naylor:** I'm—I think the minister might not be familiar with the concept of protected lands or the work that's happened in the past, actually, under both previous governments.

Between 1990 and 2018, this province moved from 350,000 hectares to 7.2 million hectares of protected land. And then, in the last five years of that time, in the—sorry, in the last five years of the previous

government, there was a really intentional push, and 2 per cent of—further of land was protected.

In the following five years, since 2016, 0.02 per cent of land was protected. So about 10 per cent of what was protected in the previous five years was protected between 2016 to 2021.

So, we can talk about history all we want and what the minister thinks should or shouldn't have happened, but I just want to know, does the minister have any commitment at all to protecting more land in this coming year or in the next five years if he has the opportunity to do so?

\* (16:40)

**Mr. Wharton:** Just before I get into talking more about particular areas and how really it's a multi-pronged approach, the member had asked about the Navius contract. Year to date, a total of \$92,000 has been spent.

So, back to protected areas. Again, as I mentioned, it's just—it's more than just land. You know, you need to expand that way of thinking, and certainly transitioning—what our government has done is transitioned conservation districts to watershed boundaries based on ecology.

So I know the member is probably familiar with that. As a matter of fact, we've expanded our Watershed Districts Program the last three years in a row, even during COVID, where pretty much everything shut down. The team is still hard at work and, again, expanding that network to now 113-member municipalities.

And I'd like to say, stay tuned, but I'll say more to come, because Manitobans—and particularly municipalities and other districts across Manitoba—are stepping up and they understand that delivering ecological programs across working landscapes is the way to go, including, by the way, \$204 million into Conservation and GROW trusts.

So you have to—we believe, anyways—that you have to look at the big picture. And certainly, when we're having those discussions with the likes of Seal River and Fisher River Cree Nation and other stakeholders across the province, these are areas that come up when we talk about protected spaces, protected areas, and water plays a role. So we're certainly proud of the record that we have on both fronts, and we'll continue to forge ahead to ensure that we're protecting spaces throughout the province.

**Ms. Naylor:** While we're on the topic of the importance of protecting a wide range of biodiverse areas, both land and water, one of the areas that the previous government worked to strengthen protections for was peatlands. And I know that this government, in the Climate and Green Plan, specifically talks about increasing protections for peatlands, and yet this most recent budget brought in, you know, fiscal policy that's at odds with that. I would think that there's now financial incentive to increase peat harvesting in the province.

So I know that that, you know, that policy doesn't fall under this minister's budget, but it is his government's budget, so I'd like to know if this minister can speak to, you know, this policy that's very much at odds with his own Climate and Green Plan commitment to protecting more peatland in the province.

\* (16:50)

**Mr. Wharton:** As the member noted, this particular question really falls under NRND. However, I'm pleased to put on the record that it was our government that actually fully proclaimed the former government's stewardship act, Peatlands Stewardship Act, back in 2020, again, really giving us that balanced approach to, obviously, to the crucial landscape.

So, pleased to put that on the record. The bill was introduced in 2015 by the former government, and our government fully proclaimed the bill in 2020.

**Ms. Naylor:** I believe that I asked a question about if the incentives for peat harvesting are—if the minister sees these at odds with the goals of his department. I admit there was a long break there, so I almost forgot what the question was when the answer came because it didn't match.

But I will say, because we're almost out of time, I just have one more question under my umbrella of parks and protected lands, so I'll ask that and see if we can possibly get an answer today.

Does the minister believe that there will be any change in special permits to access polar bear areas in Churchill this year?

**Mr. Wharton:** Again, I thank the member from Wolseley for her question on polar bears.

And we—the polar bear areas that you're talking to really falls under NRND, but certainly, for the record, I would love to put on the record that my colleague introduced bill 76, The Coat of Arms, Emblems and the Manitoba Tartan Amendment Act, which would

designate the polar bear as an official provincial emblem to recognize the important role polar bear currently plays as an internationally recognized symbol of Manitoba.

Certainly, our government recognizes the importance of the polar bear to the point where now it is official coat of arms.

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

## ROOM 255

### FINANCE

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James):** Welcome back, folks. Glad to see that those who were ill are once again better and are here to speak and connect. Thank you so much.

Just wanted to start out by talking a bit about some of the changes that were made at Hydro by this government in terms of the release of a number of government—of Hydro workers, hundreds and hundreds of workers, and their replacement by private contractors, many of whom are from out of province.

So I'm hoping the minister can maybe just provide, first of all, some numbers. What is the total number of Manitoba Hydro staff who were released since his government has come into power in 2016?

\* (15:10)

**Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance):** Thank you for the opportunity to answer the member's questions about workforce and workforce numbers.

I know that we have information to table. We've been having—even as recent as the budgetary documents that were developed in respect of Hydro. And those numbers indicated the workforce at Hydro in 2021 were 4,954. Anticipated numbers in 2022 were 5,023, and the planning assumptions are for workforce at Hydro to be 5,175 in 2023. So, Hydro continues to hire. Hydro continues to undertake to build its workforce.

But there's a good-news story here that this does give me the opportunity to tell. And that is—I just wanted to flag to the member that on page 26 of the Hydro's annual report—and I know we've brought a diverse number of documents to the table in these proceedings, but this is the Hydro portion of the Finance Committee of Supply.

So I'll just reference for the first time this annual report released by Hydro just last week. And it indicates progress being made on targets and performance when it comes to diversity. And so I do want to flag to members there: there's been an overall amelioration even in terms of Indigenous workforce at Manitoba Hydro. Province-wide workforce has gone from an 18 per cent target in '21-22 to an actual of 20 per cent.

Likewise, the northern workforce that identifies as Indigenous has risen in year from 47 per cent to 49 per cent. Indigenous-in-management component has risen from 8 per cent to 9 per cent. And that's in addition to things like persons with disabilities rising from 6 to 8 per cent, visible minorities 9 to 10 per cent. So, some very, very significant gains in year—women in management, from 30 to 31 per cent.

The member knows that a number of years ago now, there was an overall campaign initiative, if you will, to try to address Hydro workforce, and that had been largely done on a voluntary basis, where individuals who were nearing retirement could elect to take their years of service and their pensionable benefits and, in many cases, additional payments, and to be able to leave a little early. And that was undertaken by a number of individuals.

There was a senior management trim of 15 per cent, a mandate given to all the Crown corporations. I believe that would've been around 2017, but I stand to be corrected, and we can confirm that or otherwise provide information as the afternoon goes on. And so, that was important, to make sure that we were continuing to, as we said, get services to Manitobans and reduce that top-heavy administrative capability at many of our Crown corporations.

So, as I indicated, you know, the workforce continues to be built. Those diversity metrics show continued improvement.

And then the other thing I was going to just speak to, and the member may have a follow-up question, is the member asked about contracts. Well, there was no campaign in which government or Hydro were directing for people to go away as employees and come

back as contracts, but contracting within Hydro has been a long-standing feature for some areas of the work. For things like, in emergency circumstances, when it comes to responding for fires; if there are rebuilds to be done where they need to flex workforce because of things like, maybe, workforce interruptions, as was done this summer through the gas division, when one union decided to go on strike.

And so, in that case, they do have an ability to provide good service and ensure business continuity and safety by bringing on contractors. And I'm sure the member would agree that those are provisions that are prudent and need to be taken to protect ratepayers and to protect safety.

So those are some answers I can give at this time, and I invite him to ask other questions as he may have.

**Mr. Sala:** I do appreciate that information. It is good to hear that diversity metrics are improving; this is good news.

We did not hear an answer to the question, though, however, about the total number of Hydro employees that were there when the minister's government came into power in 2016.

So the question I'm hoping to get clarity on is: What was the total FTE within Hydro in 2016 when this government came into power?

\* (15:20)

**Mr. Friesen:** I'm happy to answer the member's question.

First of all, I just will refer him to the Manitoba Hydro annual report. And I want to just indicate to him that he can see all operating statistics and financial statistics in the concluding part of that report, including beginning on one—on page 113, exactly the numbers he's looking for by operating year, and it goes back a number of years.

So all of those numbers, in respect of capability of electrical systems supply, it talks about FTEs, there's revenues and expenditures, all by year and in a nice presentation. So he can find all the FTEs for every year he's looking at.

I would want to, for context, 'indicate' to the member that as I indicated to him, even, like, 2021, workforce at 4,954. In 2022, the—it was anticipated to be 5,023 and even then anticipated for 2023 at 5,175. Hydro continues to do business. Hydro continues to operate. Hydro continues to hire.

And even in this environment, when workforce is challenging to get at, Manitoba has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the entire country. And that has been a source of strength for Manitoba, but certainly, it is also increasingly a source of consternation for employers and those who are trying to find workforce.

We know that the global pandemic significantly interrupted those normal processes of onboarding new workers. Programs like the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program were significantly interrupted. But also just the way people moved across the country seeking out new economic advantages for themselves and their families, that was also interrupted. And so we're seeing how that plays out.

However, I would want to make a key clarification for the member, and that is that Hydro, you know, obviously is a very large utility that operates generating largely hydroelectric. It sends that electricity down transmission lines. It translates that power in places like at Dorsey and Riel stations. It then sends that across the manifold of the province, where it translates into power for households, for companies, corporations, industries.

It sends that power excess, above and beyond what our requirements are domestically, to customers outside Manitoba, both in the US and in Canada, and then part of that money, part of that export, goes on the spot markets, where a part of a broad array of electrical, both generators and transmitters, we can both receive inputs and provide distribution to others.

I say this in order to distinguish these operations of the corporation from its activities in respect of capital. Capital. Every once in a while—and I would welcome the long conversation about the needs for, and alternatives to, Keeyask and Bipole III—but when Hydro builds out a major project like this one—\$8.3 billion in respect of Keeyask, significantly over budget, budgeted amounts that the former government hid from Manitobans—but when it does so, it must attract and engage additional workforce.

And I can indicate to that member that on page 77 of the expert review of Bipole III and Keeyask, it indicates there, in respect of Keeyask, for construction, 2,436 project-direct jobs, and then other direct jobs and employment stats of 2,175, and even indirect and induced, for a total employment—in person years, I should say, not just jobs, with person years—of 8,347.

However—I mean, I believe at one point in time, Keeyask was North America's largest construction project. Many of those jobs, of course, came from outside of our project. Many of those jobs paid income tax in other jurisdictions, was something that the NDP never disclosed to Manitoba.

But clearly, the member understands that workforce must flex up and then it must return down on the completion of large capital projects. Corporation makes every effort, of course, in respect of its own employees, to reallocate them, but clearly a project of this size is a composite of both FTEs, own-source employees and contracted employees.

**Mr. Sala:** I'd like to ask the minister if he could provide the total value of the contracted-out labour on transmission and generation side of the organization in 2016, and then the total value of contracts issued in the 2021 fiscal year—so, the last fiscal year—sorry, '21-22 fiscal year.

So again, to repeat: What is the total value of the contracted-out labour in 2016-17 fiscal year, and what was the total value of the contracted-out labour in the '21-22 fiscal year, specifically for generation and transmission?

And I'm not looking for any information related to capital.

\* (15:30)

**Mr. Friesen:** I welcome an opportunity to address the member's question.

I want to indicate to the member that, you know, we've got very significant capability at this table, including Mr. Rob Marrese, who's the assistant deputy minister in Finance, responsible for Crown corporations in the secretariat. Jim Crone and others as executive directors in that secretariat give us good advice. I also have at the table, of course, my deputy minister, Rich Groen, my Treasury Board secretary analyst, as well as the executive financial officer for Finance, Mr. Ryan Klos. And so we've got a lot of depth at this table.

However, I believe that the member, at times, is at the wrong table. And we can provide a lot of detail, but we cannot provide the detail he would get from the Hydro board when the board actually comes to committee on an annual basis. And in that construct, in that capacity, the member would have access to the CEO for Manitoba Hydro. He would have access to the executive financial officer, the chief operating officer, and through them, to the array of senior executives

and managers who would be able to give the member the level of specificity that he is seeking in respect of a very, very specific request.

The member's asking for a five-year parse-out of contracted labour, but only on generation transmission, and not in respect of capital, a total value. So, what I can do is indicate to the member that—that's—my encouragement to him would be, by all means, to be present at that committee when Hydro presents annually to this Legislature in respect of its annual report. Don't miss that meeting. Be sure to ask that question.

I can tell you, though, the answer to that question will probably go something like this: those levels of contracted employees fluctuate over annual operating years. And the reason they would fluctuate is because the question becomes, when does Hydro bring on contract workers? Well, first of all, let's be clear: there is no edict from anyone—no edict from the CEO, no edict from the chair, certainly no edict from this government or this minister—that would interfere with Hydro to say somehow that you've got to go out and take away employees who work for Hydro and bring people back as contractors. There is no such initiative. There has been no such directive.

We have, of course, you know, through the chair and the board of Hydro, I know that they are always interested in the operations of Hydro to say: What is your workforce? How are you addressing your issues? What are your service standards that you have for these areas? How long does it take you to respond in terms of challenges?

But I think a lot of the questions about the fluctuations in the number of contracted individuals or groups in a year can also be answered by referring to weather events, because when Hydro contracts is reflective of environmental conditions.

So the member asked about 2016 and '17. If I remember correct, we had a really big spring storm in 2016-17. I think it was that year we had some really bad, inclement weather. And that would be a case—if there had been some lines down—Hydro knows what it has; it knows that workforce that it can flex. It knows what it can produce and generate through overtime, but then, beyond that, it may choose to—it might be the executive decision of the company—to bring on contract workers.

Likewise for fires in—I remember, one of those years was a very significant summer fire season. And at that time, we had a number of outages—even right

now in Manitoba, we have two First Nations communities that are getting by with interventions like diesel generators to allow them to have access to power. We're actively—they're actively monitoring those situations and providing service.

But those things would cause more use of contractors—flexing workforce, using overtime, but then also employing contractors.

So, I would just want to be sure that they also understand those kind of operational decisions aren't undertaken by the government. They're undertaken by Hydro. That level of specificity is best gotten at by going to the Hydro committee and asking the question of the CEO and the CFO.

The—Hydro, of course, brings their capital and their operating plans to the Treasury Board, have done so for a number of years now. The plan of Hydro in respect of operating and capital has never been challenged by Treasury Board. It's been passed as it has been presented. I think it's a rigorous process, far better than in the past.

\* (15:40)

**Mr. Sala:** I'm looking forward to that conversation at that committee hearing.

And I guess the concern here that the minister doesn't seem to be reflecting on is that his government did, in fact, require that Hydro cut a significant number of jobs. It's well documented. He can reframe it however he'd like—that it's—you know, this is just something that people did on a volunteer basis. I'd suggest that he go back and look at what actually happened in 2016-17 to get a little more familiar with what actually went down in his own department within Hydro. We lost hundreds and hundreds of workers as a result of this government requiring that Hydro cut down the total number of FTE.

The impact of that—if you speak with Hydro workers, and I—again, I encourage the minister to familiarize himself with the file and to go back and maybe connect with people working within the corporation—was significant. That impact—the impact of those cuts resulted in a huge number of people taking on multiple jobs at once; it resulted in unsafe working conditions for a number of workers, especially Unifor gas workers.

And if you speak with the IBEW membership, what you would learn is that it's essentially resulted in a significant amount of work which was previously done by the corporation being done by contractors, not

as a function of year-to-year fluctuations or fires or storms, but as a direct function of his government's cuts to FTE within Hydro.

So the question I think that I really would like to get clarity on from the minister is: Why does his government believe that contract labour provides better value than Manitoba Hydro workers in doing the work that needs to be done within Manitoba Hydro? Why does his government believe that contracting out with private contractors is better? Why does it provide more value than actually just hiring on Manitoba Hydro workers—hiring those people back that his government let go?

**Mr. Friesen:** I thank the member for the question.

I do want to set the record straight here. The member is making a very blunt foray into trying to elicit some kind of response that would say that the government prefers private contracts to employees—the Crown corporation.

There's a number of things wrong with the assertion. First of all, the government has no ideological position as the NDP does, in respect of full-time equivalence versus contract employees. We are proud of our workforce, we are proud of our civil service workforce in Manitoba.

As a matter of fact, I think it was just about a week or two ago that we were celebrating excellence in the civil service. There's a number of awards that even at one time I had the pleasure and the honour to give out, where we have an annual awards celebration, and senior leadership can identify people within their organizations who have really excelled and done something that is noteworthy—built new systems, solved problems, collaborated with other groups to get value—these should be things that we all celebrate together. That's done within the civil service.

So, we celebrate the achievements of our civil service. We're committed to growing a professional and modern civil service, and I invite the member to read more about the plans of our government to facilitate that, and to partner with the civil service and how we're doing that.

But, the other problem with his assertion is it flirts dangerously along the line of somehow saying that the government is directing Hydro in respect to their day-to-day operations. Which is completely false, and it hearkens back to that expert report on bipole and Keeyask, because it's exactly that report that talks about the previous government's interference with Manitoba Hydro.

And that is a conversation I would like to have with the member this afternoon. I think he's inviting that conversation directly. And he's actually on sensitive ground, because it was very critical analysis and recommendations that talked about the previous government's interference at Hydro—driving these mega projects for Hydro infrastructure regardless of cost escalation and eroding business case—erosions in the business case that the government knew about but did not disclose to Manitobans. So, I invite that conversation.

\* (15:50)

However, I think the member may also be asking in respect of last year's decision of one of the unions at Hydro—this was the Unifor strike that had taken place last spring, you know, after Hydro actually had successfully negotiated new contracts with AMHSSE and with CUPE, but Unifor took a membership vote and they went on strike.

What ensued was a natural gas work continuance safe operating procedure. It was developed to provide work instruction to staff, assigned as contingency workers, in the case of a strike. It outlined service levels and the work that would have to be performed by a contingency workforce.

It did not guarantee uninterrupted service, but it sought uninterrupted service wherever it could. It prioritized work based on risk, identified work in a high importance, medium importance, low importance. The contingency workforce would be deployed to deal with work of an emergency or safety nature. I would strongly suspect that that contingency workforce was made up both of Hydro employees who were redeployed, and also flexing to include other workforce, like contractors.

If the member is suggesting today that Hydro should not have entered into contracts that were designed for safety and business continuance—I read the notes that talked about ensuring safety for Manitobans when it came to gas division—let him say so in these proceedings that he would put Manitobans knowingly at risk for ideological reasons. We would not do so.

However, remember, at the end of the day, governance works this way: the minister has responsibilities and they are not to directly run a highway—Hydro. The board, CEO, senior executive management team, under the direction of the board of directors; that is who runs Hydro. That is who makes day-to-day decisions. That is who operates both in

continuous, normal circumstances and in emergency circumstances.

**Mr. Sala:** I'm glad the minister raised the question of who is running Hydro, because there is something we touched on last week but we didn't have a chance to go much further on, and I'm looking forward to discussing that now, in relation to his last comments; which is, specifically, his government's decision to wind down Manitoba Hydro Telecom and to give over our hydro—or sorry, our fibre-optic assets over to XplorNet for what appears to be a song, Mr. Chair.

So, I'm looking to just maybe have the minister comment initially on why his government chose to wind down Manitoba Hydro Telecom, given the quality of the work that they were doing, and why they chose to hand that fibre over to XplorNet at no cost.

**Mr. Friesen:** Mr. Chair, I'd be happy to answer the member's question, but just before I segue there, I did want to end my other response and I regret that my time ran out before I was able to do so.

I couldn't help but notice that the critic for Hydro, the member for St. James (Mr. Sala), had talked about his concerns of the government—and it really isn't the government, it's Hydro—taking on, he said, multiple concurrent projects, which he said created risk, and they should have been staggered.

That's interesting to me because on page 131 of the expert report on Bipole III and Keeyask, it is exactly this concern by the commissioner that is addressed. The fact that the previous government—and I'm reading from the report here—was managing multiple large projects, and capacity was stretched at Manitoba Hydro. It said although capacity appeared to have existed for Bipole III, internal capacity appears to have been lacking with respect to the management of Keeyask, particularly in the poor results in 2016, it said.

That's the time when we actually inherited that project, you know. The government came into place. This was likely due, it said, to the amount of time that had passed since Hydro's last major generation project. He's referring, of course, to Wuskwatim.

Hydro did not seem to recognize this lack of internal expertise, or if it did, it failed to address it soon enough through the use of external consultants and the recommendation that comes from this is to say—the recommendation, surprisingly, is not to say therefore fire people and only use external consultants. No, the recommendation does not say that. It

says that Manitoba Hydro should use external expertise for high-value future capital projects and it should plan its capital program so—where as possible, so that mega projects multiply—or, multiple mega projects are not constructed simultaneously.

Mr. Chair, I find it a point that I should make that the commissioner—the author of the expert review of Bipole III and Keeyask is in agreement with the member for St. James today. Both of them caution the former NDP government who tried to manage too much at one time with an ideological approach of saying we cannot seek expertise, we cannot axe—ask experts, that that member last week came very close to taking a run at three individuals who acted as the expert advisory group on this Keeyask-bipole report.

And finally, what stopped his questions is when I started reading their biographies into the record, people who had led Ontario infrastructure for 25 years, people who had done Indigenous hydro developments for years and years in North America and it was at that point that the member of course ceased and desisted from his line of questioning.

On the subject of Manitoba Hydro Internet, our government was proud to undertake a process that would have seen the dark fibre, as it's referred to in Manitoba, running across this province, plowed in by Manitoba Hydro years ago. Essentially utilizing that for the benefit of the hundreds of communities that have substandard levels of Internet. This is an issue having to do with equity, equal treatment of communities. It talks about the importance of northern and rural investments, but also it talks about how the connection to high quality fibre optics creates whole other opportunities for these communities.

So, if the member is suggesting that he doesn't want to see those communities connected, then he should say so today. This initiative was announced by our government in 2020. There was a significant process whereby the government did an RFP; it was a competitive process, there was a proponent. I can assure the member that the work continues to basically use thousands of kilometres of fibre optic cable not being used by Manitoba Hydro to extend Internet service to underserved rural and northern communities.

We're proud of this partnership with XplorNet; we're proud of the work that is being done.

**Mr. Sala:** I'd like to ask the minister if he can provide information on the Manitoba Hydro Telecom dividend that Hydro would—received annually from

Manitoba Hydro Telecom and how that was applied to regulated electricity and gas costs to offset rates.

\* (16:00)

**Mr. Friesen:** The member is mistaken. The—Manitoba Hydro doesn't pay a dividend to the Province of Manitoba, and the—and subsidiaries of Hydro don't pay a dividend to Manitoba Hydro. So I'm going to let the member write that down before I continue.

So I'll repeat that: Manitoba Hydro doesn't pay a dividend to the Province of Manitoba, and subsidiaries of Hydro don't pay a dividend to Hydro. I'm referring to page 114 of the Hydro annual report. The member sees there a statement of revenues breaking down between domestic electric and gas, and there's an extraprovincial line as well, and there's other revenues.

And so the member knows that those—of course, those amounts are all reported in a consolidated form for the purpose of these financial statistics. It's a good presentation. It goes back a number of fiscal years. And it's within those parameters that any income, were there to be any from subsidiary areas of Hydro, would be reported.

The member knows the timeline on which these decisions were made. Essentially, in 2019, Crown services at the time and Central Services proceeded to issue an RFQ, a request for qualifications; there were proponents who answered that, those bids were adjudicated. And then the RFP was actually issued in 2020, in summer.

And the announcement was made of the top-ranking proponent. Contracts were signed, and the work continues to connect these northern and rural communities to high-speed Internet. I would want the member to understand, of course, that this was not somehow utilizing component pieces of Hydro's high-speed Internet that they were currently using. Rather, Hydro had connectivity adequately and sufficiently for the future in respect of its assets, to connect it, to meet its obligations to provide high-speed service.

And this was in respect of hosting and utilization of the additional strands of fibre optic thread for the purpose of signing additional customers. The original press release states that the objective is to connect more than 125,000 unserved or underserved Manitobans to reliable high-speed Internet services. It indicates who the proponent is, Xplornet Communications; it talks about the fact that even 30 First

Nations and 270 rural and northern communities will be connected.

And then it includes, as well, 350 communities with cellphone access. And it's a partnership, a collaboration, where Hydro has the fibre, the government undertakes to grant the contract, a third party comes in and bids and takes up that responsibility, and the recipients, the beneficiaries, are Manitobans who get service that they didn't otherwise have, far faster than that would otherwise have been the case.

I would want to be clear, the member asked a question about why do it at all. We have always had the concern for Hydro to concentrate on its core mandate. Hydro has nothing in its act to say that it should be out there in the retail space connecting individuals to high-speed Internet and doing that work. It's completely outside of Manitoba's core mandate to provide affordable power to Manitoba households, commercial entities, business entities, industrial users and to export for profit, for the benefit of ratepayers, that which it does not use itself in terms of surplus energy.

So there is nothing outside of that context where Hydro should focus on its core mandate and services; these high-speed services can then be offered to Manitobans on existing infrastructure, where Hydro can simply, basically, devolve the opportunity in respect of fibre, to a different actor. The government is proud to be able to be continuing to provide high-speed Internet to Manitobans who would otherwise not have this service.

**Mr. Sala:** I appreciate that 15 minutes after the minister stated that his government doesn't interfere in the decision-making at Hydro that he just confirmed that his government has interfered in the decision-making of Hydro, and is, in fact, directing them to wind down Manitoba Hydro Telecom. So I appreciate that clarification.

He didn't answer the question, however, so I'll say it differently. I think he knows what I was asking; I called it a dividend; I'll re-state the question, and hopefully a little more clearly here. I'm looking to understand the total amount of revenue for Manitoba Hydro that was created by Manitoba Hydro Telecom, and how that was applied to regulated electricity and gas rates in Manitoba.

\* (16:10)

**Mr. Friesen:** Well, once again, I would welcome a conversation on governance, where the previous government interfered directly in the operations of Hydro,

chronicled completely and at length in the expert report on Keeyask and bipole.

And the cost of that interference was billions of dollars of cost overruns. That commissioner for that report made clear that the government—NDP government—hid the escalating costs of the projects from Manitobans; that they circumvented the processes that were designed to test the projects for value. The Needs For and Alternatives To process was never even applied to billions of dollars of assets.

And then when the government knew the true 'escalating' costs, they underreported those amounts to Manitoba. No wonder he called for a recalibration and a renewed understanding of what everyone's role is—what the CEO of Hydro's role is; what the Minister responsible for Hydro, what their role is; what the board chair's role is; and what Cabinet's role is—the Executive Council.

And so when the member makes the claim that somehow, because the government of Manitoba has an interest in using dark fibre not utilized by Hydro to connect communities all across Manitoba's north and rural communities, that that is tantamount to interference in Hydro. He's completely false. He's completely off the mark.

I want to read for the member from the annual report of Hydro what Hydro actually does: Manitoba Hydro is a provincial Crown corporation—I'm on page 14—and one of the largest integrated electricity and natural gas distribution utilities in Canada. We are a leader in providing renewable hydroelectricity and clean-burning natural gas energy for life, that powers our province and supports our economic growth.

We are a forward-looking utility that keeps the best interests of our customers at the forefront, functioning both as a responsive, reliable supplier of electricity and natural gas, and as a trusted energy advisor for our customers as the energy landscape continues to change. We also trade electricity with four wholesale markets in the midwest United States and Canada.

I noticed that nowhere in the corporate profile does it indicate that the core mission and mandate of Manitoba Hydro is to use dark fibre and get into the Internet business by competing directly with companies like, I don't know, Rogers and Bell MTS and Xplornet and Valley Fiber and who knows who else in this province is all providing Internet.

It doesn't say that anywhere because that is not the core mission and mandate of Hydro. The decision to undertake to simply light up that unused fibre is a smart one, and it's one that Manitobans say, yes, that makes a lot of sense, actually.

There's underserved communities. The fibre optic lines run right past these communities—did when the NDP were in power, but they did nothing about it. And so the enterprise in principle is one that will see benefit to thousands of Manitobans, and it's why we undertook to go in that direction.

I want to indicate to the member that the total consolidated revenue reportable to Hydro in the year that finished 2021 was \$6 million. That's in total, and I would like to read into the record an indication of what those subsidiaries at Hydro are. *[interjection]* Sorry, we're managing multiple documents in front of us.

So I just want to indicate that the consolidated financial statements include the accounts of Manitoba Hydro, as well as the wholly owned subsidiaries, including: Centra Gas Manitoba Inc., Minell Pipelines Ltd., Manitoba Hydro International Ltd., Manitoba Hydro Utility Services Ltd., Teshmont LP Holdings Ltd. and 6690271 Manitoba. And I believe that it is the list of consolidated subsidiaries.

**Mr. Sala:** Sadly, I just—I still did not receive a response specifically about Manitoba Hydro—yes, that was a consolidated summary of revenues. At least, unless I misheard, we were asking specifically for the amount of revenue that Manitoba Hydro Telecom generated for Hydro on a yearly basis and how that impacted electricity and gas rates.

I can completely understand why the minister is avoiding wanting to talk about that more specifically because it would highlight the fact that the decision that this government has made to shut down Manitoba Hydro Telecom is going to increase the cost of Hydro for all Manitobans.

I do want to ask the minister a question about the value of contracts that Manitoba Hydro Telecom had in place with Manitoba-based Internet service provider companies. There are, I think, somewhere in the range of 50 Internet service provider small businesses in Manitoba that, for a long time, partnered with Manitoba Hydro Telecom to expand access to broadband for people, especially in our rural and northern communities.

They were doing a phenomenal job until this government decided to come in and to hand over that dark

fibre and the infrastructure. We're not just talking about unused fibre; we're also talking about towers and other infrastructure that the minister has failed to identify in his summary of what's being handed over to Xplornet.

And so my question for the minister is: The value of those contracts that were in place between Manitoba Hydro Telecom and those ISPs, what was the value of those contracts? What was the total value of those contracts before Manitoba Hydro Telecom was shut down?

And I would also ask if the minister can provide some clarity. We know, of course, that an RFP did go forward. Xplornet was the winner of that RFP. The contracts that were in place between ISPs and Manitoba Hydro Telecom would have also been sold off to Xplornet as part of that deal.

We'd like some clarity on the total value of that sale to Xplornet for—what was the value of those contracts in that sale? And that would have been a separate and different aspect of the sale; not the access to the fibre, but the value of the contracts themselves that were sold to Xplornet as part of the deal.

\* (16:20)

**Mr. Friesen:** A couple of things in answer to the member's questions.

First of all, I had indicated before, you know, he might be at the wrong table in that there is some degree of specificity he's seeking; I said earlier, that he would be advised to go to the Hydro committee when they're before the Legislature and ask those questions directly of the CEO and the CFO. And I would say the same recommendation of mine would apply to him when it comes to the breakdown.

So, I read at least, I think, six subsidiaries of Hydro into the record and I indicated their revenues last year—total net revenues—at \$6 million. I can say to him that, in respect of this year, it was \$9 million. That's for all the subsidiaries.

So when you consider that the revenue at Hydro was declared at \$3.04 billion, and the net revenues of six subsidiaries were \$9 million, I mean, you're talking about a very, very small percentage of revenue, but that's from all the subsidiaries. So it is possible that the revenues that are ratioed, in terms of Hydro's total revenues, to this one subsidiary may be less than 1 per cent—could be half a percentage point.

The member was trying to say, what impact would this have had on rate determinations? The

answer would be nil, because it would never reach the test of materiality when it comes to determinations of rates.

However, on the other question, I had said earlier that the member may be sitting at the wrong table, and now I even have, actually, more information that that could be the place—the case. Because what that press release does make clear, that I referred to earlier in the afternoon—the one where, in 2021, when the government announced the award of this tender to Xplornet Communications, is that it was actually a procurement exercise, and that this initiative has been handled by the department which is entitled Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services.

So when it comes to specific details about the state of the contract, of course, the first thing I would say to the member is, some of that will not be disclosable simply because that member knows that there will be contracts signed and there will be non-disclosure conditions within those contracts. And those are due to competitiveness and that no company can have the exact details of their bid revealed to the company or it may compromise their—the contract itself. It could significantly contract.

I've learned more and more in my time about procurement law. I am no expert, but having been the chair of the Treasury Board and been the minister of Finance before this return to my role, certainly, I've come to understand more about the conditions and the environment in which that solicitation for work must occur: what are the rules that guide those interactions; what can you disclose to competitors; what can you not disclose to competitors; what are the timelines you must respect; and what are the intervals within those things—how much time is adequate time to allow for a solicitation of bids?

And so, it's a complex area, and that is why we have a department with that expertise. So when it comes to these particular questions about, you know, the assignment of customers or what assets were included—answer being none, of course; Hydro continues to own its assets. There's no devolution of assets of Hydro—but those questions are better asked of government—sorry, of the Department of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services.

But there's good news because we are in that part of our legislative year whereby three sections of the Committee of Supply sit concurrently. So, we're not counting down one hour at a time of the 100 hours that are set aside for the consideration of departmental Estimates, but three.

And I understand that just this afternoon, probably in committee room 255—it may be the Chamber, but both are a short walk—that the government—or, sorry, that the Department of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services is sitting this afternoon. The deputy minister responsible for procurement, the minister responsible for procurement and these questions could be easily asked of that table.

If he would want to, he could send one of his colleagues out, write those questions on a page and see if they would like to use their time to ask those questions of the minister who holds the contracts and undertook to structure these arrangements.

**Mr. Sala:** I'd like to follow up.

I have a copy of an email here from the deputy minister for Crown Services which was sent to the CEO of Hydro in—January 21st, 2021.

And the email—there's a section from it I'll read: Xplornet has proposed an additional \$50 million for Manitoba Hydro Telecom's book of business, but this is separate and apart from the fibre assets and are on top of the fibre asset access. We actually see this as a bonus, as the book of business was going to whoever won the zones anyway in exchange for the fibre and cellular investments.

So, I'd like to again ask the minister if he can comment on the fact that his government is encouraging the private sale—the privatization of what here is estimated as about \$50 million worth of contracts. Can he provide comment on what I just read?

**Mr. Chairperson:** I would ask the member for St. James (Mr. Sala)—in your last remarks, you were reading—just asking if you were reading from a private correspondence, and if so, you have to table that.

**Mr. Sala:** I'm happy to copy and table the email.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank you.

**Mr. Friesen:** My advice to the member is going to be similar to the advice I provided him just earlier, but I would make a couple of clarifications.

Of course, you know, we've clearly said this afternoon and, you know, and clarified the record that government—I've read into the record the core mission and mandate of Manitoba Hydro from its annual report.

Clearly, this is outside any connection of fibre optics in term of dark fibre, unutilized fibre within that fibre trunk—I believe that's the term that they use, that fibre trunk line. That's clearly outside of the mandate of Hydro, the core mandate of Hydro. So, the decision

for government to undertake to facilitate an RFP, a request for proposals—first a request for qualifications, then a request for proposals—is completely above board. It's legitimate.

\* (16:30)

It's actually preferable because Manitoba Hydro faces challenges of its own. And I would love to talk about the challenges of Manitoba Hydro in respect of variance on revenue forecasting the ongoing threat of weather conditions that has a plus-minus \$200-million, \$300-million variation in how it performs in year. We've seen the evidence of that the last couple of fiscal years.

Hydro has challenges in respect of inflation and holding a lot of debt, debt that has tripled under the previous government, and of course that debt has to be serviced. Debt comes with a debt-service cost; debt-service cost goes up as interest rates rise, as they have with the Bank of Canada seeking and then acting to raise the rates for lending five times since January.

Hydro has other challenges in respect of the renegotiation of American contracts, the state of its—the good state of repair of assets, challenges in respect of transitioning to the future and being able to pivot to seize the opportunity of green energy and other challenges, as well.

But, clearly, you know, Hydro should be focused on addressing those challenges. That is where the senior management team is focused. That's where the board of directors is focused. So it's appropriate and it's preferable that this work be undertaken not within Hydro.

It reminds me of when I was elected to the Legislature in 2011. I know the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) was, as well, at the same time. I can neither reflect on his presence or absence in these committee proceedings. But at the time, I remember shortly thereafter—it might have been 2014—and the minister responsible for—oh, let me get this right—Infrastructure? The minister responsible for the Crown corporation—it might have been Liquor & Lotteries—brought a bill that sought to do infrastructure, to pave roads within a Crown corporation's budget.

We were bewildered by the bill. It saw—it sought an allocation from the Crown corporation to go directly to pay the—oh, I know what it was: it was MPI. Because they said, well, you know, there's probably a benefit to MPI paving potholes because that way the claims wouldn't be so big.

And it was clear interference in the internal workings of the Crown corporation, interference by the previous NDP government going right around their board of directors, going right around their CEO, interfering in the core mandate of MPI, saying you are now going to pave potholes.

And, of course, the bill never really saw the light of day. I think it got first reading. There was incredibly poor reception to the bill, and the minister finally backed off and said it's probably not appropriate for the NDP to be paving potholes out of the MPI budget. And I'd love to hear the member's comments on that in the past. So, talk about interference with Crown corporations.

However, I would say again to the member, part of what he's asking simply cannot be disclosed because of contract law and ongoing negotiations. But the majority of the questions that he is asking that are appropriate should be directed to the Minister responsible for Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services, which is currently sitting in the Committee of Supply, probably about 80 metres from this committee table, right in the Manitoba Legislature.

Those proceedings are happening concurrent with these proceedings, and I would encourage him, in respect of the contract itself, to pose those questions to that minister whose deputy minister responsible for procurement, who helped to oversee and to develop this contract, is sitting and answering questions at this very time.

**Mr. Sala:** Just want to again reiterate, put on the record here that we've got email from government clarifying that, in fact, this government is selling off \$50 million—approximately \$50 million worth of contracts that were held between Manitoba Hydro Telecom and private businesses, and are handing over those profitable contracts to another—to a private business: in this case, a internationally owned, hedge fund-owned infrastructure company in the name of Xplornet.

You know, the minister has repeatedly talked about how Manitoba Hydro Telecom's work was not within Hydro's core mandate. I would remind the minister that Manitoba Hydro Telecom has been doing this work for many years underneath Manitoba Hydro, has been doing that very successfully. There is a team of individuals that have been working at Manitoba Hydro Telecom that have been doing spectacular work for many, many years, partnering with small businesses in Manitoba, expanding access

to broadband across this province and have been doing a really great job of that.

Now, what happened was, when his government decided to wind them down, they've essentially created a multi-prong disaster, and I'm happy to just sort of spell out for the minister some of the ways that his government's decision has impacted Manitobans here.

First, their government's decision to hand over the fibre to Xplornet has resulted in a near-freezing up of broadband expansion in significant portions of the province. The reason for that is because, when they issued the RFP, Manitoba Hydro Telecom's work with ISPs was frozen for approximately a year. And once Xplornet was awarded the contract, those—they continued to be frozen and are continuing to delay working with ISPs.

So we're now about a year and a couple of months in to work being frozen in a huge portion of the province, and now we're staring down the barrel of potentially another year of customers across rural and northern regions of Manitoba waiting to get access to broadband because of this government's decision at a time when broadband has never been more important, Mr. Chair.

Second big impact I want to clarify and just help the minister understand, because it doesn't seem he's had enough conversations with folks in this sector, is that the ISP businesses that worked with Manitoba Hydro Telecom—there's approximately 40 of them that are being hugely negatively impacted.

And I encourage him to go back and read a recent Martin Cash article where he interviews a number of people from those businesses. He doesn't have to take my word for it. He can go back and listen to those small businesses and learn about the impacts of his government's decision on their business. And many of those businesses are being threatened. Those are good businesses; those are good Manitoban jobs, and they're being wiped out because of his government's decision-making.

And the last piece that is really concerning is, again, the impact on Hydro rates that this decision will make by giving away profitable contracts to Xplornet.

So, I—again, I understand, he doesn't want to clear—clarify, and he's—he wants me to go speak to someone in a different room, even though he is the minister responsible for Hydro and should be very aware of what's happening under Manitoba Hydro, but

I will not press the question of those contracts any further.

I would like just to ask him generally, though: why does he believe that Manitoba Hydro Telecom and the employees there were not doing a good job of expanding broadband in Manitoba? Why does he believe that an internationally owned hedge-fund company—hedge fund-owned company—like Xplornet would do a better job of expanding access to broadband when Manitoba Hydro Telecom has been doing this work for years and sending profits to Manitoba Hydro ratepayers?

\* (16:40)

**Mr. Friesen:** I was referring earlier to the time in which Manitoba Hydro will be back in front of a standing committee in the Legislature.

But I'm actually—I have in front of me right now the standing committee notes from the previous appearance of Manitoba Hydro CEO Jay Grewal and—along with her senior officials. That meeting took place at January 14th, 2022.

And I'm going to quote from the CEO: Was a cost—I'm just going to make sure I'm in the right place, yes—was a cost analysis done prior to the RFQ and RFP—there were—speaking about this initiative to light the dark fibre for the purpose of connecting 125,000 Manitoba households who didn't have—who were underserved or unserved by high-speed Internet. Was the cost analysis done prior to the RFQ and RFP that was put out, as recently announced, about the difference in keeping it in-house or outsourcing the delivery of broadband?

So, the member should get ready because here's the direct answer to his question. Should we do it in-house or should we outsource the delivery of the broadband? This is not the minister speaking now. This is the CEO for Manitoba Hydro.

And here's the answer: This announcement will see improved broadband service and connectivity offered to many northern rural and Indigenous communities in Manitoba, dot, dot, dot, very positive news—exclamation point.

We also performed, as part of our review of the entire Manitoba Hydro business, a review of Manitoba Hydro International, of which MHT is a part. Our analysis showed that the course of action we took to refocus—to return our focus to our core business of energy provision was in the best interests of our customers and all Manitobans. End quote.

The CEO of Hydro is on the record as saying (1) they did a review of MHI, Manitoba Hydro International; (2) that Manitoba Hydro Telecom is a part of MHI. And the result of that analysis and investigation under—led by the board of directors was a report that indicated that it would be best to actually do this work by outsourcing the delivery of broadband rather than keeping it in-house.

I, secondly, want to refer the member to the directive to Hydro from the government of Manitoba, issued in the summer, I believe, of 2021. I can check whether it was exactly the summer—it was November of 2021. And I'm reading there the directive provides instruction to Manitoba Hydro to make available surplus capacity of its owned fibre optic cable network—so, the first deal is surplus capacity—and certain other assets in Manitoba to Xplornet Communications, who won the contract, at no incremental cost or impact to Manitoba Hydro ratepayers or existing Manitoba Hydro broadband customers. At no incremental costs or impact. There is no negative impact on the ratepayer. Hydro is kept whole in this regard.

The third question he asks about, did I think that they were doing a bad job, is a highly ideological question, very leading, designed to elicit some kind of a statement that would say, we think that, you know, Hydro is bad but the private sector is good, and that's nonsense. The fact of the matter is that that member knows that under his government, the debt of Hydro was tripled within the last seven years. That debt now stands at \$24 billion. This is a major build-out of capital.

To energize high-speed Internet for 125,000 households, Hydro does not have the access to markets. It doesn't have the capital capability. Why? Because of bipole and Keeyask being billions of dollars overspent.

So, I think that member for making our point that capital-sunk costs cannot be revisited, that those opportunities have passed, and now it's appropriate to defer that investment and that cost and that risk and that capital generated in private markets to a group who has that expertise to go get that job done which is outside of the core mandate of Hydro.

**Mr. Sala:** I'd like to ask the minister if he can confirm whether or not he signed off on the \$50 million—on the sale of the \$50-million book of business for Manitoba Hydro Telecom. Was there—at any point, was he, as minister, required to sign off in support of, first of all,

that valuation, that \$50-million valuation, and secondly, did he sign off on that valuation and give Hydro the go-ahead to sell off those contracts privately?

**Mr. Friesen:** I know that my special assistant, Mr. Connor Verry, is carefully monitoring the time that is available to us, but I'm sure he's about to advise me that we only have 13 minutes remaining in these afternoon proceedings, and so I have only 13 minutes to offer that member to extricate himself from these—this committee hearing, give the helm to one of his colleagues at the table or grant time to the Liberal party and go see the minister responsible for this contract.

The minister responsible for Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services, who holds the contract with Xplornet, who developed the process that led to the RFQ and the RFP and the granting of that contract and the public disclosure of that contract—the member should avail himself of the opportunity to go see the experts on this subject. That—that's exactly where he can seek those answers.

Short answer to the member's question, though, is no.

**Mr. Sala:** At any time, did members of the Department of Crown Services propose a price for Xplornet to be able to access the fibre? And so, I'm talking about specifically the infrastructure; contracts are put aside now. Was the department involved in any way in proposing a price for which Xplornet would be required to pay in order to access the fibre assets?

\* (16:50)

**Mr. Friesen:** I know that we probably only have nine minutes remaining in these proceedings, and so I want to—I do want to encourage the member, like, there is a department that holds the contract, holds the pen on this, and that government department is—it's the longest name in all of government departments. I think it's even longer than community wellness and—Mental Health and Community Wellness, although that's a long title, too.

But the member responsible—the minister responsible for Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services is in the Committee of Supply this very afternoon, probably in committee room 254—I think we're in 255 here, yes. And so he's best able, with his deputy minister, to answer questions specific to the contract.

However, I just would want to make clear again, for these proceedings, a couple of key points for the member so he can understand what this is and what this isn't.

Internet fibre optics are not a core piece of Manitoba Hydro's mandate. I read that mandate into the record this afternoon. Electric generation, electric transmission, service of customers, sale of additional surplus power, low rates, green energy. That's the story of Hydro.

The member says, well, why don't you just let Hydro do this work? Easy—NDP. The NDP burned through billions and billions of dollars of cost overruns which they deliberately hid from Manitobans. But that money, when expended, is spent. It can't be unspent. Those assets are fixed. Those costs are incurred. Those debt schedules take place. Those amortization schedules, as prescribed by public sector accounting standards, are in place. Debts have to be repaid.

And so this becomes an opportunity of cost avoidance for the government of Manitoba, who is able to then contract with a third party that says we will take on the risk. We have this expertise. This is our business area of expertise. We will cobble capital together. We will come up with a plan. We will get workforce. We will handle logistics. And we will work in conjunction with Hydro to be able to do the buildout.

What does that investment look like by Xplornet? I believe it was publicly announced as a \$500-million investment to connect 125,000 communities in Manitoba—in the North and in rural communities.

Now, one thing's for certain: This member wouldn't have done it. The member for St. James (Mr. Sala)—he's made it clear on the record he wouldn't have done it. He is so bound by his ideological blinders that he would say it is better for Manitoba communities to not be connected.

He also said earlier, why would Manitoba Hydro Telecom not do it themselves? I heard no plan in the last 15 years from Manitoba Hydro Telecom to take the bull by the horns, to light dark fibre in this kind of way and to invest \$500 million. I don't think they could have gotten that past the board of directors. Because the board of Hydro would have asked one question: Well, what's your core mandate? Is this your core mandate?

And so, you know, I know that Manitoba Hydro Telecom was doing something, and now that something has become very, very—much more significant.

So a few fundamental points: Hydro owns and maintains telecommunications facilities throughout the province; and, for the purpose of allowing it to monitor and maintain and operate its bulk electric systems, generating and transmitting and distributing energy, we issued a directive to Hydro to say, there's unutilized fibre, we should use it, but a third party can do that better.

Hydro maintains ownership of its fibre-optic network. It's not privatization of Hydro. It's another step in the journey of focusing on the core business of Hydro, and that was something that the CEO for Hydro said at the committee in January of 2022.

The Province has lifted the stop-sell and Manitoba Hydro's in communication with customers or in discussions with MHT about improved network services. Xplornet is required to build a new infrastructure, connect the customers. It'll take some years and that contract is still under way, and costs associated with innovating future expansion services will be borne by Xplornet.

And, I repeat, there is no increased cost or negative impacts to Hydro or Hydro customers caused by the change.

**Mr. Sala:** Sure. Not surprised to hear the minister make a, you know, a solid argument in favour of privatization there.

Not sure why he's thinking that he should stop with Hydro. Why not go elsewhere? I mean, we know that his government is doing that. They're off-loading risk and allowing private interests to bring their capital to bear in health care and other areas of government. So, again, not a surprise to hear him make an argument in favour of that.

I would like to ask the minister: One thing that we understand that Xplornet was going to be required to provide as part of the arrangement was expansions, not only in broadband service, but also in cellular service. And I'd like to ask the minister about whether or not Xplornet is still expected to make expansions in access to cellular service as part of the work that they're doing? And I would also like to draw to the attention of the minister that Xplornet's cellular division was sold off a year and a half ago.

So, hoping for some clarity as to whether or not we are still expecting them to expand access to cellular service as part of the deal.

**Mr. Friesen:** Knowing that time is short this afternoon, I'll delve straight into an answer and indicate to

the member that specific questions pertaining to the contract in respect of both fibre optics and the cellular components should be posed to the Minister responsible for Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services.

However, to his question from the previous exchange and volley, about why couldn't Manitoba Hydro just do it, I remind the member that the annual carrying costs of debt for Manitoba Hydro are reported in these financial reports at \$1.1 billion. That amount of carrying cost is multiples of what it was just a short 10 years ago.

Manitoba Hydro does not have the capacity to do what he's asking them to do, simply because they're constrained by debt, a debt which Manitoba Hydro, its board and its CEO are working to be able to stabilize. Bill 36 does the same, but I know we are not supposed to refer to that bill in these proceedings, so I will keep my reference to that bill very, very short.

However, it is no small thing to think about the impact of the completion of Keeyask generating station, of Bipole III transmission line, and the \$3.7 billion of cost overruns. I would welcome an opportunity in these proceedings to talk to that member about the cost per kilowatt hour when it comes to these assets. It would be really good for him to understand in these current—in this current financial environment, what you get for your dollar per kilowatt hour for a new build. And it is really shocking to know the amount of debt that comes online.

And, of course, that debt means it's a challenge for Hydro to keep those rates low. We all know that the former NDP government threatened those low rates at Hydro—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order.

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

## CHAMBER

### ADVANCED EDUCATION, SKILLS AND IMMIGRATION

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield):** 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 Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration. At this time we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

And, Minister, I know you're virtual. Would you like to introduce your staff? You're not required or obligated to, but you have that opportunity if you would like to.

**Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration):** I will introduce my staff. Along with me today is my deputy minister, Eric Charron; my assistant deputy minister for Finance and Corporate Services, Melissa Ballantyne; and my assistant deputy minister for Immigration, Karmel Chartrand.

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

As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** For adult education, enrolment has declined. From 2003-04 to 2019-20, decline in enrolment was 26 per cent in adult learning centres. In adult literacy programs, there was a decline from the 2009-10 year to the 2019-20 year by 40 per cent. That's a 40 per cent drop in enrolment in a decade in adult literacy programs.

Experts say that this decrease is not due to a lack of demand but due to a lack of funding and promoting these programs. Investing in adult education and adult literacy has been proven to reduce poverty. Adults with high school diplomas have greater job opportunities than those who are not able to work those types of jobs.

Will the minister explain why there has been this decline in enrolment, and will he address why these programs—has been underfunded both due to inflation, underfunded due to demand as well and not meeting the needs of those people who would be interested in taking adult education or adult literacy programs?

**Mr. Reyes:** Before I respond to the critic question, I just want to hope that everyone had a great Thanksgiving long weekend with their loved ones, everyone in the House, colleagues and staff.

I just want to also say that when it comes to adult learning and literacy, it is undertaking a comprehensive review of adult education in Manitoba as 2023 will mark 20 years since the establishment of The Adult Learning Centres Act. The department wants to ensure that Manitobans have access to appropriate programming that will allow them to re-skill or upskill, to find new jobs, keep the ones they have or enter into post-secondary education. Adult education ensures Manitobans have the right skills, talent and

knowledge at the right time and supports economic resilience and growth to rebound from the effects of the pandemic.

Our government is delivering on the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy and our commitment to adult learning and literacy in the province. Our over 6,800 learners—adult learners—across 64 'adurt'—adult learning centres benefited from our \$20.3 million in provincial funding to strengthen adult learning and literacy as we emerge from the pandemic and support economic resilience and growth.

So I want to personally thank the teachers and staff as they have begun another school year focusing on adult learner success in and out of the classroom.

**Mr. Moses:** The minister mentioned that there's a review of funding and programming for adult education and literacy programs. Can the minister tell us when that review will be complete and when we can expect to see that report?

\* (15:10)

*Mr. Josh Guenter, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Mr. Reyes:** My department holds quarterly stakeholder meetings with adult learning and literacy leaders to focus on items such as programming, increased partnerships and collaboration, modernizing efforts and student outcomes and success.

I have personally had meetings with one particular stakeholder, Dr. Jim Silver. We had a very good discussion with regards to adult learning and literacy.

We have a committee led by the director of Adult Learning and Literacy branch, and comprised of regional representatives from the adult learning centres and adult literacy programs that has been established.

The committee focuses on reduction of red tape and unnecessary burden, increased transparency engaging with clients and partners and transformation of the way we work.

The committee enabled the department to convert five paper processes into online reporting tools. Additional projects are underway.

**Mr. Moses:** Thank the minister for the question.

I'd like to ask about Research Manitoba. Research Manitoba does important work and helps to drive innovation and develop talent right here in Manitoba.

Unfortunately, though, we've seen Public Accounts show that funding to Research Manitoba has declined in the past years, from \$17 million down

to \$15 million down to \$12 million. These cuts have continued even after a change in leadership with the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson).

And I think it's important to recognize that Research Manitoba goes to spur our economy in Manitoba. There's a huge competitiveness impact when it comes to funding Research Manitoba, and research in general in the province. It goes not only to bring in federal funding dollars for research; it's meant that our opportunity—that there is further opportunity for economic growth, and to support made-in-Manitoba research, made in—explore and expand the knowledge base right here in our own province by investing in research and innovation.

Research Manitoba obviously plays a key role of that. And even more so now than ever coming out of a pandemic, it's important for us to focus on competitiveness with other provinces and internationally and spur our economic activity and economic development through research and even investment in research.

So my question is, for the minister, can he clearly explain why there has been this trend to cut and decrease the funding to Research Manitoba, what he says about research in general and its needed growth in our province and if he plan to reverse course and increase funding for Research Manitoba?

**Mr. Reyes:** I don't know if my critic is aware, Research Manitoba actually falls more in alignment with Economic Development, Investment and Trade.

However, what I could share with the member is our government is delivering on the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy and our commitment to adult learning and literacy in the province.

The strategy sets out the vision and actions needed to achieve success focused on four high-level objectives, and I think I've mentioned this to him before at a committee when we had the committee the first time in my role as Minister Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration.

We anticipate skills needed for the future. We need to focus on emerging trends in industry, innovation and 'technological'—technological advancements in the workplace.

We also need to incorporate improved data and labour market information into planning our post-secondary training and immigration systems. We have to align education and training to labour market needs and help all students succeed now and in the future.

We need to cultivate greater partnerships between employers and training and post-secondary systems so that students gain the skills and competencies needed for success; of course, adult learning and literacy centres, included.

We have to foster entrepreneurial and innovative skills, building our innovation start-up and scale up ecosystem through our greater—through greater connections between students, researchers, academics and industry—will enable greater commercialization and positive outcomes for all.

We must grow, attract and retain talents. We both agree on this. Manitoba has labour and skill shortages. We also have people who need good jobs. We can succeed by bringing our systems together. We have an opportunity to draw our strengths, such as our Indigenous populations, to promote positive outcomes for our communities and our economy.

We also have to be more vocal about the great things that Manitoba has to offer, to encourage those who have left our province to return home and to attract people to our province; people with talent, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Moses:** As of July 2021, the government announced \$23,000 were available to support internationally educated nurses and that more than 1,200 nurses had applied for the program to become approved in Manitoba—to work in Manitoba.

So, I'd like to know how many—specifically around internationally educated nurses—how many people were accepted to the program and did this funding actually flow to them. And, furthermore, in terms of internationally educated professionals, what steps is the minister taking to ensure that internationally educated professionals have greater access to work in Manitoba?

**Mr. Reyes:** I don't know if the member is aware that the portal, with respect to international educated nurses actually falls under, again, Economic Development, Investment and Trade. However, what I can tell him is that nurses in Manitoba are a valued member of the health-care system, as we both know, and this was especially noted during the pandemic.

So, as we emerge from the pandemic, our government is working towards increasing the nursing supply to 400 seats over the next few years. During 2022-2023, our government has committed just \$12 million for 289 nursing seats at six post-secondary institutions.

The Manitoba government has committed to meeting Manitoba's obligations under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement and the New West Partnership and has taken action to address the concerns identified by the nurses.

We want to ensure qualified health-care professionals are working as quickly as possible to support our health-care system and address our labour shortage.

On the subject of internationally educated professionals, I'm glad the member brought that up. I've had numerous meetings with our federal Minister of Immigration, the Honourable Sean Fraser. We talked about, you know, the alignment of foreign credentials with respect to internationally educated professionals who come from different parts of the world. And, you know, Manitoba wants to be a welcome place.

Part of our mandate with regards to the Immigration Advisory Council is to address, you know, that transition when it comes to the alignment of credentials from those countries and ensuring, obviously here in Manitoba, that they can practice in a professional and safe manner.

I've had many of those discussions before with internationally educated professionals. It's very frustrating. I think we both know—we've talked to many people—is that you have an internationally educated professional from these countries that come here, only to know that they can't practice of what they were trained and educated on. But that's something our government is working on, communicating with the regulators because we want to ensure that we service Manitobans as professional and safe as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

\* (15:20)

**Mr. Moses:** I'd just like to find out from the minister, you know, if he has specific things that he can point to that would show action is being taken to ensure that internationally educated professionals are going to be—have barriers removed, artificial barriers, removed in Manitoba so that they are—have better access to work in Manitoba since we know that there is a need for labour in our province.

Just to add a second part onto that question, Minister, recently there was an announcement from the federal government about hours worked, allowable hours worked, by international students, increased to 40 hours per week for international stu-

dents. That was a change made by the federal government; it was made on a temporary basis. Just want to know whether the minister supports that change and whether the minister would support that change being made permanent for international students.

**Mr. Reyes:** Yes, you know, the member asked me a question about action with regards to internationally educated professionals.

What I could tell him is that our fair registrations practice office ensures registrant increase—registration practices are fair, clear and well-defined. If he takes a look at our government website, if you're an immigrant, an internationally educated professional wanting to practice your profession in Manitoba, the fair registrations practice offices has links to each regulator's registration information to help get you started.

I want to commend the fair registrations office for putting that on there, because it was my plan of action to ensure that our government is informed of—to the newcomers and future Manitobans that come to our province. Because the last thing we want is for internationally educated professionals to have anxiety or stress without knowing what they're expecting when they come to our province. You want to be that welcoming province. You want to be that friendly Manitoba.

So I ensured that those links, that information on our government website, if he wishes to take a look and maybe pass on to his network, because we're all about advertising here; I mean, you said you look—ways to promote government programs and services, that all those links to each regulator's registration information is actually on the government website. With regards to the decision that the federal government made with respect to the work hours limits for international students, one thing I can tell you, as the provincial minister in charge of Immigration, along with my colleagues from other provinces, you know, we want to continue work with our federal minister, collaborating with the other provinces to ensure that we address the labour shortage, and he has addressed it temporarily, and we will continue to analyze on how this goes.

I can tell you initially that I have been in contact with many small business owners when the announcement was made, and even some international students, and they were very happy that, you know, that they can work a couple extra hours.

The Minister of Immigration—federal one—and myself, we both agree that, you know what, the priority is for students to study. But if they can get more hours to supplement their income, to help small businesses, to help labour shortage, then, you know what, it's a win for all parties.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Moses:** No more questions.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Are there any further questions?

Seeing no further questions, we will now turn to the resolutions, beginning with the second resolution, as we have deferred consideration of the first resolution containing the minister's salary.

Resolution 44.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$721,757,000 for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, Advanced Education, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 44.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$65,159,000 for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, Student Access and Success, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 44.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,060,000 for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, Immigration Pathways, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 44.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$74,000,000 for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, Loans and Guarantees Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 44.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,000,000 for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 44.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 44.1.

The floor is open for questions.

**Mr. Moses:** I move that, second—that the line item 44.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration's 'salaby'—salary be reduced to \$21,000.

**An Honourable Member:** I'll second that.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, it's moved by the honourable member for St. Vital, seconded by the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare), that line item 44.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration's salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Shall the—okay. The motion is in order, and it is debatable.

\* (15:30)

Is there any debate? Is the committee ready for the question?

**An Honourable Member:** Question.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

**Some Honourable Members:** Agreed.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Voice Vote**

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** All those in favour, say yea.

**Some Honourable Members:** Yea.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** All those opposed, say nay.

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** The Nays have it. In my opinion, the Nays have it. The motion is defeated on division.

\* \* \*

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** This completes the Estimates—okay. This brings us to our last resolution.

Resolution 44.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,234,000 for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

***Resolution agreed to.***

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply will be for the Department of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services.

Shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and critics the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next department? *[Agreed]*

Okay. We are now in recess.

*The committee recessed at 3:31 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 3:35 p.m.*

**LABOUR, CONSUMER PROTECTION  
AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Labour, Consumer Protection, and Government Services.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**An Honourable Member:** Yes.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay. Go ahead, Minister.

**Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services):** It is my pleasure to be here today to discuss Budget 2022 as it pertains to the Department of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services.

The department's mandate is to provide labour services and consumer protection in addition to functioning as the internal service delivery organization for government.

A key strategic priority for the department is the modernization of government services such as procurement, information technology, asset management and capital management of vertical and underground infrastructure. In addition, through the new Labour and Consumer Protection portfolios, the department

has strategic priorities in areas such as employment standards, workplace safety and health and consumer protection, providing programs and services directly to Manitobans.

Through the central capital program areas, the department executes duties and functions related to capital management and delivery. The department's goal is to efficiently expend capital allocations on approved capital projects, consistently apply risk management to capital funding and projects and improve asset management for all government assets.

Digital and Technology Solutions is the central agency with overall responsibility for information technology and business transformation strategy, policy and service delivery for the Government of Manitoba. Digital and Technology Solutions provides strategic leadership to continuously improve the Manitoba government's information and communications technology environment through planning and implementing solutions to meet future and current ICT needs.

The Manitoba Centre for Cyber Security leads work in 'securing' Manitoba's data and systems while aligning IT security policies and practices with government's priorities and risk tolerances. The procurement and supply chain sets the strategic direction, policies and processes for procurement and supply-chain-related functions across government. The department also represents the Province in negotiations and participates in meetings related to digital service delivery and data analytics.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

The Labour portfolio is responsible for the effective delivery of programs and services pertaining to workplace safety and health, employment standards and public safety.

Consumer protection supports and protects the interests of Manitoba consumers, citizens, business people, landlords and tenants. As part of its mandate, the department will continue its effort to save taxpayers' dollars and working with stakeholders to expand Manitoba's procurement strategy across the public sector.

The central capital program areas seek to ensure predictable delivery of government's commitment to annual strategic infrastructure investments and expediting capital planning and project delivery through innovative project delivery approaches including design-build and P3s.

The department is also working with federal and municipal partners to deliver funding for worthy infrastructure projects within the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program and future bi- or trilateral programs. The provision of central co-ordination, negotiation and delivery of strategic capital infrastructure and federal-provincial infrastructure programs and projects are key strategic priorities of the department.

\* (15:40)

The department provides strategic leadership to continuously 'improve'—improve the Manitoba government's information and communication technology environment through planning and implementing solutions to meet current and future ICT needs.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable member for—pardon me, I need to back up just a moment there. I do want to ask the critic, though, if he has an opening statement.

**MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** My opening comments will be quite brief.

First, glad to see that we actually have a Minister of Labour again; it's been sorely lacking with this government, although they certainly didn't forgo the opportunity to take every kick they could at labour from 2016 on to the present. Whether it was the initial bill 7 that made organizing more difficult; whether it was the bill 28 that froze workers' wages, and on and on, that list of egregious things that the government has done not for labour but to labour, to working people in this province is quite an extensive list that I won't go through in the interests of perhaps fostering a new way of working with the minister. I won't point out all the past sins before he took over the portfolio.

So with those few words I look forward to having a productive question-and-answer session with the minister and hopefully questions and answers can lead to a better way of the Department of Labour working than what it's been so far.

So with those few words, thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 8.1(a) contained in resolution 8.1.

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber. And I would ask the minister and critic to please introduce their staff in attendance.

**Mr. Helwer:** I have with me Deputy Minister Scott Sinclair and Jean-Paul Fradette.

**Mr. Chairperson:** In accordance with subrule 78(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put on the resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, can the Minister of Labour tell this committee whether he has received a mandate letter from the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) regarding this new ministry, and if so, will he table it?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, for the new department, we have not received a mandate letter.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, that seems to be a bit of problem. We have a department that hasn't existed since 2016, a minister who's never held a portfolio before, so how does the minister go about doing what's expected of him if there's no mandate to know what is expected of him?

Is it—changes all the time, or why is this ministry one of the ones that doesn't have a mandate letter?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, under the leadership of the current Premier, it has been made clear to ministers, myself included, that we are to engage with the department and stakeholders and find the best path forward for Manitobans.

There is regular consultation, of course, with Cabinet and with various stakeholders. Labour Management Review Committee has been one of the groups that we have asked for advice, and we've met with various labour groups and First Nations and a variety of other stakeholders.

**MLA Lindsey:** So perhaps, maybe, if you don't have a mandate letter—or if the minister doesn't have a mandate letter, he could expand on a little more of what direction the Premier gave him when he took on this ministry. Or did she just pass it on to you and say figure it out for yourself? There, I would assume, be more communication than that on what the expected goals of government were before you took on the position.

So could you tell us how you figure out what you're doing here?

**Mr. Chairperson:** I just remind all members to direct their comments through the Chair.

The honourable minister has the floor.

**Mr. Helwer:** So, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on conversations with the Premier.

We do regularly meet with Cabinet and report to Cabinet about what we are doing in the department and the ministry, and it has been clear from the Premier's statements—I'm sure that the member will have followed them—that it is an open and accountable government, that we are consulting and listening to Manitobans, and that is the direction we have taken. Very many consultations with public and private sectors, labour, management, private sector, public sector and a wide variety of other stakeholders.

**MLA Lindsey:** Does the minister plan on attending Labour Day events as part of his mandate for events to commemorate the day of mourning for workers who've lost their lives on the job?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, I was invited to the last Labour Day, which was the first Labour Day we've been able to have since the pandemic began. And I thank the individuals who invited me.

I was very saddened, in one way, to say that I would not be able to attend, as I was attending the wedding of one of our daughters out of province. So, they seemed to understand that that was an important event for our family, and certainly, as I have time and make time, we can anticipate next Labour Day. I don't anticipate that I've got another daughter getting married on that day, or a son, but that was the dilemma that I was placed in this year.

\* (15:50)

**MLA Lindsey:** And certainly appreciate the fact that sometimes family duties do take precedence over political duties. Might have a hard time convincing my wife of that but she may have a different opinion of how I separate those two out.

So, would the minister, if he is still the minister on next Labour Day, be planning to get that in his calendar now so that he could participate in Labour Day next year?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, I would certainly know that it is in the calendar when Labour Day is and we'll determine what needs to happen for my attendance at

various events next year, if I am indeed minister. We'll see.

Those—I'm sure the member opposite knows that calendars do change and ministers change, so I will make all attempts to attend events on that particular day, should I still be the minister.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, the second part of my question was pertaining to the Day of Mourning, April 28th, for workers who've been killed or injured at work, and does the minister plan to participate in those day of mourning things that happen. I know that there's quite an event, takes place across the street here, and the march.

Will the minister be taking place—part in the march and all those events?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, on the last Day of Mourning, and I have attended other days of mourning, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) was in Brandon, which is where I was elected, in Brandon West, and when the Premier is in your constituency, one most consider that one needs to attend that constituency. And we had the legislative assistant, MLA Teitsma and the deputy minister attended in the Day of Mourning—sorry, the MLA for Radisson attending on my behalf in Winnipeg.

So, we will anticipate when the next Day of Mourning is and see what the schedule brings, but it is indeed an important day for us to recognize for those who have been killed in the workplace.

**MLA Lindsey:** I thank the minister for that answer.

So, you said—or the minister said that he was in Brandon with the Premier. Does Brandon have a Day of Mourning ceremony—and I'm sure they do—and did the minister and Premier attend the ceremony in Brandon?

**Mr. Helwer:** They have had Days of Mourning recognized in the past. To my knowledge, I was not invited to anything in Brandon nor aware of any events that were going in Brandon. I was aware of the event in Winnipeg. As I said that the legislative assistant, the MLA, attended, and the deputy minister.

**MLA Lindsey:** So while we're talking about the Day of Mourning and injuries at work and fatalities, there was a workplace death earlier this year; a young fellow by the name of John Lloyd Barrion, killed while working at a beer vendor in the city; quite tragic, that.

So the question is, what steps is the department taking in response to this workplace death?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, we do indeed take all workplace deaths and injuries very seriously and continue to investigate. We did investigate the particular circumstance the member opposite mentions, but it would be inappropriate for me to comment on particular cases, especially if this one continues to be under investigation.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, normally, when something like this takes place, the inspector who did the investigation may issue some workplace improvement orders on things that could be done to prevent similar accidents.

Can the minister tell us if any workplace improvement orders were issued as a result of that fatality?

**Mr. Helwer:** We would have to take that under advisement and go back to the particular circumstances of that one. We don't have information on every workplace incident and I want to make sure that we would get all the details right on what we can say about this one.

**MLA Lindsey:** Just on this same case, does the minister believe that calling an inquest when a worker dies, particularly in circumstances like this, that the circumstances could have far-reaching implications for other workplaces that are similar? Does the minister agree that calling an inquest would be the most beneficial way of ensuring that issues that may arise in this case are dressed in similar circumstances as in this case and other beer vendors. Would the inquest lead to safer workplaces, which should be the point of inquest?

**Mr. Helwer:** So we will take the advice of the department on this particular issue and, as I said, they are still investigating.

**MLA Lindsey:** Can the minister tell us how many of their inspectors have taken the 'appropriate' training to determine if a situation like this should cause charges under the Criminal Code to take place? And at the same time, if he could tell us if all RCMP in the province are trained in workplace accident investigation to determine if criminal charges should be laid as a result of what was known as the Westray bill that changed the criminal code definition so that people could be held responsible for things that weren't done properly in the workplace.

**Mr. Helwer:** So, as I'm sure the member realizes, there is always ongoing training in the civil service

and in the department for a variety of areas that public servants require training on, and we continue to analyze what training should be required and we deal with the individuals in their particular positions about what's required.

\* (16:00)

With respect to the RCMP, I think I'd have to refer the member to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen), as we don't really discuss interactions with other groups of that nature.

**MLA Lindsey:** Does the minister agree that having inquests into workplace fatalities would be beneficial to prevent fatalities or accidents in other workplaces?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, we certainly take the advice of the department on what they suggest and request, or if there were a prosecution in a particular case, we would see that we would follow the judgment in that case.

**MLA Lindsey:** Thank the minister for that, although it really wasn't the answer I'd hoped for. In my belief that any time a worker gets killed at work, there should be an inquest to determine the cause of that particular fatality because it does relate to other workplaces and could very well prevent another worker from having a similar fate.

So, the government required there to be secure entrances at Liquor Marts in order to combat crime and other offences, other crimes that were taking place.

Is there any consideration being given to secure entrances at things like beer vendors?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, again, since the investigation is ongoing, it's really too early to comment until we see the results of that investigation. And certainly, the Crown agency would probably be involved in any discussions.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, while I understand it's—two-year time limit before the government has to make decision whether to lay charges. Sometimes I don't think it's in people's best interest to wait that full two years before change starts to happen.

So if, from the investigation, they determine that there are some shortfalls, particularly at beer vendors, would it not seem to be more prudent to start taking action now, or to at least start engaging in the conversation with employers and employees as to what some of those precautions should be to provide those workers with a safe workplace?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, again, the investigation is ongoing, and we have to await the results of that investigation before we move any further. It would be inappropriate to prejudge the results of an investigation.

**MLA Lindsey:** Will the department be sharing the results of that investigation with the family?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, again, as I said, the investigation is ongoing. It would be inappropriate to determine what can and cannot be released until that investigation is concluded.

**MLA Lindsey:** Can the minister tell us how many workplace health and safety inspectors are presently employed in the province of Manitoba, and could he compare that to previous years—say, from 2016, '17, '18, '19, '20, '21, '22?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, given that he's asked for current and 2016, '17, '18, we'd have to take that under advisement and get back to the member.

**MLA Lindsey:** I appreciate that you wouldn't have that information necessarily at your finger's tip, so I appreciate that you're going to take it under advisement.

Can the minister tell us how many other beer vendors had a visit from a workplace health and safety inspector since the time of that fatality to determine what they have in place for safe work practices?

**Mr. Helwer:** So we typically disclose total investigations and visits, not individual or sector specific, but we can take this under advisement and get back to the member on how many total visits we have had, but not sector specific.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, nowhere in the department would there be a record of how many inspections were carried out at specific workplaces, particularly as a result of a fatality to determine if similar situations existed in those workplaces?

\* (16:10)

**Mr. Helwer:** So, this particular incident the member refers to is, as I said, still under investigation, and there may be a criminal prosecution, as well. We don't know that. So it is a little more complex than we might see in a normal inspection. And outside of that, we don't disclose individual inspections in sites.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, workplace health and safety budget was underspent by over \$1 million last fiscal year.

Can the minister tell us what accounts for this underspending?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, as a new department, I trust the member will understand that many staff and responsibilities were moved in from other departments, and we're looking at what is necessary to make sure we have an appropriately staffed department in order to follow all of the activities we need to undertake.

**MLA Lindsey:** Can the minister tell us what the current vacancy rate is within the Department of Labour and, if possible, break it down into more of the specific, I suppose, workplace health and safety standards in the different departments within—or sub-departments within the department?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, we don't report at that level of detail, but we can undertake to get some information to the member about particular areas he was asking about.

**MLA Lindsey:** Just in regards to Employment Standards, the department underspent its budget last year by \$628,000.

Can the minister share with the committee to what degree that underspending comes from vacancies, and what other things would account for this apparent cut in spending?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, again, starting a new department of this type, moving in staff and responsibilities from other departments and then some statutory responsibilities moving back, perhaps to Finance, have meant that there's a lot of things that are changing in terms of the numbers that are reported.

So, I trust the member will understand that with a new department, there are staff that came in and responsibilities that we're still determining or have determined where the individual belongs. Some of them did move back, indeed, to Finance, with some particular responsibilities.

**MLA Lindsey:** Does the minister agree that this kind of back-and-forth movement of people and resources makes it very hard for people to actually know whether the money is being spent appropriately? Particularly when we look at things like workplace health and safety, that we know what the spending is on it year over year, and it's like a 13 per cent cut. Is that impacting those services while you're trying to figure out what your department is supposed to be?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, certainly, I agree with the member's statement from earlier, and very honoured that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) chose to create a department with labour at the beginning of its name. And I think

that's critically important to Manitoba, and it is one of the many roles that we take on, but it was a big part of our department and, obviously, very important.

**MLA Lindsey:** And I appreciate the minister's statement, but he didn't answer the question.

Does the minister believe that underspending in this area will impact—and has impacted—the ability for the department to carry out its services that it should be?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, I wanted to ensure the member opposite that we are on target previous years for the number of inspections.

**MLA Lindsey:** And, of course, the minister will understand that the department does much more than just inspections. There's training courses and different things that they do, want to be proactive in reviewing regulations, one thing like that.

So, again, we see that the cut in spending, and not just in the workplace health and safety, but we see it again, what is it, a 20 per cent cut in spending in the Employment Standards.

\* (16:20)

What effect does that have on the department's ability to do the job that they're supposed to be doing? Can the minister assure us that there's been absolutely no reduction in what should be expected and what can be expected from those departments delivering on the programs that they're supposed to deliver on?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, obviously, the member opposite knows that the last couple of years have been challenging in the whole world environment, and creating a new department in that environment was a challenge, as well. We have been working with our staff and other entities to find the best way of delivering programs and services, and one of them is a partnership with the Workers Compensation Board.

**MLA Lindsey:** The minister talks about a partnership with the Workers Compensation Board, but this minister is not responsible for the Workers Compensation Board, is that correct?

**Mr. Helwer:** Actually, that's not correct. I am statutorily responsible for the Workers Compensation Board.

**MLA Lindsey:** I appreciate that.

Let's talk about September 30th. The minister's had time for consultation and certainly had time to reflect on the truth and reconciliation day—

Orange Shirt Day, as it's commonly called. Had the opportunity to pass the private member's bill—the member from Keewatinook had a member's bill forward. The minister had lots of time to introduce his own piece of legislation that mandated that as a statutory holiday.

Can the minister tell us just who exactly he has consulted with in this and who remains to be consulted with that seems to be slowing the process down?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, we have some that have—obviously have occurred since October—or September 30th this year, but some occurred prior to that, and then some that are yet to occur.

So we have consulted with the Manitoba Métis Federation, Southern Chiefs' Organization, MKO, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, of Manitoba Treaty Commissioner, Manitoba Inuit Association, residential school survivors, and the Labour Management Review Committee consulted widely with labour and business and other stakeholders.

**MLA Lindsey:** So then, I guess the question is, who all does the minister believe he has yet to consult with in order to come to a final decision on whether the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation should be recognized as a statutory holiday in the province of Manitoba?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, these are very emotional discussions that we have had with many groups, and often more than one meeting—sometimes pause during the meetings as we all need to collect ourselves, and sometimes have a further meeting.

So it's a very sensitive consultation process that we're going through and we need to make sure that we fully understand all of the circumstances that the various groups bring to our attention. And sometimes we have agreed for them to reflect on the discussion and come back with further discussions.

\* (16:30)

So, as I said, it's a very sensitive and emotional process that we have been going through. And we don't—while we don't wish to bring forward the very painful memories they have been shared with us and will continue to be, I assume, if we—when we continue these meetings. But they have, indeed, been very emotional and sometimes need to take a bit of a break to come back at another time to discuss further.

**MLA Lindsey:** Certainly appreciate that it certainly is a very emotional issue that does require the right

tone to have the discussions to ensure that you're hearing what's being said.

Can the minister give us any kind of feedback that he's received on the day so far. Has the tone been positive towards it becoming a statutory holiday, or has there been a lot of pushback against it?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, is—there is no universal agreed-upon opinion other than it has been made very clear, and I have been—made it very clear as well that this is not a holiday. So to call it a holiday is, I feel, and many others, offensive. This is a day of truth and reconciliation, of recognition, of remembrance, and it means many things to many different people, but it is, indeed, not a holiday.

**MLA Lindsey:** I agree with the minister. It certainly should never be considered to be a holiday like some other statutory days are. Certainly, there are other statutory days, like Remembrance Day comes to mind, where it's not necessarily considered a holiday like the May long weekend is. Most people don't even recognize what the May long weekend was originally intended for, whereas November the 11th, people recognize it; it's commemorating what took place on that day. But that didn't stop it from becoming a day of recognition, a day that's considered a statutory day, whether it's a statutory holiday or it's a statutory day, right? That—this should probably receive no less recognition than that.

So can the minister give us any idea of a timeline? Perhaps by next September 30th, does he see that those consultations would have come to a conclusion? And certainly, I don't want to put any kind of mandated timeline on the minister to try and rush through because I know this is an emotional journey for many people. Does the minister have any sense of when those consultations may come to a conclusion?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, I guess, for reference, the member referenced Remembrance Day and that exists as a separate day of recognition from other, what are called statutory holidays, is called Remembrance Day. And that may or may not be the avenue we go down.

I would hesitate to set a date when consultations are done because consultations, in this case with the emotions attached, will take as long as consultations will take. Of course, we would hope to be able to introduce some descriptive legislation in—excuse me—hopefully the spring. But we continue to listen to a variety of groups on this particular day and what it means to them, and it is very different to all. As I said, no real consistency other than it is not to be seen as a

holiday. A day of education, a day of recognition, a day of reflection are many terms that we've been listening to and talking about.

So I think it's critical that we make sure we reflect that in any legislation. It is, of course, for the past two years, a provincial day of recognition for staff, provincial staff, and for schools and child cares. And we have ongoing discussions, of course, with that.

I'm sure the member opposite knows that when the federal government declared it a day of recognition, that that has implications for some of our labour agreements. And so that is one of the things that, of course, we have to account for, that if, as are most of our agreements, when you get labour agreements, have—been impacted by federal decisions. That is one of the roles and understandings that we have to undertake.

And that has been done, as I said, for the past two years; the provincial civil servants has—it has been a day of recognition, remembrance and learning and in great encouragement to all organizations to make sure that we treat it that way, that we partake in the various events and educational opportunities. And I know many of the schools, or, if not all the schools, in Manitoba spent the entire week leading up to September 30th talking about truth and reconciliation and what it means and what the responsibilities are of Manitobans.

**MLA Lindsey:** Thank the minister for that.

So, let's talk about something different now. Can the minister advise this committee how many strikes took place in Manitoba last year and how many have taken place in the province since 2016, year by year?

\* (16:40)

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, I'm sure the member opposite will have heard some of my responses previously, that those are issues that are, you know, between the employer and the union. And unless there is a direct request from labour or management or from the Labour Board, the department is not involved and should not be involved.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, the minister is saying that the Department of Labour has no idea how many strikes have taken place in any given year?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, further to my last response, and when we are involved and when we are asked to be involved, we do have a record of when we've been asked to be involved, but we would have to get back to the member with that particular number.

**MLA Lindsey:** I appreciate that the minister is taking that under advisement.

So, can the minister advise this committee how many companies have advised the department that they plan or have plans to lay off more than 50 workers since 2016, year by year?

**Mr. Helwer:** Since the department has been in existence, two. Since 2016, we would have to take that under advisement and get back to the member.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, does the minister have any plans on making any kind of public communication about companies that are laying off more than 50 workers this year?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, the reason for the notification is for us to ensure that the obligations under the labour standards codes.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, from the two that the minister alluded to in an earlier answer, have all those obligations been met by both of those?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, one has fully discharged their obligation, and the other is much more recent and still in progress, but we expect that they will meet all the obligations.

**MLA Lindsey:** Does the department have any obligations to laid-off workers as to assisting them with finding alternate employment or training or anything of that nature that would help those workers and their families?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, again, our responsibility as a department is to make sure that the employers comply with obligations under the labour standards code.

If the member wants to ask about training, that would be a question for Economic Development, Investment and Trade.

**MLA Lindsey:** Can the minister advise what role his department plays in mediation and conciliation?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, the—my responsibility is—depends on a request from the employer, the union or the Manitoba Labour Board.

\* (16:50)

**MLA Lindsey:** So, has there been any requests to the minister to do anything with mediation and conciliation, recognizing that those services were cut from his department?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, since January of 2022, when the department was formed, there have been no requests

from an employer, labour group or the Manitoba Labour Board.

**MLA Lindsey:** So, could the minister explain exactly what his department would have done had there been a request, seeing as those services seem to have been cut from the department?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, currently, the options under the act for the minister are to intervene in a bargaining dispute, such as requiring the Manitoba Labour Board to appoint a conciliator, appoint a mediator, and ordering a vote on the employer's last offer. Of course, these would be dependent on the requests that we get.

These options can be helpful in getting the parties to reach an agreement but they're not arbitration processes and none of them can force a settlement except where the membership votes to accept the employer's last offer following an order to hold a vote.

The act also provides for a mandatory arbitration process that can be initiated by either party when a strike or lockout has been ongoing for 60 days or more, but the minister has no involvement in this process.

**MLA Lindsey:** Does the minister agree that having those services of mediation and conciliation available were helpful in preventing strikes?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, as I said, we've had no requests to the department since January 2022, so I can't really comment on something that we have not experienced.

**MLA Lindsey:** Let's talk about Vital Statistics for a moment. This is a program that is under this minister's area and apparently it was underspent by some 12 per cent last year.

What's the explanation for this variance from budget?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, I guess the response here—I know the response here is actually the same as previous ones. It was moved from another department into this new department, and then transition has a lot of different iterations and moving some jurisdiction back and forth.

But I do want to assure the remember—the member that by late October 2021, the backlog that had been in Vital Statistics had been reduced by 99.9 per cent, and while it's been under this department, we have been focused on improving service delivery. There are always some unique circumstances that come up, but when we know that—but we do know that when the—all of the information is

available to the branch that wait times are within the two-week goal of the—of Vital Statistics branch.

**MLA Lindsey:** So the minister says that the wait time has been reduced by 99.9 per cent? Is that correct?

**Mr. Helwer:** No, the backlog has been reduced by 99.9 per cent. The wait times, the goal is two weeks when the information is all contained and correct in the application.

**MLA Lindsey:** Does the minister have a sense of how often the information on the application is always correct?

**Mr. Helwer:** So, for 90 per cent of the applications we have the adequate information to process the registration or the death certificate, whichever that particular application is for. So the—that leaves us with 10 per cent or roughly 8,000 applications that we need

further information on, and some of that 'infordation' can indeed take time to get because we have to contact the individual.

Some of the incorrect information may be the phone number or the address. So there's a variety of things that are circumstances—

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

Call in the Speaker.

#### IN SESSION

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield):** The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Tuesday, October 11, 2022**

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**<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>**