

**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>
ALTomARE, 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

Thursday, October 27, 2022

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

**Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk):** It is my duty to inform the House that the Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would kindly ask the Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield):** Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Introduction of bills? Committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

### MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

**Jaclyn Hertes and Christina Swanson**

**Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is with great pleasure today I highlight two individuals in the—as Dawson Trail heroes, Jaclyn Hertes and Christina Swanson.

This past week I was invited to be part of the MLA to work day. The purpose of Take Your MLA to Work Day is to celebrate the contributions that Manitobans with disabilities are making to workplaces in Manitoba. Having an inclusive workplace that welcomes and acknowledges the value of all people is crucial to a positive, 'producty'—productive and healthy work environment.

I had the pleasure of meeting Jaclyn, who allowed me to shadow her at her workplace. Jaclyn is a very hard worker. Jaclyn's tasks at work include ensuring things are clean and operating as they should in the car wash bays, pumping fuel, stocking coolers and supplies, prepping slushies and maintaining the cleanliness of the store.

Jaclyn is steadily working towards her goals, which are being able to get her own place to live and work her way up to a position that carries more responsibilities.

Today, Jaclyn is joined by Christina Swanson who is the co-ordinator at enVision Community Living. She has been running Eastman Employment Services for over 20 years and has built it up from 30 individuals to 200 annually.

Christina describes Jaclyn as a friendly, dedicated person, and it is no surprise how well she fits in with the team at Clearview Co-op in Ste. Anne. It was in 2019 when Eastman Employment Services connected with Jaclyn as she was prepping to graduate high school.

Jaclyn applied and was accepted into the STRIDE program. The STRIDE program is an initiative that aims to equip young adults with the skills and confidence needed to excel in their life and workplace. They focus on the gap between school and work for students with disability and include internships as well as several pre-employment and life-skill building models.

I would like—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

**Some Honourable Members:** Leave.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Leave has been granted. *[interjection]* Oh, I have to acknowledge you.

The honourable member for Dawson Trail.

**Mr. Lagassé:** I would like to thank Jaclyn and Christina for allowing me to be part of this initiative. It was a pleasure meeting both of you, and I look forward to running into you in the community.

### Bethania Mennonite Personal Care Home

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia):** I rise today to recognize the Bethania Mennonite Personal Care Home on their 75th anniversary of exceptional seniors care in our community.

Originally located in Middlechurch, Bethania was the one of the Mennonite community's signature contributions to the provincial health and care systems. Before public funding, it was facilities like Bethania that provided this essential care for our elders.

A new facility was developed jointly with Concordia Hospital in the 1970s to have better access to medical resources, and they have flourished there ever since.

A fundamental tenant of Bethania is that health and healing encompasses not only the physical and psychological, but also the spiritual dimensions. Spiritual care forms an integral component of daily life as residents partake in singing and music; are

given opportunities to nurture relationships; share stories and hope for the future. This care extends to end of life with scriptural encouragement, prayer support, visitations and constant positive presence of staff.

The Bethania spiritual care program is funded solely through the generosity of the community. Local churches provide volunteers and pastors, and the program is managed by an on-staff chaplain. For 11 years that chaplain has been Ferdinand Funk, who has provided outstanding support to residents, families and staff.

Chaplain Funk recently announced that he is moving on from Bethania, so I want to personally thank him for his service and recognize his dedication over the years.

I was pleased to join with friends and supporters of Bethania last Thursday at a dinner to celebrate this milestone. The evening included a keynote speech by Aaron Epp and a performance by award-winning musician Steve Bell, but the highlight may have been the spontaneous four-part harmony that emerged as the crowd sang Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow, something that could only happen as we were finally able to gather in-person once again.

On behalf of all members of this Legislature, I want to thank the organizers of this wonderful celebration, as well the staff, volunteers and supporters of Bethania over the past 75 years. I look forward to continuing to work with you as you move forward in your vital role in our community.

Thank you, Madam—Mr. Speaker.

#### **Community Events for Ukrainian Refugees**

**Mrs. Cathy Cox (Kildonan-River East):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, sadly, the war in Ukraine continues to rage, but as the war intensifies so does the generosity of Manitobans.

The atrocities we have observed in Ukraine have weighed heavy on all of our hearts. However, even during these darkest moments in Ukrainian history, we have all witnessed remarkable gestures of kindness, love and goodness, many from within our very own communities. I am proud that Kildonan-River East is one of these communities.

Personally, I am immensely grateful to the thousands of Manitobans who opened their hearts, their homes and their wallets to assist those families forced to flee their war-torn Ukraine.

Mr. Speaker, I was overwhelmed by the mountain of donations of food, personal hygiene, baby products and clothing that were dropped off at my office in response to the food drive I organized to aid our local refugee families. Manitobans are renowned for their generosity and our province will always be known as the home of hope.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am proud of our government who stands strong, in solidarity with Ukraine and its people.

On July 14th, I was pleased to join our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and the Minister of Municipal Relations (Ms. Clarke) at Chornick Park to announce funding of \$106,000 to support a nine-week summer camp established solely to assist the newly arrived Ukrainian refugee children as they transition to their new life in their new homeland.

Hosted by St. Anne Ukrainian Catholic Parish, the children enjoyed an action-packed summer of social activities where they experienced, first hand, the beauty of our province. Spiritual learning and healing was also an important component of their daily routine.

I was excited to host a pizza lunch and ice cream on the last day of the U-WIN Camp and have to share that it was absolutely heartwarming to watch the kids do what kids do best: just have fun. Later, the kids entertained guests with a myriad of Ukrainian songs and dances, thrilled to show off their new-found friendships and confidence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the proverb it takes a village—

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Leave.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Leave has been granted.

**Mrs. Cox:** The proverb it takes a village to raise a child has never been more meaningful.

To our Ukrainian community, the many volunteers, the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, I say *duzhe dyakuyu [thank you very much]* for opening your hearts to bring hope and a little happiness to these lives of these children.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

### Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba

**Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I begin, I would like to call attention to a terrible tragedy that occurred just last night in Thompson.

Thompson RCMP and fire and paramedic services responded to a house fire last night that took the lives of four children under 10 years old. I would like to ask the House to keep the family and the community in their thoughts and prayers in the coming days.

I would like to stand today to acknowledge and welcome the newly appointed Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, Anita Neville.

As many have already stated this week, she has been a champion of many issues that—and has devoted her life in her name of service for many years already. The ceremony in her honour earlier this week was astounding and a wonderful display of the ceremony involved in her role of 'visirial,' as well recognition of her outstanding history as a parliamentarian and a community leader.

As a First Nation person, former chief, I know the importance of the relationship between First Nations and the Crown and its representatives. As Lieutenant Governor is designated 'visirial' in Manitoba, it is uplifting to see an appointee with such history of advocacy for her communities. It is encouraging to see a Lieutenant Governor who has worked with marginalized people for so long to uplift the voices of our communities.

\* (13:40)

Along with the new Lieutenant Governor comes new opportunity further the relationship between Indigenous people in Manitoba. I sincerely look forward to a future of making positive change with the new Lieutenant Governor.

Thank you, Mr. Speak—Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** On a point of order?

### Point of Order

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member for Radisson, on a point of order.

**Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson):** Just, I would ask if you could canvass the House if there's leave—in light of the member's statement and the loss of the four children in Thompson, if there's leave for a moment of silence.

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

All rise.

*A moment of silence was observed.*

### Ukraine: Land of the Brave Exhibition

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** Last night, I attended a preview of an extraordinary exhibition at Osederok Ukrainian cultural centre and museum, Ukraine: Land of the Brave. It celebrates the creative achievements of Ukrainians from around the world with some extraordinary art and an incredible, immersive exhibit with video directly from the front lines.

It was a deeply moving experience—thanks to the words of Andriy Shevchenko, a former ambassador from Ukraine to Canada.

I had met Mr. Shevchenko at Osederok in 2019, commemorating the fact that a century ago, when Ukraine was struggling for independence under the threat of Russian aggression, that one of the central outposts for an independent Ukraine was here in Winnipeg. He is no longer the ambassador living in Ottawa; he came straight from Ukraine. And when he spoke last night, he spoke as someone whose country is at war and whose family is under fire.

Tragically, Mr. Shevchenko's brother was killed in action leading troops three months ago. And he said that his young daughter has come to like the noise of the sirens that precede missile strikes because it means she gets more screen time as she curls up with a device to watch Peppa Pig in the safest corner of the house until the danger passes.

As he said 'dastight,' this is not just a fight for Ukraine, this is a fight for the world. It's a fight for the kind of world we live in, and an attempt to control not just Ukraine, but Europe; to undermine and disrupt our economies, and turn us against each other. We are being deliberately squeezed by Russian manipulation of energy prices and supplies to get us to cave in and surrender to Putin's demands, and to turn us against each other.

The courage of Ukrainians, especially President Zelensky, has been a real light in the darkness, standing up against a global wave of authoritarian governments with clarity, purpose, hope and astounding bravery.

Ukraine has the right to chart its own destiny. We can all be doing more to rally and support Ukraine,

because their fight is our fight, and it is the fight of our time. There are resources on Osederok's website on how to help Ukraine directly, and I encourage everyone to see the exhibition, which is free from October 31st to April 30th.

Slava Ukraini. [*Glory to Ukraine.*]

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### Municipal Election Results Acknowledgements

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** I add my condolences to those of my colleague from Thompson, and send our continued commitment to help, to his community and to northern Manitoba at this difficult time.

I also, on a somewhat more sombre note, want to extend my congratulations to Mayor Smook of that community on her re-election, as well as to mayors Larry Johannson and Brandon Burley on their re-elections in Selkirk and Morden, respectively, as well as to newly elected leaders in Dauphin, in the form of David Bosiak; the mayor of Brandon, Jeff Fawcett; and, of course, right here in Winnipeg, with Scott Gillingham.

We had many folks who were newly elected last night, and we certainly do wish them our best in serving this province.

I would be remiss, of course, if I didn't also congratulate Cathy Merrick, who made history in becoming the first woman grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. So, *weweni* [*thank you and well done*] to her.

I do have a question on health care, but wanted to make those remarks first.

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** I do want to send our deepest condolences to the family who lost their loved ones in a house fire last evening in Thompson. Four children lost their lives in this horrific tragedy, and our thoughts and prayers go out to the family as they mourn this horrific tragedy that's taken place.

I want to thank the member for Thompson (Mr. Redhead) for his statement today and for rightly recognizing this tragedy in the way of a moment of silence here in the Chamber.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

### Brandon Regional Health Centre NICU Staff Shortage Concerns

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** We hear today from the Manitoba Nurses Union that the NICU at Brandon hospital is, quote, drowning, end quote. There's no health-care aide, there's no clerk, there's no CRN and there is no in-house doctor.

Staff are burning out and this is very concerning. After all, a neonatal intensive-care unit cares for the sickest of infants and young children. It's clear that there's not enough staff to properly run this unit in Brandon as of right now.

Which steps will the Premier and her government take to ensure that the damage to Brandon's NICU is repaired?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question about health care in the Brandon region. I know that we have already announced some upgrades to the facility in Brandon to ensure that Manitobans in that region can get better access to care closer to home.

And so, I just want to thank all of those who work in our front lines. We recognize the challenges that they're facing, day in and day out in a health-care system. Obviously, human resources is a significant challenge, not just here in Manitoba but, of course, right across our country. And we'll continue to work towards addressing those issues.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** The current crisis that we see in the health-care system is certainly put into stark relief when we reflect on the lack of staffing for this neonatal intensive care unit in Brandon.

That same message from the nurses' representatives points out that a new facility will not address the needs at the bedside in the form of staff. So we need to see a concrete plan to deliver those health-care aides, those physicians and those nurses who will care for the sickest amongst our young children.

This is, of course, similar to the SOS that we heard recently from the Grace Hospital. It comes during the same week as the alarm has been sounded at St. Boniface.

There is a crisis in health care. We need to hear concrete steps.

Which steps are the government going to take to respond to these direct and specific calls to help from the front lines of health care?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Certainly, we recognize there's significant challenges with human resources across health-care systems right across this country, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Leader of the Opposition has asked what action we're taking, and I can tell him, again, that we are—we have announced 400 new nursing seats in the province of Manitoba, which will help address some of those issues. We also have internationally educated nurses that we're working towards ensuring that they get the licensing that they need to be working in our front lines and in our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so.

And I know the regional health authority is working diligently to address some of these issues in the Brandon area.

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

#### **Plan to Address Homelessness in Manitoba Request to Support City of Houston Model**

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Every Manitoban can see that there has been a dramatic increase over the past five years in the number of people living in tents, living in bus shelters, living underneath bridges.

This is a problem that we see in Winnipeg, but we also see it in communities like Thompson and Brandon, and in other places across Manitoba. That's why we're committed to ending chronic homelessness in our great province. The Houston model offers a path. We think it should be replicated here.

Will the Premier support our plan to end chronic homelessness in Manitoba?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** We share the concerns. Of course, we don't want people living in bus shelters or on the streets, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Just the other day, I was up in Thompson and visited the healing centre that has recently opened up in Thompson to help address some of those issues in that community. And, of course, we are looking at a holistic approach when it comes to this.

\* (13:50)

There's significant challenges when it comes to homelessness and mental health and addictions that have really come out of the pandemic. We recognize

there's challenges there, and we are working in a holistic way to address those issues.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, with a follow-up.

**Mr. Kinew:** When folks go to a hockey game or to a concert downtown, when people bring in out-of-province guests or business partners or potential investors, and they see people sleeping in bus shelters, they know that we can do better.

The challenges that we're confronted with here are long-standing. Certainly, they emerged long before the pandemic, and everyone in Manitoba has noticed that this issue has become particularly pronounced over the last five years.

We also know that there are examples which can be used as a best practice, sources to emulate. We see one of those with the Houston model. Governments who are willing to engage can actually lead the path towards success when it comes to providing dignity for folks who are currently out on the street, and providing an increased sense of pride for everyone here in Manitoba.

We've brought forward a plan to end chronic homelessness in Manitoba. Will the Premier work with us to bring about more dignity for people from all walks of life in Manitoba?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** This is a serious challenge, obviously, that we're facing in our community, and is why we are taking action.

We have invested more than \$5 million in the Downtown Community Safety Partnership, and I want to thank all of those individuals who are working day-in and day-out to ensure the safety of those individuals who are on our streets and in downtown Winnipeg. We also made significant investments, as well, in N'Dinawemak, as well. And we'll continue to make those investments and we'll continue to take a holistic approach when it comes to this.

We know that mental health and addictions is a very significant challenge; homelessness, very significant challenge, particularly coming out of the pandemic. So, we'll continue to take these types of action.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** The PC approach to homelessness cannot be said to be holistic so long as they take an ideological approach to the addictions crisis. The fact that they, out of ideology, rule out a safer consumption

site, or harm-reduction approaches, is one of the contributing factors to why this situation is getting worse. The cuts to mental health, the cuts to health care and the cuts to social services and housing are other contributing factors.

We have brought forward a plan. We have studied best practices in other jurisdictions. We're willing to work with everyone in the community. We know government can make a difference if they're willing to act, if they are willing to lead. The Houston model offers an important best practice.

We've brought a plan forward. Will the Premier support our agenda of ending chronic homelessness in Winnipeg, and did she raise this important topic in her meeting with Scott Gillingham today?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question.

I do want to congratulate Scott Gillingham, the mayor-elect for the city of Winnipeg, on his new position. And I look forward to working—and we look forward to working collaboratively with him as we work through some of these challenging issues.

Yes, I did, in fact, raise this Downtown Community Safety Partnership, as well as some of the challenges that we're facing, and I can tell you we will work very collaboratively toward that. We are focused on—we've also announced more RAAM clinics; we're focused on recovery, getting people off of their addictions and so they can recover that way. We have—also, we're the government that brought in 100 new recovery beds. That's something that didn't exist under the previous NDP government.

So, we'll continue to take this kind of action, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We will not take an ideological approach like the members opposite.

### **Physician Recruitment and Retention Request for Government Plan**

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Deputy Speaker, the state of health-care staffing in our province is dire.

Doctors Manitoba released a report yesterday that stated that Manitoba has the lowest number of family physicians per capita in Canada and the third lowest number of specialists per capita. To make matters worse, over the next three years, 43 per cent of physicians are planning on retiring, reducing their hours or leaving Manitoba altogether. Urgent action is needed to reverse these trends.

Will the minister outline what actions she's taking to recruit and retain doctors in Manitoba?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I thank the member for Union Station for the question because it gives me an opportunity to remind members opposite about their record on doctors.

Over the NDP's 17 years in power, Manitoba dropped—dropped, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the fourth highest physician number per capita to the eighth in Canada. That is their record.

With regard to what we are doing, we're listening to the front lines, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Gordon:** That is why I was out in Portage la Prairie to be part of the doctors—rural doctors summit to listen to Doctors Manitoba, to listen to the physicians that were in the room. The best solutions were in that room—

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

The honourable member for Union Station, on a follow-up question.

**MLA Asagwara:** The Doctors Manitoba report found that two thirds of physicians are experiencing distress and half are experiencing high levels of burnout. Doctors Manitoba has stated that burn-out is the largest threat to retention, and I quote, the root causes of burnout are largely system issues, not due to a lack of resilience, end quote.

We know the PC's cuts have created a health-care system that does not work for Manitobans, nor staff. The minister could reverse her government's cuts and create a healthy working environment for doctors.

Will she do so today?

**Ms. Gordon:** I reiterate that over the NDP's 17 years in power, Manitoba dropped from the fourth highest physician number per capita to the eighth in Canada, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And what are we doing? We're listening to the front-line physicians. Dr. Thompson stated in his press conference that he agrees with the direction our government has taken in terms of listening to the front lines and that this issue is not unique just to Manitoba; it's being felt across the country.



We will continue to listen to Manitoba physicians, accept their report, look at their recommendations and do what the members opposite never did, and that is to implement and make changes.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member for Union Station on a final supplementary.

**MLA Asagwara:** Deputy Speaker, the shortage of doctors in Manitoba will get even worse unless urgent, immediate action is taken. Manitoba needs 359 physicians just to meet the Canadian per capita average, yet 348 physicians are considering retirement in the next three years. Hundreds more are planning on leaving Manitoba or reducing their clinical hours.

We know the PCs have caused chaos in our health-care system. We know the former minister of Health has still yet to apologize for accusing doctors of all kinds of things in our health-care system. Those accusations, their cuts are leading to higher levels of stress and—*[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**MLA Asagwara:** —burnout.

The minister should take action to reverse her government's cuts and create a healthy working environment in our health-care system—

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

**Ms. Gordon:** I have been working with the Health human resource task force in my department, as well as Shared Health recruitment group, and we will be rolling out a comprehensive action plan in the next few weeks to address recruitment, retention and training.

But I do want to highlight for Manitobans who may be viewing question period today that the members opposite voted against many, many health initiatives: making Trikafta available to cystic fibrosis patients six and up; they voted against making 'cocular' implants upgrades available to seniors; voted against providing insulin pumps and glucose monitors to young adults; voted against adding 26 in-patient monitor beds at—

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

#### **Manitoba Student Aid Program Issues with Accessing Funds**

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, every week, my office—it receives more and more

complaints from students about their issues they're facing with Manitoba Student Aid.

\* (14:00)

Students have faced extreme delays in accessing the funding they need to go to school. This has resulted in students having to pay out of pocket, go into debt, because they're not receiving the funding before the payment deadlines. Their debt is detrimental to students who already struggling with the rising cost of living.

So, the minister should take action urgently to help these students in need.

Will he take that action today?

**Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration):** Let me share with the House that during 2021-22, Manitoba Student Aid provided approximately \$217 million in both federal and provincial student loans, grants and bursaries, including \$51.9 million in Manitoba student loans and 19—one—\$19.1 million to Manitoba bursaries to help post-secondary students receive a high-quality education in Manitoba.

The financial supports that our government provide these students will help them not only receive a quality education, but gain the right skills, talent and knowledge to stimulate our growing Manitoba economy. We're working with post-secondary students to help students who are waiting.

Thank you, Madam Speaker—Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Moses:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's clear the minister isn't working to resolve these issues that Manitoban students are facing with Student Aid, and it's simply unacceptable.

I wrote to the minister months ago and have raised this issue multiple times. That's why it's so disappointing to hear that students are still unable to access Manitoba student aid that they are eligible for. Students who have contacted my office say that they are—that these streaming delays are causing them to think about dropping out of school.

The minister needs to take action. He needs to resolve these problems. He needs to help students.

Will he do so today?

**Mr. Reyes:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, staff continue to work hard to process the applications and field

inquiries so that students can focus on their studies each semester.

Last year, Manitoba Student Aid provided over \$33 million in scholarships and bursaries which helped over 16,000 students finance their post-secondary education.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member for St. Vital, on a final supplementary.

**Mr. Moses:** Students rely on Manitoba Student Aid to attend post-secondary. These persistent issues that they face week in, week out, year in, year out with this government are growing tiresome for students who need this money.

They are facing issues like slow turnaround time, poor-performing websites, inadequate phone support and general lack of organization is simply unacceptable. We've reached out to the minister's office, and he has not taken action.

Will the minister commit to fixing these issues with Manitoba Student Aid today?

**Mr. Reyes:** Our government is working—is providing students with record levels of financial supports in the form of scholarships, bursaries and loans, unlike the previous NDP government, who took no interest in the financial well-being of post-secondary students.

Our 'gumbent' is still fixing the mess left by the former NDP government and the \$15-million waste they produced with the non-functioning Manitoba Student Aid system that didn't even allow students to log into the system, resulting in application delays and backlogs.

They NDP's plan is tax students to the max, which in no turn—*[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Reyes:** —makes life less affordable to students.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're cleaning up the mess; we're taking action for their mess.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

### **Crown Prosecution Services Vacancy Rate and Staffing Concerns**

**Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** Manitoba Crown attorneys have been operating under challenging circumstances during the pandemic. They are facing burnout, chronic staffing shortages, high vacancy and an unsustainable workload.

This is a direct result of the PC government's incessant need to cut, cut, cut to save a couple of pennies off the backs of Manitobans. Deputy Speaker, this needs to change.

So, I ask the minister: Will he reverse his government's cuts to Prosecution Service in Manitoba today?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are no cuts, but there is a vacancy rate of about 7 per cent, which absolutely needs to be addressed. There is recruitment going on when it comes to Crown attorneys.

I know there's a labour issue, as well, that I won't get into because I won't interfere in a labour issue, but I do know that it's important for Crowns, it's important for all Manitobans, that we are ensuring that our communities are safe.

That's why Manitoba led the effort to have changes to the Criminal Code to ensure that bail provisions would change. And we spoke to ministers of justice across the country; they agreed with us. They said there needs to be tougher bail to ensure that those who are dangerous offenders and who are charged with dangerous offences aren't released.

I wonder why the member opposite won't support us in that call.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Since 2016, those—the number of those working in the legal positions in prosecution services has been dramatically cut. There are less according to the own minister's annual report, dropping from 2,004 in 2016 to 188 in 2022. Crown attorneys are sounding the alarm regarding unacceptably high vacancy rates and the potential for mistakes due to overworked staff.

It's time to reverse these cuts. Will the minister commit to doing so today?

**Mr. Goertzen:** There are no cuts, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but there is recruitment going on when it comes to Crown attorneys.

However, another mistake is a mistake that the federal Liberal government made in 2019, when they brought in bill 75, which changed bail provisions. And it may have been unintended consequences, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but they're still real consequences. There are dangerous offenders who are charged with violent offences in our community who continue to get released on bail because it's impossible for Crown attorneys to argue against that bail because of bill 75.

I know that the federal Minister of Justice said he's going to look at that and what unintended consequences have happened, but I would hope that the NDP would join us in that support.

They've been silent on these issues, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They don't want to talk about ensuring our communities get safer; they'd rather talk about defending the police. I hope they change their mind—

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

**Ms. Fontaine:** So, back to Crown attorneys, Deputy Speaker.

They are working excessive hours. They don't have adequate time to prepare for the volume of cases that they're presented. Vacancy rates are too high. Staff are burning out. Crown prosecutors warn the integrity of the justice system presented by the current staffing crisis demands a response, and we agree on this side of the House. Unfortunately, the minister keeps skirting around the issue.

The minister must reverse the cuts to Crown prosecution—*[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Fontaine:** The minister must reverse the cuts to Crown prosecution services.

Will he commit to doing so today?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've already indicated there are no cuts and there is recruitment going on for Crown attorneys.

But the member wants to talk about the integrity of the justice system. Integrity is ensuring that violent offenders who are accused of violent offences don't get released back into our community to create another victim. That the NDP won't talk about.

When we went and talked to other Attorneys General across Canada, they said they agree with Manitoba's position. In fact, they signed a letter, and the key signature on this letter was the NDP Attorney General in British Columbia, which commended Manitoba for their effort to change the Criminal Code.

If the NDP in British Columbia get it, why is it that this NDP opposition can't understand we need to make our communities safer? And I'll table that letter for the member to read and understand. *[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

### **Indigenous Reconciliation Strategy Timeline for Duty-to-Consult Framework**

**Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook):** Earlier this year, the Auditor General determined that the PC government failed to live up to their legal—and I'll say again, legal responsibility to implement a reconciliation strategy here in Manitoba. The AG found that the PCs have no strategy for reconciliation and no plan for when they may implement one.

One aspect of a reconciliation strategy is a duty-to-consult framework. Six months after this report was released, we still haven't heard anything on when we might see a duty to consult framework implemented.

Can the minister tell us what day he will put forward a duty to consult framework for Manitoba?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The 'onister'—the—sorry, the honourable Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

**Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations):** Well, I thank the member for the question.

\* (14:10)

But before I answer that question, I think it's—I will take this opportunity to congratulate the newly elected grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. This was truly a historic moment yesterday when the newly elected grand chief, Cathy Merrick. This is a first woman elected to the AMC as grand chief.

And I would also like to take a moment to thank all candidates who ran in the election. A total of seven candidates let their names stand on the ballot. This took courage and dedication. Each candidate worked very hard on their campaign. You all brought a wealth of knowledge and depth of background for consideration as grand chief, and I know the decisions made at the being—meeting could not have been easy.

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

**Mr. Bushie:** I'm—also congratulation to the grand chief, Cathy Merrick, on her election.

But, at the same time, she's wondering these same questions, and these—answers to these same questions, Madam Speaker—Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It's been six years since The Path to Reconciliation Act was passed. Yet, despite the—requiring

the PCs to implement a reconciliation strategy, it seems they have made no progress. In fact, the AG found that the PCs have no strategy and no plan for one men—when it may be implemented. The AG said, and I quote: without a strategy, efforts toward reconciliation are hampered, ultimately lacking focus and vision. End quote.

The PC government should fulfill their legal responsibility—and again: legal responsibility—and implement a reconciliation strategy.

Can the minister provide a date for when this—his government will implement this—

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

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've travelled to many First Nations communities, I've listened to them tell me their stories. And I have been told that, under the former NDP government, they were never heard; they were never listened to. That is why we're determined to create a duty-to-consult framework that works for First Nations communities.

Madam—Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government is taking action and will ensure this is done right.

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

**Mr. Bushie:** And all this consultation, yet he's under-spent that consultation budget by 42 per cent. So, I find that a little mystifying.

We know the former premier, Brian Pallister, did not take reconciliation seriously. During his five years as premier, he failed to implement a reconciliation strategy despite a legal—and again, and again, I'll say legal responsibility—to do so. Yet, the current Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has also failed to implement a reconciliation strategy a year after she took over as leader.

At this point, it's unclear whether the PCs will ever implement a reconciliation strategy and a duty-to-consult framework.

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

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Again, I will tell the member opposite: our government is taking action.

We are committed to working with First Nations on this, and advancing shared goals and promoting truth and reconciliation. We are doing this by carrying out respectful and productive consultations and

listening to the concerns of Indigenous peoples across the province.

And I look forward to our continued commitment to work with a new acting grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. *[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

#### **Shared Health and Regional Health Authorities Accountability to MLAs at Public Committee**

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** When we ask questions of the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) or Health Minister about our health system, they often pass the buck to Shared Health, or to WRHA, who won't answer our questions either. *[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Lamont:** That's because, while MLAs have committees to question the CEO and board chairs of Hydro, MPI, MLCC and more, we don't ever have the committee to hear from the CEOs of board chairs of Shared Health or RHAs who spend \$6 billion a year to run a health-care system into the ground.

We've introduced a bill that will require Shared Health to report to MLAs. Will the Premier and her government support our bill to let MLAs ask questions of the Shared Health CEO and board chair on the record at committee?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** Madam—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to commend the leadership of Shared Health, all the CEOs across our service delivery organizations, for the incredible work that they have been doing during a difficult time to ensure that the front line is able to provide Manitobans with the care that they need.

We have a high regard on this side of the House for Shared Health leadership, as well as the leadership across the RHAs and CancerCare Manitoba. We will continue to work with them. We will continue to ensure that they have the supports that they need to meet the needs of Manitobans in this province.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member for St. Boniface, with a follow-up question.

**Mr. Lamont:** There are lots of questions we'd like to ask of Shared Health about wait times, budgets, choices, outcomes, who's actually telling them what to do. We have questions about terrible wait times for procedures, deaths in the ERs, pandemic blunders, the fact that—*[interjection]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Lamont:** –the long-term-care homes are going uninspected, seniors being assaulted in long-term care and whistle-blowers ignored, burnouts of nurses and doctors—and that's just the last two years.

We don't know who is making the decisions on our health care that affect every single one of us. We don't know if it's the minister, we don't know if it's in—someone in Shared Health.

Will the Premier and her government support this bill to ensure we can bring health-care accountability back to the Legislature?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** The member opposite has a private member's bill before the House, and it'll be considered the way all private members' bills are.

But he knows full well that this government and all governments have methods of accountability. One is being demonstrated here in question period, another is being demonstrated in Estimates this afternoon. There are various committees and different ways that governments and officials are questioned.

If the member opposite has questions, he's delivering them to the fore—floor of the House here and he'll have other opportunities to deliver them as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

#### **Internationally Educated Nurse Constituent Case Concern**

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** My constituent, Lucy [*phonetic*], was a full-time nurse in China for 25 years. She worked in an English-speaking hospital in Singapore for a few years, moved to Canada in 2013, became a permanent resident and worked as a nurse in Alberta for over three years. Then Lucy [*phonetic*] got married, moved to Manitoba to be with her spouse and is being told she is only allowed to work as a health-care aide.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Lucy [*phonetic*] feels she is being forced to leave our province because this government isn't valuing her education or experience as a nurse. Credential recognition is much harder in Manitoba compared to other provinces.

Why hasn't this issue already been resolved, where is the urgency on this, and what will this government do to ensure we do not lose another qualified nurse?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** Recognizing that over 17 years the NDP government did nothing to address the issue brought forward to the

Chamber by the member for Tyndall Park, our government took action.

In July, I issued a compliance order to the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba that addresses that very issue. Individuals who are registered and 'licenced' in another Canadian jurisdiction and are practising in good standing can now be registered and work here in Manitoba in our health system.

#### **Early Childhood Education Students Tuition Reimbursement Initiative**

**Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie):** Earlier today, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning announced at Red River College Polytech our government's robust tuition reimbursement program.

Can the minister please share how our government is taking steps to reduce barriers for people wanting to enter the workforce and ensuring our government—our province has the highest quality early childhood educators in the country?

**Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** I'd like to thank my colleague for that great question.

Yes, today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, alongside federal MP, Mr. Terry Duguid and my could—good—great colleague, minister of education and Skills and Immigration and I had the pleasure of being at RRC polytechnique, of announcing that our government is providing \$4 million—\$5,000 per student—per school year for reimbursement to help with tuition-related costs of recognized early childhood learning educator programs right here in this great province of ours.

Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*interjection*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Over the last 20 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the opposition had not—

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

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

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Order.

#### **Thompson Aquatic Centre Project Construction Timeline and Costs**

**Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson):** The Thompson pool closed under this government and has sat closed since 2019.

\* (14:20)

An announcement leading up to a by-election contained no timeline for construction. The news release claimed the project would cost \$50 million, but, in fact, it's going to cost many millions more.

When will this project be built, and will this government commit to the shortfall in funding for the Thompson aquatic centre?

**Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services):** Congratulations to Colleen Smook being re-elected as mayor of Thompson. She has been—she's been great to work with, as is her council, and congratulations to the new council and all the others that have been elected across Manitoba.

Mayor Smook has said that, you know, Thompson has done a great job on how they're moving ahead here: over \$130 million in grants from various levels of government. They're working to get things done, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Redhead:** As a matter of fact, I've talked to Mayor Smook. She's the one who informed me that there's going to be over \$4-million shortfall and that the City of Thompson is struggling to find the money. She's asked me personally to ask this government for the shortfall in funding.

So, will this government increase their contributions and tell us when this project will be built?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, we're pleased to work with municipalities all across the province, First Nations groups and others in Manitoba, with the federal government under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program.

That was where this application went from the mayor of Thompson and her council, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was approved in Treasury Board and Manitoba, and it was approved in Treasury Board federally and advanced—the funds were advanced to the City of Thompson. City of Thompson is the proponent of this project.

**Mr. Redhead:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we know, the pandemic has caused increases in everything. Inflation—projects have gone over budget, and at the time when Thompson had put that request forward, it was in—within reason.

But we know that costs have gone up, and so, will this government commit to fully funding the aquatic centre in Thompson? It's that simple, yes or no?

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, I was pleased to stand with the chief of Berens River this morning, and his council, to

announce further projects under the ICIP program with our federal partners. Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$31.6 million to benefit Berens River and its surrounding areas, improvements to provincial and federal roads, upgrades to a water treatment plant and a new arena and multipurpose facility for the youth to make sure that they are engaged and they are active.

We won't do what the previous NDP government did, which was tell municipalities that they are advancing these applications and then pulling them at the last moment, as they did to many municipalities in Manitoba. Very disgusting, Mr. Deputy Speaker *[phonetic]*—Speaker.

We'll work with the City of Thompson and this pool will get built.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Time for oral questions has expired.

Petitions—oh, actually, just a second here.

### Introduction of Guests

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Maybe not the most formal Deputy Speaker ever, but I do want to acknowledge some students in the gallery.

We have seated in the public gallery from St. Maurice School 28 grade 6 students—is that you guys? Yes? Welcome here—under the direction of Judi Pacheco. Did I say that right? I hope I did. So, welcome here.

This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member of Fort Garry.

We welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature.

### PETITIONS

#### Provincial Road 224

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Provincial Road No. 224 serves Peguis First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation and surrounding communities. The road is in 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 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 the many Manitobans who use it on a regular basis.

(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.

This petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Ekosi.

### **Louise Bridge**

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, 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 the next 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 highway 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 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 placed 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.

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 maintain—and 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.

This petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Are there any—the honourable member for River Heights.

\* (14:30)

### Hearing Aids

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

A hearing aid is a battery-powered electronic device designed to improve an individual's ability to perceive sound. Worn in or behind a person's ear, they make some sounds louder, helping people hear better when it's quiet and when it's noisy.

People who suffer hearing loss, whether due to aging, illness, employment or accident, not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, family or colleagues, they also can experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

Hearing loss can also impact the safety of an individual with hearing loss, as it affects the ability to hear cars coming, safety alarms, call 911, et cetera.

A global commission on the state of the research for dementia care and prevention released an updated consensus report in July 2020, identifying 12 key risk factors for dementia and cognitive decline. The strongest risk factor was what—that was indicated was hearing loss. It was calculated that up to 8 per cent of the total number of dementia cases could potentially be avoided with management of hearing loss.

Hearing aids are therefore essential to the mental health and well-being of Manitobans, especially to those at significant risk of dementia, Alzheimer's, a disorder of the brain affecting cognition in the ever-growing senior population.

Audiologists are health-care professionals who help patients decide which kind of hearing aid will work best for them, based on the type of hearing loss, patient's age and ability to manage small devices, lifestyle and ability to afford.

The cost of hearing aids can be prohibitive to many Manitobans, depending on their income and circumstances. Hearing aids cost on average \$995 to \$4,000 per ear, and many professionals say the hearing aids only work at their best for five years.

Manitoba residents under the age of 18 who require a hearing aid, as prescribed by an otolaryngologist or audiologist, will receive either an 80 per cent reimbursement from Manitoba Health of a fixed amount for an analogue device, up to a maximum of \$500 per ear, or 80 per cent of a fixed

amount for a digital or analogue programmable device, up to a maximum of \$1,800.

However, this reimbursement is not available to Manitobans who need the device who are over the age of 18, which will result in financial hardship for many young people entering the workforce, students and families.

In addition, seniors representing 14.3 per cent of Manitoba's population are not eligible for reimbursement, despite being the group most likely in need of a hearing aid.

Most insurance companies only provide a minimal partial cost of a hearing aid, and many Manitobans, especially retired persons, old-age pensioners and other low-income earners do not have access to health insurance plans.

The Province of Quebec's hearing devices program covers all costs related to hearing aids and assistive listening devices, including the purchase, repair and replacement.

Alberta offers subsidies to all seniors 65 and over and low-income adults once every five years.

New Brunswick provides coverage for the purchase and maintenance not covered by other agencies or private health insurance plans, as well as assistance for those for whom the purchase would cause financial hardship.

Manitobans over age 18 are only eligible for support for hearing aids if they're receiving Employment and Income Assistance, and the reimbursement only provides a maximum of \$500 an ear.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to consider hearing loss as a medical treatment under Manitoba Health.

(2) To urge the provincial government to provide income-based coverage for hearing aids to all who need them, as hearing has been proven to be essential to Manitobans' cognitive, mental and social well-being and well-being.

Signed by B. Wasylenko, Ken Majchen, Louise Wiens and many other Manitobans.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other petitions?

Seeing none, the honourable Government House Leader—[interjection]—my apologies, grievances?



**ORDERS OF THE DAY***(Continued)***GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** I'd like to table for the House's information a revised sequence for consideration of departmental Estimates. Thanks.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with that piece of important business done, could you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Certainly. The House will resolve into a Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
(Concurrent Sections)**

**ROOM 254**

**NATURAL RESOURCES AND  
NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT**

\* (14:40)

**Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook):** 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 Natural Resources and Northern Development.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Greg Nesbitt (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development):** Yes, I do.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to be here and speak as a minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development about this exciting new department.

This is a great opportunity to speak about how the department's programs will deliver value within this year's budget. I want to state how pleased I am to be the minister of this new department that serves Manitobans in numerous ways.

I would also like to acknowledge the senior staff of my department that are here with me today. We have Elliot Sims, the deputy minister; Matt Wiebe, the executive financial officer and assistant deputy minister of the Finance and Shared Services Division; Jana Schott, the assistant deputy minister of the Stewardship and Resource Development division;

Kristin Hayward, the assistant deputy minister responsible for the Wildfire Service and Conservation office service; and my special assistant, Colin Robinson.

At this time, I'd like to acknowledge the hard work and professionalism of all of our departmental staff. I take my role of minister of the department most seriously. Our vision is one of a working landscape where people, communities and nature thrive. This vision reflects my government's commitment to balancing the needs of Manitobans in all ways and working collaboratively with stakeholders from local communities and Indigenous communities to industry.

The goal is for the department to take a leadership role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of fish, forests and wildlife, while at the same time advancing responsible resource development and growing our economy now and in the future. These goals are not mutually exclusive and can be achieved to benefit all of Manitoba.

Since becoming the Minister of the Department of Natural Resources and Northern Development, I've been pleased to meet a variety of Manitobans across this great province. Travelling to meet with people in Indigenous communities and rural and northern areas has been critical for me to understand the needs of others in a variety of locations. I have also been meeting with the staff in this new department and it has been refreshing to see the commitment and dedication of our team members.

Listening to Manitobans is something my government and myself, as minister, have been doing, with great success. And this is something I will continue to do, doing forward. I am committed to listening to Manitobans and to stakeholder and industry groups to improve the services our department offers.

I want to highlight several priority areas of work in our department as a way to frame the opening of our discussion in committee today.

The Conservation Officer Service: I want to take an opportunity, first, to acknowledge the service of our conservation officers. These committed, responsible women and men are responsible for delivering natural resource law enforcement throughout the province.

Our officers are located in regional and district offices and work on the landscape across our province, from Churchill to Virden, and everywhere in between. They are directly involved in ensuring safety and security in provincial parks, dealing with problem

and dangerous wildlife situations and investigating concerns that are called in or reported by the public.

Conservation officers protect Manitoba's natural resources and keep our parks, protected spaces and remote areas safe for the enjoyment of all. My thanks goes out to our conservation officers for the great work that they do; not only in addressing unsafe hunting practices, but what they do with regard to ensuring that sustainable fishing is occurring and that quotas are managed responsibly. Their work in protecting our natural resources ensures future generations can one day go out and enjoy the same privileges that we do today, in beautiful Manitoba.

The Manitoba Wildfire Service: protecting the environment, our natural resources, is a key component of our department. Our wildfire service has been busy this year, battling a number of intense wildfires in Manitoba. I am proud of our firefighting crews and leaders who worked so hard all spring and summer, protecting Manitobans and property, ensuring we professionally and safely manage these dangerous situations.

I'm also proud that this year, our government continued last year's increase of 25 seasonal positions to increase resources for the wildfire season. This increase from last year is now solidified in the annual budgets going forward.

Our government is committed to the Manitoba Wildfire Service in ensuring personnel are hired, trained and work co-operatively with other agencies from rural municipalities to Indigenous communities to other provinces. The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, which is based in Winnipeg, is a cross-Canada organization that ensures provinces work co-operatively together, by sharing resources each year where required, depending on where the heavy activity is in the country.

I'm very pleased with this show of partnership across jurisdictions. We will continue to review the results of this past year and plan for next year's fire season over the winter.

Mineral exploration and development: I would like to speak now about economic development in our mining sector. Manitoba's untapped and under-explored mineral resource, along with its abundant renewable energy, makes the province an excellent jurisdiction for mineral exploration and investment.

Our Manitoba Geological Survey branch provides the fundamental public geoscience information to attract mining firms to Manitoba. Our Mining, Oil and

Gas Branch provides expertise to ensure permits are reviewed carefully and then approved efficiently.

We have developed a permitting office in our Business Development Services Unit to ensure we reach optimal levels of efficiency and effectiveness in our work, so we can ensure Manitoba capitalizes on the tremendous opportunities for mineral development which is so vital in building our northern economy.

Forestry and peatlands: moving to forestry, Manitoba's forest section-sector provides an opportunity to strengthen our northern and rural economies. In recent years, forest product markets have experienced a major upswing. Existing industry has demonstrated a surge in capital investment and there's potential for new industry development.

The department is actively working with industry and Indigenous nations to build a resilient and inclusive forest sector that is poised for growth. We are working collaboratively with First Nations to increase participation in and share benefits from the forestry sector. Historic memorandums of understanding have been signed with five First Nations to date, and we are in discussions with other nations to share timber dues revenue.

We are working closely with industry to ensure stability and certainty in wood supply, which is important for continued capital investment. Major initiatives include supporting partnerships and assisting with the navigation of regulatory requirements.

Consultation and reconciliation: we have been working with our Indigenous partners to rebuild relationships and increase participation in all natural resource sectors to ensure everyone benefits. Our government is committed to meaningful consultation processes and renewing our relationships with Indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnerships.

In closing, there are many ongoing activities and critical priorities for the department. We are committed to building partnerships and continuing our ongoing discussions and consultations with individuals, industry and Indigenous communities across Manitoba. I'm excited to continue working co-operatively with all stakeholders to fulfill our mandates and priorities.

In closing, I want to state again that this is simply a small sampling of our various activities and programs, and I look forward to exploring additional

details as we discuss our departmental budget Estimates.

Thank you.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the minister for those comments.

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

**Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook):** Thank you to the minister for those opening comments.

And I must say—and congratulations, I guess, is the—kind of the first formal time to be able to say congratulations to your new appointment to the ministerial position. I must say, we were left with some hope that, in fact, this was going to be a very positive appointment and that we're looking forward to working together in a positive way.

And when I say we, I'm not just referring to ourselves as the official opposition, but I'm also hearing those kind of encouraging words from Manitobans from all over Manitoba in hopes that there will, perhaps, be a more positive impact in regards to how Manitobans are engaged and supported throughout Manitoba.

And, of course, when we talk about natural resources and northern development, natural resources, of course, is vastly in the central northern part of the province, more so than in the south, and northern development obviously speaks for itself.

So, it's very encouraging to see, hopefully, your will to be able to have discussions in an open way on a number of different files, a number of different categories.

You had mentioned fire suppression, mining, conservation officers, inclusions, consultation strategies and such, so I hope throughout—not just today, but not just the Estimates process, but throughout your term as minister—that, in fact, that really—that open-door policy, that willingness to work together with all of stakeholders, rights-holders in Manitoba can actually come to fruition, and we can have some meaningful dialogue in how we best encourage, support Manitobans in all different ways, economically for sure.

\* (14:50)

I firmly believed, and myself, kind of, from northern central Manitoba also, really believed that Manitoban is a real have province in regards to the natural resources that we have. We have an abundance

of forestry and water, a lot of natural resources that I think we need to really not just take advantage of, but really enhance, grow and secure for future generations.

So, thank you for those opening comments and I think we'd like to get started.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the member for that statement.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 21 point—*[interjection]* 25.1(a) contained in resolution 25.1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us at the table.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Bushie:** I was wondering, can the minister undertake to give a list of all technical appointments in his department, including names and titles?

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable minister of conservation—oh, sorry—*[interjection]* Natural Resources and Northern Development.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Thank you very much to the member from Keewatinook for his opening comments, there. I certainly look forward to working collaboratively with all Manitobans, all stakeholders and with my fellow members across the floor, as well, for the good of Manitoba. I think I've pledged that to you personally, and I'm looking forward to continuing to collaborate with you as we move forward.

Yes, certainly, we'll certainly provide the information you required. We'll provide it to you.

**Mr. Bushie:** Can the minister undertake to give an organizational chart that lists all the employees in the program areas?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I'd just direct the member's attention to the supplement to the Estimates of expenditure. The org chart is printed within that, so it's full public disclosure. So—and, you know—so I think that—is that what you're looking for? If that, it's there.

Thank you.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, just to be clear, then, the org chart that was provided in the Estimates book, then; that's the list of all the employees in their program areas?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Well, this organizational start-chart goes down to the ADM level. There's names listed there. Below that, there's no names listed in the remainder of the department once you get past the ADM level, but you can see all the names here at the ADM level.

**Mr. Bushie:** Can the minister undertake to get all—a list of all the current vacancies in the department?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I'm told that by the end of November, we have to proactively disclose all our vacancies in each individual department in government, and that will be disclosed.

I can say to you today that we have approximately 120 vacancies within the department. We have a total of approximately 450 positions total. So, 120 of them are vacant.

We're certainly trying to fill those positions with good people. We're not intentionally leaving them vacant. We're trying to fill them. We have departments that we greatly need more help in and we're trying to fill them on a daily basis.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, can the minister expand a little bit more on what the efforts are to try and fill the vacancies? Because at 120 out of 450, that's a 25 per cent vacancy rate.

Just wondering if the minister can expand on what he means by trying to fill.

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Nesbitt:** The member will understand that this department was just formed in January, so we haven't had—we inherited a lot of vacancies when the department was carved out of ARD. And so, we've been working with the Public Service Commission to fill these vacancies as quick as possible.

I think the member also needs to keep in mind that some of these positions are highly specialized in the mining and the forest industries. And he'll understand that the labour shortage across Canada and indeed, across North America, there's a lot of competition for talent.

So, I just want to assure the member that we want people in these positions as quickly as possible. Our renewed focus in mining the critical minerals here in Manitoba, we're very interested in providing support to industry as much as we can.

So we will—we are attempting to fill these positions just as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Bushie:** Can the minister, then, provide a list of exactly what those job titles are of the 120 vacancies?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** It's pretty hard to provide a list because that chains on a—changes on a daily basis, I think. Like I've said, a lot of these positions are highly specialized; resource technicians, you know, people who may work in our minerals department in the geographical-geological survey department where they need to have special skills.

So, I don't think it would do any justice to give you a list of positions today and then have that change a week from now. I think that, you know, our Conservation Officer Service, for example, is 20 per cent short of people as well. There's just no people to hire right now.

So, I just want to give you the insurance that these positions aren't vacant by my accord. I want to fill them as quickly as possible. I want our government to be fully staffed so we can do the good work of protecting the natural resources and working with communities to expand on natural resources for economic development.

**Mr. Bushie:** With all due respect, I mean, the 120 vacancies that were announced today, out of 450, I mean, that was announced today and I'm sure it was still vacant yesterday. So, in regards to it changing on a daily basis, and it's—I'm getting the impression then that it's—I really don't understand how that changes on a daily basis.

So, let's pick today for example. And let's use today as the benchmark, then, to put a list of those 120 vacancies and those job titles today. Can we do that?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Again, I don't think that giving you exact titles of positions is going to help you at all. For example, we could hire three or four people today and we could have a couple retire; positions and spots will change on a daily basis.

We're—here are some job descriptions that we're hiring for: policy analyst, clerks, conservation officers, resource technicians, foresters, geologists and administrative officers. So, you know—and some of those will work through different departments depending on where the vacancies is.

But that's the general of what we're short, is those types of people.

**Mr. Bushie:** I'm just wondering—I just find it odd. I mean, you were talking about 120 out of 450 vacancy spots and then not being able to truly allocate exactly what those positions are. So I'm just curious, how do you expect to fill them if it's changing on a daily basis? And if it's changing on a daily basis—then led to believe—then if you hire 10 today, 10 are leaving tomorrow and it's always going to be at 120.

So, I think for Manitobans, they would like to actually see what list that is and that list of vacancies. Like, you're talking about trying to recruit for highly specialized areas, highly specialized workers in various positions within the department, but yet you're talking about it being fluctuating, like as if somebody's being hired today and, you know, they're immediately being—that vacancy is always staying there.

So, by the discussion that's having here and kind of the argument you're bringing forward is that you almost expect it to constantly remain at 25 per cent, at 120 vacancy rate.

So, I'm just wondering, then, again, can you provide the list of those job titles as of today, of the 120 vacancies?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I guess that all the positions we're hiring for are posted on the Manitoba job opportunities website. You can certainly go there and see on a daily basis what positions we're hiring for. I'm just committing to you that we have a 120 vacancies approximately. I mean, it could be 115 tomorrow; it could be 122.

I think that, you know, those jobs, when they come open, are posted. We're trying to fill them as quickly as possible. We need the staff. We need the people in the positions to do the work.

**Mr. Bushie:** Thank you for that response.

So then, could the minister then say, at the vacancy rate of 120, how long has that number fluctuated within the 120 range?

\*(15:10)

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, I just want to reinforce this department was formed in January. We were giving an allotment of employees, 441 employees at the time. There was a lot of vacancies—high number of vacancies included in that amount that were given to us.

The budget that we—the '22-23 budget, here, if you look in the supplement to Estimates of expenditure, on page 22, point nine, our key initiative

is increase the rate of filling vacant positions for critical services to ensure a reasonable work-life balance.

So, I mean, given that the first few months of this department's being in existence, we were still in COVID; it was hard to hire people. People were still staying at home. I'm committing to you that we're hiring employees as quick as we can.

For example, we've hired eight new people in the last little while. We've hired three new people in our consultation unit—that's a high priority for us, is—you know, to get people in our consultation unit, to talk about forestry, to talk about mining with our First Nations partners.

So, again, our commitment is to hire, fill these positions, so we can get the work done that Manitobans want us to do.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, the minister is committed, then, to filling vacancies as quickly as possible. So, could he provide, then, benchmarks as to when—and a timeline as to when, percentage-wise, they may be reduced? For example, you're at 120, and understanding it fluctuates a position here and there, but when will it be down to, you know, 100 or 80 or 60, for example?

I'm just wondering if the minister can provide benchmarks to be able to see exactly when they're going to be filled.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I certainly don't want the member to get the impression that we're not hiring. In the first five months of this fiscal year, we've hired 225 people. Now, we still have a 120 vacancies. So, we've hired 225—I mean, obviously, we've lost some to retirements or moving on to other jobs.

It's a competitive, competitive industry right now in the mining and forestry industry. There's people looking for employees all over Canada, so we're competing with Canada and sometimes with the US, as well.

So, 225 people we've hired in five months and, you know, I'm certainly not prepared to set benchmarks here today; I think that's not good for any of us. But I just want to give you my assurance we're going to hire people to fill these positions as quick as possible because we can't get the work done to the way we want to do it without these people.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, a little further to that, then: Has the minister, then, provided training opportunities and, in particular, for northern Manitoba and then people living in northern Manitoba, to actually fill these

vacancies? And what kind of recruitment and retention strategy for northern Manitobans to fill these positions is he undertaking?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, I'm told, pre-COVID, we would run career fairs in the North often to try to promote the positions we have available. Obviously, COVID didn't allow us to do that.

I—again, some of these positions are more specialized and I—you know, obviously we'd love to hire specialized people from First Nations in the North to do those types of jobs, but realistically, they're not available a lot of times.

So, we are working, certainly, with our First Nation communities and I'm pleased to have travelled up to four, five First Nation communities, meet with the chiefs, develop a relationship with them, working with them on forestry initiatives, ensuring that their citizens have the ability to participate in programs. We're training people in these communities for tree-planting programs, reforestation programs. Our wild-fire service will hire people, when available, in situations up north as well.

So, I think that it's—the jobs are available to everyone and I think that, you know, we'll likely get back to career fairs as we move forward.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, again, the minister referred to the vacancy positions, some of the positions and—leading us to believe that most of the positions are actually almost highly specialized positions, so that's why the lack of being able to fill those positions.

So, with that being said, I think it's very important, then, that the 120 positions actually be undertaken to provide those job descriptions to us and those job titles to the committee, so that the committee can actually see that those actually are the accurate figures and accurate descriptions as to what the vacancies are.

So, the other question, then—and the minister also referred to being open to everyone. So is it, then, the minister's assertion, then, that currently, right now, today, the department has 120 job positions posted?

\* (15:20)

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Again, I think the member will appreciate this department's been here for nine months. We inherited a lot of vacancies. We've filled 225 of them. A lot of filling vacancies requires classification changes, things like that. The positions that came over maybe weren't exactly classified the way we need them in our department.

Again, you can go to the job website and see exactly what positions are posted. I can't commit to you that there's 120 posted today. I mean, there could be 125 posted today, and 90 posted tomorrow, depending on which vacancies are being filled over time, here. So, that's back to my point that the number changes on a daily basis and giving you a list of positions today doesn't mean they'll be here tomorrow.

And as to the training part: again, as I said, you know, I think I listed six or seven different classifications where we're looking for people. That type of training maybe can't be offered locally. It has to be offered, you know, at post-secondary education, perhaps even, you know, university level and things, when you get to geologists and stuff like that.

So again, you know, we're certainly working with First Nations where we can, and we're providing opportunities where we can.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, again, I'll go back to not looking for the window. We're looking for them today. I mean, the minister is also here with his staff, so I'm sure the number is readily available as to what the job postings—the number of job postings for the department are today. We've thrown out the number of 120 out of 450; inheriting 441; hiring and bringing over 225.

So again, using today, then, as the benchmark, what are the post—what are the job postings that are in the department as of today?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I certainly want to be very open with the member and will undertake to provide you with a list of open positions, as of today, at tomorrow's Estimates. We'll go to the job site and we'll find the open positions. Like I said before, some are in the process of being reclassified, some are in the process of being posted, so, when I say there's 120 vacancies, you may not see 120 on the listing we provide you with tomorrow.

I just wanted to go back to Indigenous employment: 26.3 per cent of our department is Indigenous right now, as of March 31st, and that's in the supplement book as well. I think we're pretty proud of that and, you know, as a lot of our activities happen in the North where there's a high percentage of Indigenous population, having Indigenous people working for us is very, very good.

It's good for the First Nations. It's good for us as well. They know the people, they know the land. And, you know, it's certainly—we're big on reconciliation and, you know, getting as large of an Indigenous

component that wants jobs and can do the jobs is a priority for this department.

**Mr. Bushie:** Okay, so that's a pretty good segue into my next question, then.

The minister has spoken about reconciliation and the commitment—and his department's commitment to reconciliation, but as per the Estimates book, the percentage of department employees who are participating in reconciliation training, target is only 10 per cent.

Why is that the case?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Is the member talking about page 22 of the supplement, where our percentage of the department employees who have completed the mandatory respectful workplace training?

Our target is 90 per cent for this year. That's our target, since creating a new department.

Is this—is that what you're talking about? Our target of 90 per cent?

**Mr. Bushie:** No, if you look one page previous, page 21, percentage of department employees who participate in reconciliation training—I didn't refer to respectful workplace there, I referred to reconciliation training—and your target is 10 per cent.

Why is that?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** In talking to my staff here, they think the number has been reversed; it should be 90 per cent in there. That's the—you know, we pride ourselves in reconciliation. I mean, the large part of our department deals with First Nations on a daily basis. You know, we're certainly key—a key focus of the department is reconciliation on resources and things like that.

So, that's the best answer I can give you, is that that target should be 90 per cent, the same as it is for the respectful workplace.

**Mr. Bushie:** So then, the minister's assertion, then, is that the Estimates book is wrong?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** It's one of those yes or no answers. Yes, it's wrong and we're actively working to go towards that 90 per cent target.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, it does beg the question, line by line, what else is wrong in the book in terms of the numbers being off then?

So, when you say reversed, so then, the percentage of department employees who participate in reconciliation, then, is supposed to be 90 or is it supposed to be 10, 15, 20? What is the actual number, then? *[interjection]*

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable First Minister—oh, sorry, not first.

The honourable minister.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Sorry. Yes, it should be 90 per cent in there.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, why is the number and the target 100 per cent?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I think the member can appreciate with staff turnover, having 100 per cent rate for reconciliation training or any type of training is unachievable. As those people are hired, it take time to train them, especially field staff. We may hire people in the North that we have to bring into Winnipeg for reconciliation training. So, that's the discrepancy.

We're looking for 90 per cent. You know, depending on the staff turnover and things like that, it could be higher, could be a bit lower.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, honestly, I expected the simplest answer to be yes, we're targeting 100 per cent. That would—should be the goal, to target 100 per cent in terms of reconciliation training, and not say, you know, they're so—you know, they're far away, so it's—we don't want to be inconvenienced with being able to have somebody attend something that's so important, not just to this department but to government overall.

So, I would think that the target would be 100 per cent, but it is what it is, from the minister's response.

\* (15:30)

But getting back to the fact that the number is wrong: is there anything else wrong in the book, in terms of numbers and percentages and—or has the book been—the Estimates book been verified?

I assume, then, that the department—and, I mean, albeit being a new department, but that's only—that can only be used as an excuse for so far. Being able to say that, you know, reconciliation—and the minister referred to how important that is to him and him personally—that that was, for lack of a better term, a misprint.

Or was it the actuals and can we expect, then, a new Estimates book with the actual correct figures and percentages?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I just want to reinforce to the member that, certainly, our target is a hundred per cent of reconciliation training. We're just saying it's not feasible because of hirings, hiring today. You hire someone today, they don't have reconciliation training, to say that you're going to have 100 per cent is not there. So, that's why we're printing 90 per cent. That's the reason.

But, obviously, our whole of government is committed to reconciliation and this department works with First Nations. They need to understand the principles of reconciliation. So, you have my commitment that we're doing everything we can with staff to ensure they have reconciliation training as quickly as possible.

As for the error in the book, we'll see that an error page gets issued, correcting this incident. I—you can appreciate this is a new department. I wasn't the minister when this book was issued. I'm only going by what my staff tells me now.

And I have full confidence in my staff that—and I think, I would hope, that you have full confidence that we're proceeding with reconciliation with all our staff as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Bushie:** So understanding, then, that the change-over and the kind of—the response given by the minister is, in fact—it's just a matter of timing in terms of being able to actually have everybody participate in some type of reconciliation training for whatever position they may be.

So, then, is it the goal of the minister, then, to have reconciliation training be a mandatory part of employment within its department?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, the member will understand that HR policies are set by the Public Service Commission. And as a department, we'll follow them. I think Minister Helwer's department will be coming up here in Estimates. I think you could ask him that question about reconciliation training and how mandatory it is and things like that.

I'm committing to you that our department ensures our employees receive reconciliation training as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, is it fair to say, then, that the minister around the Cabinet table will actually recommend

and—that employees in this minister's department will, in fact, have mandatory reconciliation training?

Understanding it may be the protocol comes from a different minister's department, but will the minister advocate and ensure and lobby that the Minister of Labour to ensure that reconciliation is a mandatory part of hiring in his department?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I think I've impressed upon the minister that—or the member, sorry—that reconciliation is a key priority of mine. It's been that since I was appointed minister in June and I will continue to advocate for reconciliation training within my department.

I think that, you know, as far as recommending at Cabinet or anything like that, I mean, I think that's something that—I think you need to address that with Minister Helwer moving forward as for reconciliation in other departments.

But this department deals with a lot of First Nation issues and a lot of Indigenous peoples, and you have my commitment and our department's commitment that we will ensure our employees receive reconciliation training so they can do their job to the best of their ability.

**Mr. Bushie:** Has the minister received a mandate letter from the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson)?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** If the member will look on page 15 of the supplement again there, I think it has our score-cards, priorities and objectives. I've been working with that.

I've also been working with the Throne Speech. I think if you go back to the Throne Speech, you'll see some of the priorities set for Natural Resources, which I've been following since I've been appointed minister.

The Premier certainly reinforced our commitment to mining here in Manitoba, so obviously, that's a key priority for our government. The forestry MOUs that we signed with the First Nations and continue—will be continuing to sign, moving forward, are certainly a sign of reconciliation as well.

So, again, it's an economic development focused with our First Nation Indigenous partners in the North, ensuring that they share in resource revenues moving forward, and that we create an attractive investment climate here in Manitoba for industry to come to Manitoba and do business.

**Mr. Bushie:** So has the minister, again, received a mandate letter from the Premier?



**Mr. Nesbitt:** Well, obviously, I meet with the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and, you know, when I was first appointed minister, I met with the Premier and, you know, we talked about priorities, her priorities, and she obviously wanted to know what my priorities were and I think they align.

And, you know, moving forward, I've used this department strategy map, the balanced scorecard here, together with our announcements since then, in terms of mining and forestry.

So, I have a road map, I know where this department needs to go and I look forward to continuing working with my staff to do good things for this department and Manitobans in general.

**Mr. Bushie:** So then, I assume that, then, to be a no, that you did not actually receive a mandate letter from the Premier. I've asked that a couple times now and it's pretty much a simple yes or no, and it's clear that it's, then, a no.

I'm just wondering if you've had any discussions prior to accepting this department's—the ministerial role in this department. Did you have any direction or any communication with the former minister, Scott Fielding?

\* (15:40)

**Mr. Nesbitt:** As the member will know, Minister Fielding was a very dedicated MLA, a very dedicated minister and as a rural MLA, his office was always open to me to talk to, talk to him about. So, you know, so, since he was appointed the minister—when he was appointed the minister, I had several informal discussions with the minister about the Conservation Officer Service and, perhaps, you know, how it should be revitalized and things like that.

But, no, I didn't have any formal meetings with Minister Friesen. Minister Friesen resigned as a minister. Minister Lagimodiere was acting minister for three or four days there until my appointment. So, I had no formal meetings with Minister Friesen.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, then, I'm a little confused, but I guess we'll—I get where you're—who you're referring to.

So, then, to be clear, then, since you've taken over your role and been appointed minister, you've had no communication with Scott Fielding on this file?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Before we continue on, I'd just like to advise that we should be using minister's portfolios and not their names in discussion. But, the First Minister. Sorry—not the—the honourable minister.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, sorry, on the answer to my last question: I shouldn't have said the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen). I meant the minister of Natural Resources. I had no formal conversations with the minister of Natural Resources before I was named to the position, no formal meetings with him, or after.

So, just—repeat your last question, if you would.

**Mr. Bushie:** I'm just wondering if the minister, since he has been appointed to be minister of Natural Resources, Northern Development, if he's had conversations about this file with Scott Fielding after he's been appointed minister?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** No, I haven't had any meetings with the former minister.

**Mr. Bushie:** Can the minister provide us with a list of northern communities, including the First Nations, he's visited since he took on his role as minister?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I'll just start out by saying I haven't been to as many First Nations as I would like to or as I've been invited to. Time just hasn't allowed me to do that.

As you can appreciate, becoming a new minister in June, I certainly had a lot of briefings and things like that. It was like drinking through a fire hose for a few weeks there, trying to get briefed up on all the departments and things.

And I have had the opportunity to travel north, and if the member really is interested, I could provide him with a list of all the First Nations. But, you know, I've been up to Norway House. I've met with Chief Anderson up at Norway House, had an excellent tour of the community.

There's other First Nations up there I've met with. I've been up there to sign agreements with forestry. I've met with First Nations at the mining conference in Toronto, at the PDAC mining conference there. I've had a day full of meetings with First Nations people there. I've had First Nations chiefs and their representatives into my office for meetings.

So, we can provide you with a list of the First Nations, but, you know, there's a number of them I've met with personally, there's some I've talked to on the telephone and then some I've met at a conference, so.

**Mr. Bushie:** Yes. So, to be clear, yes, I am interested in the actual list that you have for the northern communities and First Nation communities that you've visited.

So, can the minister provide us with that, please?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** As I said, you know, I certainly want to visit all the First Nations that are involved in forestry and mining moving forward and, indeed, any First Nation in the North because, you know, my portfolio is Northern Development as well as Natural Resources, so I'm concerned about the economic welfare of all the First Nations in the North.

And I love hearing from leadership, talking to them, hearing what their concerns are and how us as a government might be able to help.

You know, I've met with First Nations in western Manitoba, west-central Manitoba, northern Manitoba. Like I say, there's many more I want to go to, there's many invitations sitting on my desk, but legislative duties, you know, prevent you from going, as much as you want to travel.

I think that's the great thing about this portfolio is you represent a vast amount of Manitoba and everybody wants to talk to you, wants to visit with you and, you know, it never fails; you talk to someone and they say, well, come up and visit me. And, you know, I've pledged to visit as many First Nations as I can. I mean, time is the only constraint.

So going forward, I endeavour to visit all the First Nations in the North.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, again, can the minister provide us with a list of the communities that he, in fact, has visited?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, I do have a few in front of me here that—you know, again, I couldn't list them off the top of my head. I've been to Norway House, like I said; Misipawistik; Chemawawin; Opaskwayak; Sapotaweyak; Wuskwi Wusipihk [*phonetic*]; Mosakahiken. I've been to Keeseekoowenin in western Manitoba; I've been to—I've talked to Manto Sipi, I've been invited to go up there; Red Sucker Lake. There's a number of them.

And again, there's other ones I've met with that I just can't recall the names for right now—Grand Rapids, I've been there as well, so.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, can the minister, then, undertake to provide us with that list?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I think I just gave you the list of the ones that I visited and, again, there's been several I've met with either in my office here or in—at the prospector 'nevelopment'—developers mining conference in Toronto, we had a daylong meeting with a number of First Nations there, as well.

So, I've endeavoured to give you all the names of the ones I've met with. I know there's likely just as many, again, that I haven't met with, but I will meet with them moving forward.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, we're taking an awful long time on a pretty simple question.

Then again—so, the minister, then, is saying you mentioned the ones already, so is that the all-inclusive list or are you willing to provide the committee, and undertake to provide the committee with the list of all the communities that you have visited?

\* (15:50)

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Well, as you are aware, the former minister met with First Nations, as well. So, I mean, I can't commit to how many First Nations he's met with. I've told you the First Nations I've met with.

And I just want to say that, you know, when I've been up North, I've advised your colleagues that I'm visiting First Nations and I've welcomed them to join me at these First Nations, as well. And, you know, the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin) joined me in The Pas for the signing with OCN that day.

And so, you know, it's always a pleasure to travel to the North and visit these First Nations. And I know the member's curious about who I visited, so I've listed them all; I'm being quite open in who I visited. And I'm pledging to visit as many more as I can as time permits.

**Mr. Bushie:** Okay, I guess we can always go back and visit Hansard to the last couple of responses and look at the quote-unquote extensive list that was mentioned, which wasn't very many, in regards to what the communities that were visited.

But again, we asked that question a number of times and it was a pretty simple answer, I would think, to be able to undertake the list of communities that were visited.

But I do have some questions on fire suppression. Can the minister provide us with the number forest fire attack crews that are stationed in northern Manitoba?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Does the member mean how many crews we have at the present time, or during the active fire season?

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, let's use June as the benchmark for that, June of 2022.

How many crews were active in that time?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I just want to say I'm very proud of our Wildfire Service. We have a very highly trained service, and, you know, they're ready to respond in a moment's notice in northern Manitoba, or across Canada if they're called on by their counterparts.

We had 40 highly trained attack crews across the province in June, operating out of seven bases. And there's 20-plus satellite bases where necessary, depending on the fire demands.

**Mr. Bushie:** Is that 40 times a crew of four or crew of five?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I'm told four or five, depending on the crew.

**Mr. Bushie:** Can the minister undertake to provide us with a list of where those 40 crews are allocated to, which communities, which bases?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, while they're compiling that list, I'd just like to say that, you know, I had the opportunity to visit the base in The Pas this summer, and also had the—went—had the opportunity to go up to Cold Lake, Sherridon base there, and then go up to Pukatawagan to see the cleanup of the fire there, I guess, the aftermath after the fire.

And again, I just want to reinforce the dedication of those crews and how proud they are to be a wildlife firefighter.

To answer your question: those crews are mobile. They can be deployed anywhere, wherever the greatest risk is; they can be pre-positioned there, if there's a greater risk in a certain area. So, they're very mobile. Those—on any given day, they would be in—they could be in different places, depending on the fire risk.

**Mr. Bushie:** I guess the question is, where are they based out of? For example, Bissett, for example. How many of those crews would be based out of Bissett, just as an example, using Bissett as an example?

So, understandably if the fire activity's greater, in a greater area, they are mobile. I understand that, I mean, we fully understand that.

But in normal times, where would their quote unquote home base be for whatever crews they may be? So, if they're forty crews, how many crews are based out of what they would call a home base, I guess?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I'm just wondering, maybe we could move on to another question; our staff's trying to get that exact answer for the Bissett location for you. We'll—you know, if you want to ask that question

further on, if you want to move on now rather than just waste time here.

**Mr. Bushie:** And I was just using Bissett as an example.

I'm just looking to see which bases have which crews, for example. And I—again, I just used Bissett as example because that's—really that's just in my backyard, so I used that as an example, to see which crews are based in, whether it be in The Pas, whether it be in Bissett, whether it be in—down south; just which crews are allocated to which base in quote unquote normal times.

I mean, if there was an active fire that required additional resource to be allocated within the province, not during that time. Just a matter of which bases have which.

So, if we can undertake the—to receive that list at some point. *[interjection]*

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable minister—oh, the honourable minister.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Yes, we'll endeavour to get that information for you.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, the number of 40 was mentioned over seven bases, 40, and I guess it fluctuated between a five-person crew versus a four-person crew.

I'm just wondering, the number 40 then with crews and the overall net persons that would be there: What is that in comparison to last year? Is that a net increase in people, or is that a net loss?

\* (16:00)

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

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, as I said in my opening statement, you know, last year was a terrible year for wildfires in northern Manitoba, as you will well know. We added 25 new positions last year to the service, so that's approximately five to six crews. We maintained those 25 positions this year.

So, again, that's our commitment to the North, to the wildfire services: that we have crews ready and on standby, should the need arise.

**Mr. Bushie:** I'm just wondering—I'm looking for clarification, then, when the minister refers to last year.

Are you referring to the last year fire season, meaning this past summer, or the previous year?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** No, the previous year, the spring-summer-fall of 2021.

We added 25 positions there, and we maintained those positions in this year's budget—so, for the '22 fire season.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, are there any vacancies within that—so, then the number, then, is—sorry, 40 crews times five—potentially 200, or potentially 160 to 200, depending on four-to-five-member crews.

So, is there any vacancies in that—in those positions right now?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, I've already said that, you know, we have 40 crews, so the member agrees 160 to 200 firefighters, somewhere in that range, depending on the complement of the crew. If we have a vacancy for—and we can't fill it right away, we can bring in retired firefighters from the North. We endeavour to have these crews fully staffed during fire season.

And, I mean, I think that if the fire season gets very extreme, we can access our resources from across Canada, as well, to bring in extra crews to help us attack the major fires. Because, again, as you well know, there's more than one fire burning at the same time, often.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, how many retired members were brought in last year?

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I think the member will appreciate that our Wildfire Service is a dedicated bunch.

You know, we start each spring with 40 crews. We don't intend to have vacancies during the summer. You know, it happens from time to time. We'll bring in a retired person if necessary. They might be in for a week. You know, there's various—and in various places as well. So, I don't think it's fair to say how many retired firefighters we brought in last year.

I think we're a forward-looking department. We're looking at Estimates moving forward here. We're committing to have a fully staffed wildfire crew with 40 crews based in those five bases across the province.

And, you know, we're fully equipped to battle fires in Manitoba. But should the labour shortage arise for whatever reason, or the number of fires increase, that's why we have partnerships with other provinces, so we can share resources with them.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, first and foremost, I mean, we shouldn't be looking to out of province to be able to bring in any kind of workers to assist. We should be

able to, first and foremost, look at Manitobans to be able to do that.

When it comes to—and it's not specific to the minister's department by any means—there is always a challenge with recruitment and retention for northern communities, whether it be in health care, education and in this case, the fire service.

And knowing also, personally, a lot of people that are in this line of work, does the minister actively have any strategy to recruit and retain out of the local communities for the fire service in the local area?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I just kind of want to take exception to the member's comment about we shouldn't be relying on other provinces. We don't rely on other provinces on a day-to-day basis or week-to-week basis, but if we have a crisis, that's what mutual aid's about.

So, there's mutual aid in the wildfire service whereby, you know, we have a number of fires in Manitoba or a huge fire where we need more resources and personnel. That's why we have reciprocal agreements with our fellow provinces to bring people in. Manitoba's sent resources to other provinces before and we're not hesitant to bring them in if we need them.

So, I'm not sure that the member actually meant what he said there.

Mutual aid agreements are also in effect between municipal fire departments. You have a major blaze in a community, you can call in mutual aid from out and about. So, I would hope the member's not suggesting that we shouldn't partner with our other provinces on wildfire service mutual aid as well.

\* (16:10)

**Mr. Bushie:** Oh, I absolutely mean that Manitobans should be the first priority for employment in any case, whether it be emergency or otherwise. And it seems to be the—that the first go-to should not be actually to get outside of the province and ask for assistance from other provinces when we do have a number of people with a vast number of experiences in wildfire suppression in the North; in particular, in First Nation communities. There's a number of them, and I believe you would categorize them in previous years as EFFs.

That's something that's very prominent in our communities. And I have seen, and I have talked to a number and visited a number of communities where, when emergencies arise, they're actually left to not

even-called to assist in an emergency. But for the most part, they're not the first call.

So, I do absolutely mean that Manitobans should take the first priority to be able to assist.

So, the question was: Does the minister have an active engagement to recruit and retain people in northern Manitoba from the communities in northern Manitoba to participate in the fire suppression program?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, I think the—maybe the member and I are talking about two different things. You know, certainly, you know, we have major blazes where we need more qualified people to come in, we need more equipment; we're going to use mutual aid.

For the most part, we use EFFs when we can in northern Manitoba. If you look at the supplementary Estimates there, with the 26 per cent Indigenous employment, a large portion of that would be EFFs, firefighters in the North.

So, I mean, I think that recruiting's always a challenge, but where possible, we do use those people. We've increased wages to try to attract more people to the job as well. So, though—you will understand, I think, that the EFFs are used mainly in the cleanup and, I guess, non-initial attack. That's where our 40-member crews come in.

So, you know, we certainly endeavour to hire from—everybody from Manitoba. The mutual aid component is just brought in if, you know, if we have too many fires in Manitoba or too major a fire, like any other province would do.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, again, is there a strategy, then, to recruit and retain, even if you have, for example, the—if you wanted to almost stage it in terms of EFFs, even though for the most part—and I'm not sure if the member's familiar with EFFs themselves, but, I mean, they're very, very experienced firefighters in their own right.

So is there, then, a strategy, then, to retain a—perhaps a pool of employment so that when opportunities arise, there's already—you're not training somebody from step 1?

So, is there a recruitment strategy to actually have at the ready when vacancies occur so that there is a pool of local—and when I say local, I mean in northern communities, surrounding communities, whether or not they'd be in and around where the bases are located—but is there a strategy, then, to recruit and

retain from a pool within the communities to move them in to initial attack?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, yes, ideally we'd love to have a pool of EFFs, you know, across northern Manitoba that we can draw from, and we certainly have some that come back every year. But, you know, some of them move on to other opportunities.

I think we're certainly working with the federal government on training opportunities on First Nations to try to get people—and northern communities, to get people trained as firefighters so that they can be then employed by the Wildfire Service.

**Mr. Bushie:** Another question about the retention and recruitment, then.

For seasonal employees, has it been a standard 20 weeks or so, or is there—has there been a plan to perhaps extend that seasonal employment? And not just during a fire season or project fires.

But is there a plan, then, to extend seasonal employment so that you can, in fact, help recruit and retain by having that as a possible enticement to keeping somebody?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I think, as the member well knows, that the fire seasons can vary from year to year. The—you know, sometimes they tend to be longer, sometimes a bit shorter.

We keep—they're seasonal employees. We keep them employed as long as we need to. So, that's—you know, they're certainly appreciated for the time that they're there, and they understand when they're hired they're seasonal employees.

And, you know, some years the fire season might drag on by four to six weeks, but other years it might be done in the 20 weeks, as you allude to.

**Mr. Bushie:** I guess that was the question that I had, is being able to extend that.

And albeit, I mean, some are looking forward to that time off when their term may expire, but at the same time, perhaps it's just not worth it for them to be able to hold out to work for that, you know, four to five months or six months or seven months, if it gets extended to be that far.

So, just wondering about, then, a strategy to increase that, and is the minister open, then, to increasing those terms?

\* (16:20)

And we talk about a one-in-100-year event when it comes time to forest fires, and we seem to be having those every couple of years now, so it's almost becoming the norm and not the exception.

So, again, is the minister, then, opening—open to the issue of perhaps extending that seasonal employment on a permanent basis, whether it be by an additional four weeks or additional six to eight weeks? Is that something that the minister would look at in—to be proactive in regards to a recruitment and retention strategy?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So I'm told that, you know, a number of these are hired earlier in the spring, and then a fuller complement comes on in May when the fire season may start. We keep these people in place as long as necessary. Their contracts can be extended by two weeks, four weeks, depending on weather conditions.

Obviously, there's no point in—you know, they're seasonal positions; there's no point in keeping these people on when there's snow on the ground. So, you know, as far as the Wildfire Service goes per se, you know, they're on a contract basis for a certain amount of time, and they have the potential to be extended.

We've also found that some don't want the extensions when they get into the fall. They may have winter employment that they move on to. So it's not a—it's not one situation fits all, as well.

**Mr. Bushie:** Just wondering if the minister can commit to notifying the northern MLAs of wildfires in their constituencies in a timely manner, meaning as they happen?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Yes, certainly. Like, this year I did reach out to your colleague from Flin Flon on a couple of fires. He called me on a couple, and then I touched base with him, moving forward, on how they were progressing.

I think you're likely talking the moderate to major fires. There's hundreds of fires in a year. Often, they're burning in remote areas with no interest to anybody. Some of those fires we let burn.

So I guess you're talking about moderate to major fires that maybe might affect, you know, structures or people or things like that. I'll commit to letting one of your northern members know, and you could fan that out.

We also have a website that you can check, but granted, you're going to have check it to see where the fires are and what the situation is.

So—but, as the minister, I have no problem committing to giving you a call when I'm alerted to a major fire that's going to threaten a community.

**Mr. Bushie:** I appreciate that commitment, as long as that website's not Facebook, where we have to hear from somebody else in a community say that we're evacuating as of today, because that's actually what's been happening on a regular basis over the last couple years, is it's more community people saying there's something going on.

And we would like to hear that from the minister who, I assume, then, has communication with people with boots on the ground, as quickly as possible, because there is a number of different things, and a lot of times First Nations are kind of put off to federal responsibility. So, we hate to see something like that fall between the cracks, and those gaps need to be closed, especially when it comes time for people's safety.

And in regards to that, in regards to evacuation, I'm just wondering if—what kind of proactive measurements the department may have upcoming. And when I say that, in particular, about fireguards for communities, and if there's a plan for fireguards for all northern communities and maintenance of any fireguards that are currently existing in those communities.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, fireguarding of communities is the responsibility of the community or the First Nation. Our department works with communities and First Nations to provide assistance in fuel management, giving them all the specifics, perhaps, of what they should be doing, but the actual fireguarding is done by the communities.

We have a program called FireSmart that we utilize in talking to communities, working with them to try to get rid of some of the fuel that might fuel a fire and hurt their communities.

So, that work's ongoing every year with communities.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, if the responsibility of the fireguard is then with the community, does that mean, then, there is no assistance from the Province?

And is there any barriers that the Province will then put forth in regards to—for example—if the community wants to build the fireguard five kilometers away from the reserve boundary, will there then be no barriers and no opposition to the Province in regards to building that fireguard if the First Nation is absorbing that cost, whether it be for their own dollars

or federal dollars, or whatever it may be? Or is there going to be an issue with the Province saying, well, no; this is not—this is land that you can't use for—to protect your community?

\* (16:30)

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I certainly get where you're coming from with your question there. I haven't heard of any instances where that's arisen. We haven't been quizzed on any instances like that. It's maybe more of a Crown lands question.

You know, quite honestly, I think a request like that would be considered based on the merits of it with a particular community. So, I mean, certainly, it makes sense to me that the fireguard might not be right on the edge of the community, might be further out.

So, I think that that's certainly something we can endeavour to look into, and do you have any instances of situations where that might have developed—oh, sorry. Mr. Chair, does the member have any instances where that may have arisen?

**Mr. Bushie:** Yes. There's a number of different circumstances where communities have tried to do various activities, fireguards being one of them, on lands that were outside of their—and I don't like to use the term reserve boundary, but outside of that boundary, in regards to kind of opposition from exploration developments, claims holders on various properties to say, you are on my territory.

So, I'm just wondering if, for the safety of the communities, is—would the minister entertain, then, kind of, mediating any kind of those discussions that may occur?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Yes. I think you have a commitment from this department that we'll work with the First Nations and work towards working with them and seeing their needs of their particular community, in terms of fireguards. I think Crown land use approvals come through our department. We have no instances, since I've been minister, where that's come up.

I'd be prepared to entertain requests from any First Nations that are looking to protect their community, and certainly look at the merits of the proposal.

**Mr. Bushie:** In regards to, again, to fire protection and the issue that arises from that, is the minister's department—or, does the minister's department have a protocol in place with Manitoba Hydro as to how to best expedite repairs of any serious disruptions that may occur?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Yes, well, our first concern is restoring hydro to the community once it's safe to do so. And we work alongside Manitoba Hydro to ensure that, you know, it's safe for their crews to go in to where the poles have been burned or toppled or whatever there.

In fact, up in Pukatawagan this summer, when I flew over the site there was a number of—number of poles down that was preventing hydro service to the community and diesel generators were being flown in. But I'm told our wildfire crews went in and cut landing pads for helicopters along the line so Hydro could get in easier to repair those lines as quick as possible.

So, we want to get all these communities back up and running as quick as possible, so we do work alongside Manitoba Hydro in a safe and responsible manner.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, similar to the question about information sharing back and forth between the minister's department and the northern MLAs, there has been issues where the northern MLAs, and we've had a number of—over the last couple years now, a number of power disruptions to the communities, evacuations and extended power lines down for a variety of different reasons, and first and foremost being wildfire.

So can the minister, then, also commit to informing us of that in terms of when power may be restored to various communities? Because I know MLAs, myself included, have had difficult time getting that information from Manitoba Hydro in a timely manner as to when power may be restored to the communities, and those are questions that not necessarily community people can call Hydro and ask about and get an actual response to that.

So, I'm just wondering if we can have some kind of protocol in place where that information sharing is very expedited?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, when a fire is under way, we're responsible for suppression of the fire. EMO takes over when there's, you know, a threat to communities and things like that. EMO provides daily briefings and EMO is responsible—you know, they're the overarching body that we work with, that Hydro works with, that MTI works with. All the required agencies of government is co-ordinated by EMO, so they would have briefings daily on this and they would brief community leaders, brief the media and things.

So, I would suggest that, you know, if you want to get copies of the—these briefings, you should likely

liaise with EMO moving forward. And, you know, we don't have those—that information available to you.

We're responsible for putting out the fires and ensuring it's safe to enter the communities.

**Mr. Chairperson:** I need to remind the honourable minister that responses should come to the Chair, so it should be the member, not you or your. That's just protocol here, so if the minister could please do that.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, thank you for that clarification, Mr. Chair. And I guess, the—it's—the confusion is because when an event happens, there is a lot of confusion and there is a lot of who do we contact.

And I think what we're looking for is perhaps for, like you had mentioned, being a newly developed department, is perhaps your department take a lead in being able to help navigate some of that and perhaps establish a protocol for communication for fire disruptions, for hydro disruptions and in some cases—and I mean, albeit it encompasses a number of different departments, as you mentioned with EMO, M-I-T, a number of different departments because there may be a fact where there is not an imminent, actual fire danger to a community, but perhaps the hydro line is down, perhaps the only access road to the community is then, you know, closed down for a number of different reasons, fire being one in this case.

\* (16:40)

So, I guess what we're asking—or, what I'm asking is to see if your department—if the minister's department can then take on, perhaps, developing a protocol.

As you mentioned—or, as the minister had mentioned that the—a new department, Natural Resources and Northern Development—and this is a developing issue in the North, so we're looking to see—maybe that's something that perhaps the minister is willing to undertake, to actually develop a protocol where there isn't—wherever you may call, I'll direct you to Hydro, I'll direct you to M-I-T, I'll direct you to EMO. Because there is a lot of confusion.

And I'm sure the minister's department that—and conservation, as well, over these past couple of years have received calls, perhaps calls that have come in the middle of the night, and I remember, just this past season, having those communications with the leadership in Bloodvein when communication just stopped, because there was now no Wi-Fi access, there was now no power in the community and nobody knew what was going on.

So, I think there has to be some kind of protocol developed, and whether it be developed through your office, or something that you advocate for within Cabinet—within government—to be able to develop those strategies going forward. I think that's something that would be very important and—for communities to have, going forward, so there is a streamlined strategy and communication, kind of line to go through.

So, I'm hoping the minister can undertake that at some point in time to be able to help—not really negotiate, but see if that strategy can be in place so there is no miscommunication going forward in emergency situations.

I do have a question about the fleet of water bombers in the province. In 2018, the Province privatized Manitoba's fleet of water bombers which has led to an increase in cost by several million dollars a year. In 2017-2018, the water bomber service cost \$14.6 million. But tenured contract reached with Babcock Canada increased the cost to around \$18.6 million a year.

Can the minister confirm whether \$18.6 million a year is still accurate?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** I apologize for not going through you when I'm talking to the member. I thought we were having like a little fireside chat here, and so—

**An Honourable Member:** No pun intended.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** No, no pun intended.

But I guess I will commit to you that I will certainly endeavour to see that the northern MLAs are—in fact, any MLA that's affected by wildfires is fully informed. As I've said before, the responsibility for a lot of that work revolves around the EMO. I'll work with my colleagues. We'll see if there's some type of email system that can be sent out to MLAs.

I know what it's like to be a rural MLA, and hearing stuff second-hand, it's not good. You should be the source of information for your constituents.

So yes, I will commit to you today that I'll try to get something in place for next year, so that the member can be fully aware of any situations that might develop in his or her constituencies, moving forward.

**Mr. Bushie:** I appreciate the response from the minister and the commitment to trying to help clear up any kind of potential miscommunication going forward.

As I'm sure you're aware, and I'm sure all MLAs are aware, in the Chamber and in their constituencies,



especially in rural and northern constituencies that oversee a vast geographic area, that there's a number of different leaderships in various communities and community members in communities that reach out. It's not a matter of we can all gather in one place and communicate with each other.

So it's important that leadership in various communities can feel they have, you know, a kind of go-to place to get the desired information—accurate information that you're looking for. So, I appreciate that.

I assume, then, the minister has got the water bomber question?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, we're not aware of any changes to the contract that was signed initially with Babcock for the water bombers.

Our role as Natural Resources is to pay the contract for the aircraft and utilize them for fire suppression. Also, I think you'll see in the Estimates there that we spent \$2 million upgrading those planes with better avionics and things like that. So that's our role.

We provided \$2 million in capital, but for any questions on the contract with those airplanes, you would need to speak to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) in Estimates or the minister of LCPGS when he comes up for Estimates.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, the minister has just mentioned then that his department is responsible for actually paying the contract.

So, I'm just wondering then: What is the value of that contract per year?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, the member is no doubt aware that the Manitoba government still owns these airplanes and we've entered into a service contract with Babcock to fly them and to maintain them, and the Province is responsible for the capital upgrades to them.

\* (16:50)

We're endeavouring to get you a number. It's built into the fire suppression costs. So, we're endeavouring to get you a number of what we pay per year for this service contract with Babcock for their pilots and for their maintenance.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, further to that number, then—and I appreciate the minister endeavouring to track down the actual accurate figures as to what the contract would be.

So, if they—the minister can, during that time, then, endeavour to give us the value of the contract when it was signed and what the value of the contract is today.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** While we're endeavouring to try to locate the information the member might be looking for, he had asked a question earlier about the initial attack bases. So, I don't know if you want to write them down as I read them here or do you just put them in memory? Okay.

So, Lac du Bonnet, Paint Lake, Weskusko [*phonetic*], Grace Lake, Bisset, Swan River and Marchand. That's where our initial attack crews are based out of.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, I guess the question was, how many crews at each base?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, I'm told the big bases are Lac du Bonnet, Paint Lake and Weskusko [*phonetic*]. The crew numbers vary at all these bases, and they could vary depending on the fire risk in the season as well.

So, the majority of the crews are based at those three—the greater number are based at those three is what I'm saying.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, just to clarify, then, I mean, they're all categorized as seasonal. So at the beginning of the season, how many crews are at each base?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, it's certainly weather dependent. So, in the spring you would evaluate the weather. It could be raining down south; there'd be less in Bissett and there'd be more moved up north. So, it's very weather dependent.

And, again, they're moved around during the season. There'd be no point in leaving a large number of crews in one place if it's rained there for a week, I think you'll agree with me

So, I guess it's evaluated every year, and it's—at the start of the season, and it's evaluated as the season progresses based on weather.

**Mr. Bushie:** We seem to be kind of dancing around the answer a little bit.

Like, obviously, if somebody is primarily based out of Pine Falls, Lac du Bonnet, Bissett, I mean, that is where they start their year. I mean, throughout the year, things change and they move around.

I guess the question is, what's the allocation for each base at the beginning of the year? You know, is

Lac du Bonnet four crews? Is Lac du Bonnet three crews, no crews or all the crews?

So, the question is, where do they start off with? And throughout the year, obviously, things change, people move around, if possible, but all of them know where their kind of home base is. And the question is: How many crews are at each base?

And if the minister can undertake to provide a list. Doesn't have to give the number right now, but if he can undertake to provide us with that list. At the beginning of the year, how many crews are at each base to start?

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Yes, I'll certainly endeavour to get that for you, but you have to keep in mind that could change next year. They could start at different places, you know, based on the weather conditions through the winter. But there should be no reason why we can't tell you where the crews were based earlier this year when the fire season started.

So, yes, I'll endeavour to get that for you for tomorrow.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, while we're in there—and I appreciate the minister's response and endeavouring to get us that information.

So, while we're also still waiting on the contract numbers and values of the water bomber, further to that question a little bit, if the minister can provide us with the number of water bombers in the fleet and the age of the planes.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** So, we have seven tankers in total. We have four CL-415s and three CL-215s.

I had the opportunity to visit the Clearwater base up at The Pas this year and visit the crew that was based there and have a good chat with the professional pilots, who are very proud of what they do. As—you've likely been near those aircraft. They're massive aircraft that can hold 36,000 pounds of water, scoop that up in under a minute. Very capable aircraft.

I also had the opportunity to go down to Gimli and visit the fire base there and see the tankers that they had on standby there as well. So, very good airplanes.

I can't give you the age of them at the present time, just that they're very well maintained. As you're likely aware, the age of the aircraft really doesn't matter as long as they're well maintained. I think that you'd be surprised at the amount of private aircraft out

there that are 30, 40, 50 years old, and you wouldn't really know it. It's all about the maintenance on them.

And I think that's part of the reason, you know, we certainly are contracting with Babcock. They're the professionals in maintenance. They have professional pilots too. They can keep crews on board, pilots for the whole season that they can utilize throughout the fleet, so.

**Mr. Bushie:** I appreciate the water 'bromas.' In fact, being an EFF in my younger days, being hit by a water bomber, so that's not the best experience ever.

And, again, if we can still categorize the age of the fleet, if that's possible, Mr. Chair.

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

## ROOM 255

### FINANCE

\* (14:40)

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

Before we resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Families, we have one small item of business to attend to.

It was brought to our attention that this section of the Committee of Supply passed two resolutions with incorrect dollar amounts during its last meeting. The reason the amounts were incorrect was administrative error. The dollar amounts in these resolutions were not updated after an errata, and revisions to the Estimates were tabled in May.

Specifically, an errata updated resolution 7.1 in the Department of Finance to reduce it from \$8,507,000 to \$7,684,000.

Also, a revision to the Estimates of Tax Credits reduced the amount of resolution of-33.1 from \$515,571,000 to \$114,071,000.

Therefore, this section of the Committee of Supply will need to reconsider these two resolutions, and I will now put the questions again.

Resolution 7.1: RESOLVED that—be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,684,000 for Finance, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 33.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$114,071,000 for Tax Credits, Tax Rebates and Fees, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Thank you.

**FAMILIES**

**Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski):** This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of Estimates for the Department of Families. Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas):** Previously in Estimates, we asked about family services providing MNP with a direct award for \$251,000 in June. The minister said that it was for an assessment tool regarding disability benefits.

Can the minister elaborate on what exactly this assessment tool is for?

\* (14:50)

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families):** I appreciate the member's question about the disability income support program and our efforts to roll that out successfully to all of our clients.

We have a two-part application process for bringing clients into the disability income support program. The first one is really about determining the severity of the individual's disability, and then the second is determining their functionality to ensure that they are suitable—they're being placed in the suitable category.

So, the assessment is incredibly important. We want it to be a community-centred—a client-centred approach to the assessment, and are really relying heavily on community to provide us with feedback and guidance and leadership in ensuring that we strike the right balance.

The consultation with community is happening right now. And determining the assessment—the appropriate assessment tool is really going to be critical to ensure the successful transition of all of our clients from the current EIA program into the new disability income support program.

**Mrs. Smith:** I thank the minister for that question; that was my next question, what was it going to be used for, so I don't need to ask that.

My last question: Can the minister explain why the assessment tool costs so much, and when will it be launched?

**Ms. Squires:** And I'm sure the member will agree that, in the end, we need to have a really complex tool that will really meet the needs of the most vulnerable Manitobans who will be enrolled in this program. And so, we really needed to invest in a tool that would help us transition clients and assess their individual needs so we can deliver person-centred programming for all of the clients.

So, in addition to contracting out experts to help us develop that assessment tool, we wanted also for them to really take a thorough look at a jurisdictional scan, ensure that we're including community input, which is sometimes costly and very timely, and come up with a made-in-Manitoba tool that will really fit the needs of the clients that we serve.

Because, in the end, we want a tool that is really reliable, so that everybody who deserves to be in the program will have a speedy entry into the program, will be assessed as quickly as possible to get in. And we also want it to have a consistent approach so that it doesn't matter where you live in the province in Manitoba, you will receive the same assessment and be eligible for the benefits that you're entitled to.

So, in Brandon, Thompson, Winnipeg—doesn't matter what office you go to, you're going to get the same level of assessment and, ultimately, be eligible for benefits that you need.

**Mrs. Smith:** Can the minister tell us when it'll be launched?

**Ms. Squires:** So, I can update the committee that phase 1 of the implementation of the new disability income support program will occur in phase 1. We don't need the assessment tool for phase 1 because these are individuals that will be coming into the program that already are in a prescribed class, meaning they're a CLDS client or another individual who's pre-screened. We know that they're coming in and they don't need a broader assessment.

When we do need the assessment tool in place, we'll be immediately following the phase 1 launch, and that's when we will be screening in Manitobans who are either on EIA but not in a prescribed class, or Manitobans who are not even currently on EIA but want to apply. We need that tool available for those assessments, and that will be available in late winter or early spring.

**Mrs. Smith:** Okay. I thank the minister for that answer.

I have no further questions.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Is there any further questions? If not—seeing none, we will now put forward question of the resolutions.

Resolution 9.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,334,480,000 for Families, Community Service Delivery, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 9.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$39,581,000 for Families, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 9.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$500,538,000 for Families, Child and Youth Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

\* (15:00)

Resolution 9.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$138,716,000 for Families, Housing, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 9.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,100,000 for Families, Transformation and Technology, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 9.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$45,000 for Families, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 9.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$15,000,000 for Families, Loans and Guarantees Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 9.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$67,000,000 for Families, 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 9.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 9.1.

At this point, we request the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

**Mrs. Smith:** I'd like to make an amendment.

Is this where I make the amendment, or wait until after? Or—I'd like to move a motion.

Okay, so I move that line item 9.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Families' (Ms. Squires) salary be reduced to \$21,000.

**Mr. Chairperson:** It has been moved by the honourable member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) that line item 9.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Families' salary be reduced to \$12,000. *[interjection]* Sorry, I would correct that: \$21,000.

The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on this motion? Seeing none, is the committee ready for the question?

**An Honourable Member:** Question.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Shall the motion pass?

**Some Honourable Members:** Yes.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Voice Vote**

**Mr. Chairperson:** All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

**Some Honourable Members:** Aye.

**Mr. Chairperson:** All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

**Mr. Chairperson:** In my opinion, the Nays have it.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Chairperson:** Carrying on. Resolution 9.1, then: RESOLVED that there granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,200,000 for Families, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Families.

**SPORT, CULTURE AND HERITAGE**

**Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski):** The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for Sport, Culture and Heritage.

So shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and the critics to prepare for the next set of Estimates? *[Agreed]*

I hear agreement on that. Committee recess.

*The committee recessed at 3:06 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 3:10 p.m.*

**Mr. Chairperson:** 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 Sport, Culture and Heritage.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Andrew Smith (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage):** I do.

\* (15:10)

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage.

**Mr. Smith:** It's a pleasure to be here. I'd like to welcome my colleagues and members opposite. It's an honour and a privilege, as the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage, to introduce the 2022-2023 budgetary Estimates for my department.

I'd first like to introduce the members of my department who are with me today: Jeff Hnatiuk, deputy minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage; Mike Sosiak, assistant deputy minister and executive financial officer, Administration and Finance; Veronica Dyck, assistant deputy minister of Culture and Sport Programs; Kathleen Epp, acting archivist of Manitoba; Julia Tetrault, director of Strategic Priorities. We also have Brad Robertson, the chief of

protocol, and Rob Marrese, executive director of Crown Services.

COVID-19 has disrupted the arts, culture and sport sectors over the past few years. And despite this impact, my department continues to adapt and evolve to address the changing needs of Manitobans. We recognize the challenges facing cultural organizations, artists, entrepreneurs, severely affected by the facility closures, programming, event cancellations and significant loss of revenues and jobs.

An initial investment of \$6 million allocated to the Manitoba Arts Council and the Manitoba Film and Music provided support to 175 arts and cultural organizations and professional music industry companies and 90 artists. In February, we announced the renewal of the \$6 million Arts and Culture Sustainability Funds. These funds will continue to help stabilize operations and support organizations in adapting to programs to ensure a more resilient and sustainable arts and culture sector.

Starting this year, we established a new arts and culture and sports community fund, providing enhanced support for capital projects and programming related to arts, culture and sport initiatives in communities right across our great province. A total of \$100 million will be invested over the next three years, including \$34 million in '22-23. This fund will address the needs across the sector for capital projects, capacity building and community celebrations in Manitoba.

Manitoba's cultural and creative industries continue to be a key economic driver, projecting a total production value of nearly \$300 million in '21-22. Nearly \$3.6 million was provided to the Manitoba Film and Music to ensure that Manitoba production companies servicing industry, including more than 2,500 professionals, were able to remain active throughout the pandemic.

A number of tax credit programs supported industries struggling during the pandemic. The film and video tax credit program enhances the costs of production tax credit with an 8 per cent Manitoba company bonus in 2020. In addition, a 10 per cent frequent filming bonus on the cost of salaries tax credit supports productions that experience delays resulting from necessary health restrictions. Further, the Book Publishing Tax Credit was made permanent in 2021.

It has been a challenging year for sport in our province, both in our amateur sports sector and for Manitoba's professional sport teams. We recognize

that children and adults whose sports activities have been impacted by the pandemic have missed the physical and mental health benefits of interacting with friends and their peers. Manitoba provincial sport organizations are committed to delivering a welcoming, safe and fun sport experience for Manitobans of every age group, gender and skill level.

In recognition of the importance of our sport in our province, we are continuing to invest over \$13 million in sport through our relationship with Sport Manitoba. We are also committed to ensuring the ongoing sustainability of sporting entertainment industries, which have been impacted by COVID-related restrictions. My department will provide \$5 million in enhanced support to the Manitoba Jockey Club for the operation of Assiniboia Downs.

Manitoba's public libraries are essential community hubs, and our government has demonstrated understanding of the valuable work done by public libraries by confirming an additional \$769,000 in investment in the public library sector and supporting the development of responsive local policies and services.

Heritage grant programs and technical support services to community-based museums and organizations ensure that the unique people, places and events that played a role in shaping Manitoba are remembered, and the irreplaceable resources we have inherited as a legacy continues to be conserved.

Manitoba's heritage community provides public programming and builds awareness of how heritage conservation enhances community cultural infrastructure and in turn contributes to growing our cultural tourism potential.

Over 175 organizations are supported in preserving Manitoba's heritage as well as educating and engaging Manitobans in heritage programming. We partnered with The Winnipeg Foundation to establish a \$25-million trust fund to preserve the Hudson's Bay building, one of Winnipeg's cherished landmarks.

Initial \$25-million investment will support the preservation of heritage elements of The Bay building as part of the Southern Chiefs Organization initiative to transform the building into a new, vibrant space that will provide Indigenous peoples with a range of services, including affordable housing for families, elders and post-secondary students.

We will be investing \$621,000 in additional grant assistance in 2022 for various heritage grant pro-

grams. This includes increased support for the previously established Heritage Resource Conservation Grant and Military Memorial Conservation Grant programs.

It also includes new funding support for the community museum support grant program and heritage initiatives programs, which are funded through the annual return on investment generated through The Bay building endowment fund.

The archives of Manitoba continue to work on replacing the Manitoba information and records administration, or MIRA information system. MIRA is a stand-alone information control system that supports government records and information management. Is a legacy system that must be replaced in order to support a shift towards increased digital record-keeping capabilities.

Archives of Manitoba continues to improve access to archival records by increasing online contact. Nearly 3,000 digitized copies of archival records were added to the archives' keystone database. Additional digitized films were added to its web page. The—your archives blog was extended, and information about records and services was tweeted through our Twitter channel.

As part of a government reorganization in January, we were happy to welcome back the Legislative Library protocol and military convoy office, Lieutenant Governor's office and Travel Manitoba into our departmental fold.

In '21-22, Legislative Library staff continued to provide metadata for the library's collection of early legislative recording. A fully searchable digitized newspaper coverage is available to researchers through the library's web page, and the application that runs both the digital collection of Manitoba government publications and the early legislative reporting database is being monetized.

The Province will provide a total of \$13.865 million in provincial funding to Travel Manitoba in '22-23. Despite the impact of COVID-19 on the travel and hospitality industries, our government has maintained funding to sustain our investment—tourism and travel marketing as a tourism industry is critical to Manitoba's economic recovery efforts.

Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries continues to play an important part in generating revenue for the provincial budget from gaming, cannabis and liquor sales. Each year, Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries remits millions of

dollars to the Province to spend on education, health care and other services, with \$597.8 million remitted to the '21-22 fiscal year.

I'd like to highlight that corporate social responsibility is a legislative mandate for Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries. Each year, 2 per cent of net income is directed to alcohol and gaming responsible consumption and addiction services.

Mr. Chair, 2022 marks both the year of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee as well as the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. With an unprecedented 70 years on the throne, Queen Elizabeth II was Britain's longest reigning monarch. All provinces, including Manitoba, will participate in the Queen's Platinum Jubilee programming. Manitoba will provide a total of \$183,275 for provincial commemorations administered by the protocol and military envoy office. The medal program will award the medal to Manitobans—or, to 1,000 Manitobans.

Lastly, I'd like to extend my gratitude to my entire department staff for their dedication and service to Manitobans throughout the pandemic. They responded with skill and dedication to challenges presented by the crisis and paved a path forward toward a sustainable recovery of our arts, sports and cultural community at large.

\* (15:20)

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister. And we thank you for those comments.

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

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** I don't.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank you. So we will proceed.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 14.1(a) contained in resolution 14.1.

According to our rule 77(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put separately on all resolutions once the official opposition critic indicated that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Brar:** I thank the minister for the opening remarks. Thanks to all the committee members for being here.

I would start with a question to the minister about who are the minister's political staff.

**An Honourable Member:** I thank my critic for the question here.

I have three political staff: Teresa Sanchez, Olubunmi Aregbesola and Sukhi Jandu.

**Mr. Chairperson:** And, minister, just want to remind you, when you are ready to answer the question, please give me a good indication or a wave, and I can acknowledge you.

**An Honourable Member:** Repeat that? Mr. Chair, can you hear me?

**Mr. Chairperson:** If you're looking like you're talking, I can't hear you.

**An Honourable Member:** Mr. Chair, can you hear me now?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Yes, I can. [*interjection*] Oh, just—oh, whoa, whoa. Hang on.

The honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage.

**Mr. Smith:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll repeat the names.

I'm not sure if it was recorded in Hansard the first time around here. So, my political staff are Teresa Sanchez, Olubunmi Aregbesola and Sukhi Jandu.

**Mr. Brar:** I thank the minister for the details. I would like to ask about the vacancy rate in the department.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Minister, if you can—if you're indicating that you want to speak, can you please raise your hand just about to the level of your face? About here. There, there, now I can see you, and then I can recognize you to speak, so.

**Mr. Smith:** So as of September 28th, we have a vacancy rate of 21.4 per cent. That's turned out to be 23.6 FTEs. Currently, though, we are in the process of actively filling in 14 positions.

\* (15:30)

**Mr. Brar:** I thank the minister for this information.

And I just want to ask the vacancy rate in 2016 and 2019 in this department, respectively.

**Mr. Smith:** In 2019, we had a rate of 23.6 per cent, and for 2016 I would have to take that under advisement.

**Mr. Brar:** Can the minister repeat the last part? I didn't quite get it. For 2019, he said 23.6, and for 2016?

**Mr. Smith:** Yes, I'll repeat that for the member opposite. Yes, for 2016, would it be possible for us to take that under advisement and get back to you when we get that number?

**Mr. Brar:** The minister mentioned about them recruiting 14 positions.

Can the minister share some details about the timeline? Are the positions already advertised, or they are planning to advertise? And when would they start and end the recruitment process for those 14 positions? And what those positions are?

\* (15:40)

**Mr. Smith:** So, to answer the member's question, we have—looking for four archaeologists. They have been posted now. We're looking for eight new staff for—programming and policy staff for the ACSC Fund, and two staff for strategic and policy branch.

Processes are certainly under way and hiring should be completed in the next few weeks.

**Mr. Brar:** Thanks for the information from the minister.

Just wanted to know: Has this government done any recruitment since 2019 in this department, and how many retirements have been seen since 2019 'til date?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order.

**Mr. Smith:** So, since 2019, we've had 22 retirements and we've recruited—a recruitment of 49.

**Mr. Brar:** I would like to ask the minister, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and the minister have put forward a bid for the Grey Cup, including a proposed \$5.5 million bid.

Can the minister provide a bit more information about how this money breaks down, and is this all towards a potential bid, or is some of it in the case that Winnipeg won the bid?

\* (15:50)

**Mr. Smith:** And I first want to say it's quite an exciting opportunity for Winnipeg and Manitobans in general, and we've done—the Winnipeg Blue Bombers

have done exceptionally well this year, and we're hoping for a Grey Cup victory again. That would be, well, not only welcome, but certainly well-deserved for our Winnipeg Blue Bombers. I know they've done a tremendous job the last few years, the last few seasons, in bringing home the Grey Cup. It's just something I think that, after a long period of COVID, it's really nice to see that and give Manitobans and Winnipeggers a break and some nice, welcome good news after some tough, tough, challenging times.

The bid, as the member asked if it's contingent on whether or not Winnipeg gets the bid here or gets the cup here, some of that money will go for the bid, some of it will be going to the Grey Cup festival, and, of course, there'll be—some of it will be going to the amateur sport legacy impacts here in Manitoba.

So, again, I know this one's a—this is a tremendous opportunity for us as a province. It's estimated that this will give us around a \$90-million boost in economic activity and result to about \$8.2 million in tax revenue, you know, something that not only boosts the morale of our citizens, or, boosts the morale of Winnipeggers, but certainly would have an economic boost in addition to that with all the other restaurants and hotels and different types of retailers that would benefit from having the Grey Cup here in this great city.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Brar:** Just wondering about how much funding has been transferred to the curling centre of excellence. And what is its current status?

**Mr. Smith:** Well, currently, as you know, our—my colleague opposite might know this, there's—\$15 million was given in 2020 to a not-for-profit, it's the international curling centre for excellence board, or ICCE, I-C-C-E, for acronym. And at this point, they are still in the planning and consultation phase.

We know that Manitoba's always been a home for curling and certainly has developed a lot of incredible talent in this province and in the city of Winnipeg—of course, outside the city, as well. So, very proud of that. Manitoba is a—internationally recognized for curling and internationally recognized for producing world-class talent, and again I provided the member with an answer to his question.

**Mr. Brar:** What the government intends to spend this money on? Is it, like, infrastructure or sports programs or promotion? Can the minister share some details about it?



\* (16:00)

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order.

**Mr. Smith:** As I had mentioned in my previous answer, the \$15 million is currently with a not-for-profit organization, International Curling Centre of Excellence or ICCE, and they're going to use that money for the purposes of the development of the sport of curling in the province.

And as I mentioned before, you know, curling is a very well—Manitoba, actually, is a very well-respected province when it comes to curling. We've developed a number of incredible international talent that we proudly can say hails from Manitoba. So, we're certainly the home of curling as—in Canada and probably around the world.

And again, like I said earlier, that the ICCE organization has the \$15 million and they're using it for the development of the sport of curling in our province.

**Mr. Brar:** I would like to ask: What funds has the department established with the Winnipeg Foundation and how much intended to flow this year, and also, how much was it last year?

**Mr. Smith:** I say our government has made key commitments in the heritage sector by working with The Winnipeg Foundation and there's a few things we've partnered with them on: is stat one, establishing a \$10 million worth of endowments for a signature museum; investing \$25 million with The Bay Building Fund and launching the Manitoba Heritage Trust Program, allocated the amount of \$5 million in support of establishment of over 60 new trusts in the heritage sector across Manitoba.

**Mr. Brar:** As per the Supplementary Estimates, it says that the Budget 2022 is providing \$621,000 for various heritage grant programs from endowments.

Can the minister clarify: Is that the total amount being provided from all the endowment funds this year?

\* (16:10)

**Mr. Smith:** So, the increase year over year for community museums is \$240,000. The heritage initiatives, \$200,000. The increase to the heritage resource conservation program is \$118,000 and the military memorial is an increase of \$63,000.

**Mr. Brar:** Just trying to understand who controls this endowment funds. Who decides when these are awarded and who gets them?

**Mr. Smith:** So The Winnipeg Foundation actually has the funds. But based on annual returns, the department allocates funding to the recipients based on established criteria.

**Mr. Brar:** It's about Travel Manitoba's review of parks. Just wanted to know, Travel Manitoba has completed a review of the parks. Has the minister received it yet, and would he be able to provide it to us?

\* (14:20)

**Mr. Smith:** Yes, I thank the member for the question on that. Certainly, where that report was done and waiting to be briefed and having further conversations with my colleagues at ECP, Environment, Climate and Parks.

And looking forward to that—more information be coming—or, available in the not-too-distant future.

**Mr. Brar:** Would the minister be able share that once he gets it?

**Mr. Smith:** I thank the member for the question, and as I mentioned earlier, more information is forthcoming.

**Mr. Brar:** Consolidated expenditures are provided on page 33 of the department's annual report. It shows a year-over-year reduction of \$31 million.

Can the minister explain?

\* (16:30)

**Mr. Smith:** To answer the member's question, that amount does reflect the one-time Bay Building Fund amount, which is \$25 million. That amount was not repeated the following year.

**Mr. Brar:** Can the minister share details on recent infrastructure upgradation at Manitoba Centennial Centre for the last two years?

**Mr. Smith:** As that's a provincial asset, that does fall under the Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services Department.

**Mr. Brar:** Just wanted to know if the minister knows a little bit about this department because this infrastructure and that institution is very important in our arts world, theatre world and so many concerts are held there.

Does the minister know something about the infrastructure development, I repeated, and are there any further mainstage upgradations planned, if the minister can share some information about it? I'm

pretty sure the minister should know something about it, if not all.

**Mr. Smith:** I appreciate my colleague across the way asking an important question. We know that Sports and Culture is very important, not only to Winnipeg, but to all of Manitoba and the triple seat plays a very vital role in that.

I would—since we do work very closely, my department and Government Services works very closely, I will endeavour to get more information for you and keep this under advisement.

**Mr. Brar:** I appreciate the answer.

Can the minister provide us with the number of tourists that visited Manitoba over the past several years?

\* (16:40)

**Mr. Smith:** In 2019, so that's pre-pandemic, there were 10.6 million visitors to Manitoba: 94 per cent from Canada; 5 per cent from the United States; 1 per cent were international.

And early indicators—certainly, we know that COVID years drastically affected the number of visitors to Manitoba, but early indications are showing that we will be back to pre-pandemic levels.

**Mr. Brar:** I thank the minister for the details.

Can the minister provide us with his plan to encourage tourism in Manitoba, whether locally or from out-of-province tourists?

**Mr. Smith:** Again, I thank the member for the question. Our government is continuously investing \$13.86 million annually for the—Travel Manitoba and that funding was sustained through COVID.

The—Travel Manitoba is continuing to work on their tourism strategy and I know that they worked and—very hard on a Francophone tourism strategy and an Indigenous tourism strategy.

So, I look forward to our government continuing to work with Travel Manitoba, knowing that we continue to attract people from all over Canada and other parts of the continent, and even the world, to come see our beautiful province.

**Mr. Brar:** And I thank the minister for the details.

\* (16:50)

Talking about climate: Can the minister outline how climate change will impact tourism in Churchill, specifically regarding polar bear tourism?

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

I would say that this would be mostly out of scope for our department here and Travel Manitoba. I would say that's probably more Environment, Climate and Parks would take the lead on that particular issue.

Having said that, Travel Manitoba does monitor these things closely and works closely with ECP, Environment, Climate and Parks, on these types of issues.

**Mr. Brar:** Talking about the film industry: Can the minister tell us how much economic activity was spurred in Manitoba as a result of the film industry?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order. Order.

**Mr. Smith:** It's a great question because I know the film industry's had its best year ever in '21-22 with \$355 million bringing into the province of Manitoba here.

So, our government's been very supportive of the film industry. We've actually made permanent the tax credit; it's the best in Canada, most competitive and it was good to see that—the number of production facilities here in the province.

Just recently, I had a chance to—or to have a tour of the Manitoba Production Centre where they're filming Spencer Sisters, which is going to be a great series by the looks of it.

And had a chance to go on stage there and actually see some of the actual production going on—or not production going on, but the stage itself and some of the settings.

And it was, you know, world-class—from my understanding, world-class facility, very competitive with other jurisdictions across the country.

So, looking forward to our continued support for this incredibly important industry in the province of Manitoba.

**Mr. Brar:** I would ask what is the minister's plan to further grow the film industry in Manitoba?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order.

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

**CHAMBER**  
**TRANSPORTATION AND**  
**INFRASTRUCTURE**

\* (14:40)

**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 Transportation and Infrastructure.

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber and we ask that members introduce their—the staff in attendance.

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

The floor is open for questions.

**Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure):** Yes, right now before we even begin, I just want to tell you that my deputy minister, Sarah Thiele, will be joining us for—as a staff member for the department.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Okay.

Well, if there's no other further question, go ahead. Are there any further questions?

Seeing none, we will proceed to the resolutions.

Resolution 15.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,517,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Infrastructure Capital Projects, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 15.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$150,585,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Transportation Operations, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 15.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$31,464,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Engineering and Technical Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 15.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,528,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Emergency Management, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 15.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$614,459,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Capital Assets, 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 15.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 15.1.

At this point, we request all ministerial and opposition staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia):** I have no questions, but I would like to move a motion.

I move that line item 15.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure's salary be reduced to \$21,000.

**Motion presented.**

**Mr. Chairperson:** The motion is in order, and it is a debatable motion.

**Mr. Wiebe:** I—you know, I asked a number of questions throughout this Estimates process that I think, you know, quite genuinely were all questions that came to us from, you know, from the community, from folks across this province. And, you know, it is our role as His Majesty's loyal opposition, to bring those forward. In the same way, it is the minister's responsibility, I believe, to respond to those questions in a forthright way.

And, you know, I know that, as I mentioned I think, in fact, in my remarks during the questions, that, you know, everyone has a certain style; there's a certain back and forth when it comes to Estimates. You know, and I thought, you know, in the last and previous Estimates, we've had a fairly good back and forth, understanding those limitations about what information is available at the minister's fingertips.

I do think that, you know, it could be the technology, it could be the disconnect between not being in the Chamber versus being in the Chamber that

created, you know, unnecessary friction, but I do think that the quality of the answers is severely lacking.

And I know that there are many—you know, this is not uncommon for ministers of the Crown to try to evade or to talk out the clock. But, you know, I guess I've just expressed my disappointment that this particular minister did that, because I don't think that's becoming of who he is and the way that I've seen him operate in the past.

The issues that we brought forward were significant. We certainly always focus on safety first, and not least, you know, among those concerns that we brought forward was Highway 6.

And, you know, the minister knows that there's a personal reason for all of us in this Chamber to do better on Highway 6, so I implore him to take a fresh look at that and to listen to the concerns of the people in Thompson and the North who use that highway every day. It's just in the media again this week. And there are serious problems that could be, I think, fairly—could be addressed in a fairly straightforward way. So, I hope that he does that.

Likewise, we've talked about Highway 101. We've talked about Highway 210 and Highway 12. There are a number of places in this province that the infrastructure deficit that has crept up under this minister is, you know, is having an impact, a real-world impact on the safety that people are experiencing on our highways.

And we know that the overall vacancy challenges that his department is facing because of the cuts that they have undertaken is having an impact, and we're heading into another winter. We've already had the highest precipitation year on record here in Manitoba, and we're looking at probably another wet, snowy winter. We know that having safe highways needs to be our No. 1 concern.

So, for those reasons, and for the fact that, you know, as I said, we bring these forward in an honest way and we ask that the minister take his responsibility in reaching out to communities across this province as well, that he take his job not just to answer my questions but to answer the questions of the people of Manitoba seriously. For the—all of those reasons, and probably some that I'm forgetting, but for those reasons in particular, I would suggest that the minister's salary be reduced in this case to \$21,000—a generous amount, I must say.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Are there any further questions or comments? Or debate?

**Mr. Piwniuk:** I just wanted to—what the member from Concordia just basically stated on the record here is that, you know what, I answered all his questions.

He should know that when it comes to the Brandon decision that I made, he has to now study the transportation and infrastructure act to see that the minister has the last opportunity to listen to everyone out there, including the community, the council—which even passed a resolution.

\* (14:50)

And that guy—and the member from Concordia should know, they're the ones that actually stopped economic growth in rural Manitoba, but they took a lot of resources out of rural Manitoba, like oil. And the thing is, he should know better, in his days, that none of it ever came back to rural Manitoba. And what's his—I mean, what does he have against when it comes to City of Brandon and the Westman area?

They took a lot of oil out during their days but they never gave anything back to that area. So this is—there's one reason why I ran for as an MLA, and the person from—and then when it comes to Highway 6, we are investing over \$51 million in the next three years to make Highway 6 safer by adding, basically, shoulders to the highway.

Every time we do stretches of it, we are adding shoulders. We are also adding passing lanes. We're starting first in the southern part of Highway 6, but we'd be working towards passing lanes in—closer to Thompson.

So, I'm not quite sure—I've been answering every question that the member from Concordia has asked me and I'm not quite sure what other answers he wants. These are direct answers, and the member should know that we're doing everything to invest back in these highways, which they had deficits of \$1 billion in the last eight years.

If they wanted those rest stops, they could've invested in it. If they wanted it safer on Highway 1, on—by the Trans-Canada Highway, they could've invested over \$1 billion in making sure that that highway's divided. If they're concerned about the Perimeter Highway, which they don't want to—they want to—they wanted to take accesses out. He talks about one side about safety but he allows the Perimeter Highway to be unsafe.

So what is it? Do you want safety? It depends on who comes to him for complaints.

So, the thing is, we are investing, we are making sure that our budget is going to be invested in the next three years at \$1.5 billion. So I'm going to leave it at that, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Are there any further questions or comments?

Is the House ready for the question?

**Some Honourable Members:** Question.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The question before the House is the motion put forward by the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), that line item 15.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure's (Mr. Piwniuk) salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt—is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

**Some Honourable Members:** Agreed.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Mr. Chairperson:** I hear a no.

#### Voice Vote

**Mr. Chairperson:** All those in favour of the motion, please say yea.

**Some Honourable Members:** Yea.

**Mr. Chairperson:** All those opposed, please say nay.

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

**Mr. Chairperson:** In my opinion, the Nays have it.

I declare the motion lost.

**Mr. Wiebe:** On division, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairperson:** On division.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Chairperson:** This completes the Estimates of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. *[interjection]* Oh, back that up.

Resolution 15.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,610,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

#### *Resolution agreed to.*

Now this completes the Estimates of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is from the Department of Justice.

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

We are now in recess.

*The committee recessed at 2:54 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 2:58 p.m.*

#### JUSTICE

**Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield):** All right, will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates for the Department of Justice.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I do.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable minister.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I know we'll have staff that'll be joining us shortly, and I'll introduce them at that time, but I do want to say what an honour it is to be able to be here today as the Minister of Justice and deliver this opening statement. I look forward to hearing from my critic, the honourable member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), to hear her perspectives as well.

I always really enjoy the Estimates process. I find it a thoughtful process, generally. Not that question period isn't thoughtful, but it's a different form and a different way of which questions are asked and answered, and I think that the Estimates process allows both the critic to learn about the department, and sometimes the minister, as well. I think it's an—a shared learning exercise, and so I think it's one of the better parts of our legislative process that we have here in Manitoba.

\* (15:00)

I would like to, before I introduce, of course, staff who will be coming in—thank all of the staff within the Department of Justice for the work that they do. I've been minister now for not quite a year—I guess it'll be a year in January—and I've really been fortunate in my time in government to work with tremendous civil servants during my time in Health and Education, when I was responsible for Advanced Education,

Immigration, Healthy Living, Seniors. During my time as deputy premier, premier and now, as Minister of Justice and Attorney General, really, really fortunate to work with just tremendous people, and they, I think, have really helped me in the roles that I have. And I always say that any mistakes are certainly mine and any credit for the good things that happen are certainly theirs.

I want to go a little bit beyond the staff within the department directly, though, and to thank, in particular, the legislative security staff who are under the Department of Justice, and we'll get into all the details about some of the challenges that have happened here in this building and the precinct in recent times. The member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) may have questions about those sorts of things as well. But I think if we would disagree on some things, I don't think we would disagree on the good staff that we have here in the Legislative Building and the work that they do to help us, not just about keeping us safe—they are very involved with working with the public who are coming into the building for meetings or for tours and that sort of thing. And I know that they're very generally accommodating and welcoming to those who come to the Manitoba Legislature, which I've often said is the people's house.

Beyond that, I want to thank those who are in law enforcement in our community. You know, we've heard of some just really tragic situations in Ontario, in British Columbia. Police officers have lost their lives. And I know that all members of this House would echo the comments that we value the great work that the women and men in our law enforcement do and the tragic losses that we've seen and seem to be escalating in terms of the number. Very, very concerning.

When I've had the opportunity to attend graduations for police officers, Winnipeg Police Service most recently, you know, I always make mention of the families of those officers, who also serve. They serve in a different way than their family members who are in the community enforcing laws, but they serve in a way that doesn't always get noticed. When your loved one is leaving home in the morning—I know I say goodbye to my son and my wife in the morning. They're not expecting me to be rushing into situations of danger, where, for our law enforcement, that's the case. When others are fleeing those situations, they're going into it. And they, of course, bear a special and unique burden for that, but their families do as well. And I just simply wanted to put that onto the record.

Within the department, there's been lots that's been happening over the last while, and I would certainly thank the former ministers of the department, the now current Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), the current minister of economic growth and development—I think I've got the department right—Economic Development, Investment and Trade—I'm corrected by the Minister of Advanced Education—and, of course, the current Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), who served in this role.

And all of us, I think, benefit by the legacy of those who've come before us. And some of the work that was ongoing beforehand involved changes to The Police Services Act, and we continue that work now, really focused on police standards, really focused on police training. Of course, work's been done on the I-E-U, and I know the member for St. Johns has some history there, and she's shared some of her own ideas with me, and I've appreciated hearing her perspective on that. And so, that's really important work that is happening.

But members will know, and I think all Manitobans know, the concern that's happening when it comes to violent crime. In Manitoba, but really across Canada, something has changed over the last two years, and, you know, there's lots of those who I'm sure will analyze this at some point and try to make some determination about why that is, but without question there's more violent crime happening across Canada in every province. And I heard that very distinctly from ministers of justice and Attorneys General, who met a couple of weeks ago at their annual meeting, which hasn't been held in person for a while, but was at that time.

Every province, and it didn't matter which jurisdiction or which political party is in power, all had the same concerns and raised those concerns. Now, of course, there's provincial responsibility when it comes to certain things, and I'm happy to both take that responsibility and ask-answer questions that come about that. But it is a shared responsibility as the federal government is responsible for the Criminal Code.

And so, we as a province have taken the lead in raising some suggestions for changes to the Criminal Code. When it comes to bail, as an example, reversing the bail on violent acts using a bladed or an edged weapon—very well received in the ministers' meetings from all provinces. I shared earlier today a letter signed by a number of provinces that I gave to the member for St. Johns; probably hasn't had a chance to look at

it yet, but we may discuss it at some point. And those are the sort of concerns that are being raised, and the sort of asks from the federal government in terms of changes to the Criminal Code.

Now, in fairness, Minister Lametti did say that the Liberal changes regarding bail and Bill C-75—I'm going off of memory, but I think it was C-75 in 2019—may have had unintended consequences and may have changed—even though they would say that they're codifying what was already a charter or a principle from common law, codifying that—but they did agree that there may be unintended consequences there. Maybe it's gone too far. So far, in fact, that our prosecutors would say it's virtually impossible to deny or to even ask for the denial of bail on virtually any crime unless it's involving a gun or some other limited circumstances.

And so, our request is to look to broaden that. And then, of course, that doesn't mean that bail would be denied, in a case of a knife, for example, if the Criminal Code was changed, but it would mean that there'd be an opportunity to properly argue that, in certain cases, an individual is not best placed in the community while they're awaiting trial. Those might still be relatively rare circumstances, but the opportunity to make that argument on behalf of public safety, I think, is very important.

So, I hope that the member opposite has some questions along those directions in the time that we have. I'm not sure how much time we'll have; it won't be days, I suppose, because we only have twenty-some hours left in the entire Estimates process. But it'll be quality time, if not quantity time. And I look forward to those types of questions, even on difficult subjects, like violent crime.

But if we don't talk about these things, then I think we're denying the reality of what people are feeling in the community. And I don't think we should not talk about these things because they're difficult things to talk about. I think—still think we have a responsibility as elected officials, and certainly, I have responsibilities, as the minister responsible for this file, to speak about these things, to make suggestions and then to come forward with solutions where those solutions fall within the purview and the jurisdiction of the provincial government.

So, with those few words, Mr. Chairperson, I look forward to hearing from the honourable member for St. Johns, my co-House leader, and to the discussion that'll happen over the next little while.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

**Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** So, I would reiterate some of what the Minister for Justice has shared, and I look forward to the discussion for Justice Estimates. I know that the minister was very anxious to get to Justice Estimates, so here we are today. I'm sure that we'll have a good discussion on some of the things that need to be discussed.

Like the minister, I want to acknowledge some folks. So—and I agree with the minister, and the minister and I have had a couple of discussions about, you know, security at the Leg. and what we've seen in the last couple of years.

\* (15:10)

And, you know, as I've shared a couple of times in the Chamber, you know, I've personally faced and experienced some of those exponential interactions with folks in the last couple of years. And so, to that end, I do—is he allowed to be in here yet?

**An Honourable Member:** No.

**Ms. Fontaine:** No. Sorry, Rylan.

**An Honourable Member:** Soon.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Soon. Just, sorry.

So, I do want to reiterate some of the—speaking of security, I want to thank security, all of the security staff who keep us safe in this building and certainly, I do have an enormous amount of respect for Nicole and have a good working relationship with her. I think she does her job very well. I think she is very capable and has a very unique set of skills that allows for, you know, resolution to issues that may arise in a non-confrontational way. And so I do want to really just acknowledge her.

I want to acknowledge Justice staff as well. And I mean that in the totality of that, that is the enormity of Justice. I think that everybody recalls when the pandemic first was here. And we had certainly a lot of issues and a lot of concerns and a lot of fears and a lot of things to kind of navigate all over. But, certainly, one of the things that I think that stands out for me the most is within the correctional facilities. And that was an enormous amount of logistics to be able to keep people safe.

Now, of course, do I agree with the direction that came down from, you know, the—maybe perhaps the minister, all of the direction—no, obviously not. But what I do appreciate is the attention and the care to make sure that people were safe.

Of course, we perhaps disagree in the way that it did happen, but, you know, people deserve to be safe at work as well. And they had an enormous responsibility to keep folks, citizens who are housed in correctional facilities, safe as well. And, of course, we know that often that was done with, you know, not necessarily the best PPE. So I want to acknowledge all of the Justice staff that have had to, like, navigate, you know, the court system and, you know, youth, you know, corrections and all of those. I think that it's been a lot for folks.

I want to acknowledge also the folks that are in the communities that also in their very important way, in their own unique way, tried to help folks that were struggling in the communities. And I'm sure that the minister would agree, as well, that we've got some pretty significant stakeholders or players in that.

And so, of course, we can talk about Mama Bear Clan and Bear Clan that were out on the streets every single day trying to ensure that community was safe, that people were safe, that people had food when so many things were closed. These folks, just everyday, normal, caring, compassionate Manitobans went out on the—on our Winnipeg streets and actually all across Manitoba to make sure that people were taken care of. And that's an extraordinary testament of compassion and love for community. And so, I acknowledge them as well.

And I actually want to give a particular shout-out to a woman who's like a sister from another mister, Gina Smoke, who is—I don't know what her current title is, but she's with the Unifor and she's, like, the Indigenous liaison or something. And her and her group did, like, extraordinary work at the height of the pandemic. Like, they were cooking, you know, full meals, like, you know, at least two, three nights a week and going out and feeding our relatives who were unsheltered.

And she organized all of these women who came together. And often they used their own money to feed the community. Sometimes they'd get donations, but most of the time it was their own money. And going down along the water to make sure that the—you know, our relatives that are in the camps were fed, that they had things during the winters. And they did such

extraordinary work and I love Gina so much that I want to just acknowledge her, as well.

And then I want to acknowledge Cora Morgan. So, Cora Morgan is currently the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs First Nation family advocate. She's been there for the last seven years. In fact, she's the one that has started it and has grown it to where it is today. And, you know, she was part of this cohort along with, you know, Spatch, if you know who Spatch is, and other folks in the community, including Gina, who got together and envisioned N'Dinanemak [*phonetic*], which is at 190 Disraeli.

And I've been there several times and it's a safe place for folks that are unsheltered, and it's a loving space for people that are unsheltered. And Cora, you know, she was the one that went and bought all of the beds, all of the blankets, all of the pillows, all of the clothes, shampoos, like everything, she did all of that. And I think she did it within like a couple of days. And again, that's really an—a testament to that commitment and that love for our communities.

And, again, I—you know, I don't want to say that that is the model that we should now, then, think that it's okay for our relatives to be housed. We have to do—you know, everybody deserves to have folks—everybody deserves to have housing; safe housing, adequate housing, a place to call their own.

And so, I do acknowledge her for the work in pulling all of that together, because I do agree with the minister, like, the last two and half years—I think all of us, you know, there has been just an extraordinary amount of struggle and hurt. And, you know, with services that were typically open then were closed and then things weren't back to full capacity and—it's just created just these huge gaps in protections and services that people really rely on.

And people are struggling. People are really, really, really struggling. Families are struggling. People are struggling. People with mental health issues are struggling. People with addictions are struggling. Families with family members with addictions are struggling. Like, it's just been a really, really difficult two and a half years, and I would submit to the House that everybody feels that. Everybody, in some way. Maybe in your own family, in your own community, but everybody, I would imagine, really feels or certainly would bear witness to that struggle that we're seeing.

And so, of course, you know, the next several hours discussion is important that—important in the



sense that of course Justice is one component of that. It's not the whole component—in fact, I would argue that, you know, a lot of these—the system within the justice comes after the fact. Right?

It's kind of—it's downstream, and we really do need to be looking at those things upstream and what are the conditions that we should put in place? What are the resources that we should put in place for folks so that, you know, we don't have folks that—who are struggling and become in conflict with the law.

And then we know what that path looks like for, you know—and we—I used to say it when I was the director of justice for the Southern Chiefs Organization, and we said it many, many times: once you get involved—you become in conflict with the law, that's often years and years and years until you're out of that. And often, you're in conflict with the law because of those struggles that we're seeing with people right now.

So, I look forward to our discussion for the next couple of hours.

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

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 4.1(a) contained in resolution 4.1.

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

\* (15:20)

Would the honourable minister like to introduce his staff?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I would.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable minister.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'd like to introduce, not in order of importance but going from my left to my right, the extraordinary deputy minister of Justice, Dave Wright. I'd like to introduce the brilliant chief of staff and special assistant, Mardi McNicholl. And the very diligent and detailed ADM—assistant deputy minister—for Corporate and Strategic Services in the Department of Justice, Maria Campos.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen) for those introductions.

Would the critic wish to introduce their staff?

**Ms. Fontaine:** The—this is Rylan Ramnarace, who is the legislative researcher and assistant to the Opposition House Leader, who is the eager Rylan, who is going to be helping me here today.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the critic for those introductions. Enthusiastic introductions all around, only to make for a more exciting committee, I'm sure.

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 now is open for questions. Are there any questions?

**Ms. Fontaine:** Can the minister undertake to give a list of all technical appointments in his department, including names and titles?

**Mr. Goertzen:** We will undertake to do so and report back to the member in the time allocated by the rules.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Can the minister undertake to give an organizational chart that lists all employees and program areas?

**Mr. Goertzen:** We will take such an undertaking.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Can the minister give a list of all current vacancies in the department?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Can the minister provide a list and title of all of the Indigenous, Black and persons of colours—person of colour working in the department?

*Mr. Obby Khan, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Mr. Goertzen:** Just confirming with staff.

Not entirely sure the way in which we delineate that, or the—if there's any sort of other sort of issues around privacy with that, but we will—I'll say to the member I'll investigate that and see what's possible.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Yes, I ask that question because it's an important question. Right? It's an important question to explore how much BIPOC folks are hired within, certainly, the department. Because I never see any—whenever we have Estimates or anything like that, I never see any BIPOC people, ever.

And so, you know, when you think about justice, one would—one could argue that there should be BIPOC people working within Justice that, you know—and interestingly enough, I bring that up because, actually, the letter that the minister provided during QP, which I did read—I read almost right away—and I found really interesting that here was a letter from, you know, all of these different ministers and deputy ministers or whatever it was, from four different provinces. And in the second paragraph of this letter, who—I don't know who drafted up this letter, but I do want to read it for the purposes.

So, you know, dear minister, thank you, da, da, da. We have heard clearly from our provincial and territorial counterparts that this is a significant concern in urban and rural communities. While we recognize and support the goal of reducing the over-incarceration of Indigenous people and marginalized communities, recent changes in federal law and Supreme Court decisions have had unintended consequences, making it extremely difficult to hold violent offenders in custody while they are awaiting trial. That's literally the—pretty much the first paragraph.

And so, here's this letter that's gone to the federal minister, and what this letter does is that it situates Indigenous people and marginalized communities as being violent. I think that is so incredibly offensive, so incredibly dangerous and to be honest, I don't know why the minister was so proud to give this letter to me, as if this letter was saying something progressive or important.

Actually, what this letter is doing is it's constructing and it's affirming all of those racist tropes of Indigenous people and marginalized people, i.e., Black people and people of colour, as being intrinsically and inherently violent.

And, in fact, that language is used throughout this letter. Nowhere in this letter do we hear about non-BIPOC people being violent. This letter, from the very get-go, situates and affirms those racist tropes of Indigenous people and people of colour and Black people. It is actually quite anti-Indigenous and anti-Black and anti-persons of colour.

So I know that the minister is very proud of this letter. I think that this is highly problematic.

So, to go back to my question: when I only see non-BIPOC people in positions of power, in positions of management, like here today, and I can't get an answer on how many BIPOC people are actually employed in the Justice Department—and I'm sure that

there is; I imagine that there's BIPOC people. I would have to imagine—it's important that there are BIPOC people hired in these positions because it is all of you that are making the laws and the decisions and the policies that impact on the very communities that you're writing the federal minister to do more about.

I actually think this letter is incredibly offensive and, as I said, very dangerous.

**Mr. Goertzen:** So the letter that the member is referencing is one that was written by British Columbia, currently an NDP government. I—you know, I don't spend a lot of time defending NDP governments, but I'm going to spend a little bit of time here because the member referred to the NDP government in British Columbia as racist.

And I think that that's concerning; not, again, because they're my political party; I don't say that. But I do think that we have to hold ourselves to a higher level, generally, as politicians because, you know, we talked a bit about the challenges and the division that exist in society today, and that's cause for a lot of different reasons. But I do think the language that the politicians use, and the member opposite referencing language that was written by the British Columbia government in the letter is important.

So I'm not critical that she's raised the issue of language. I think we can all learn from different things, but to suggest that the NDP government in British Columbia is racist, I guess I'm just concerned with that, and it troubles me a little bit.

\* (15:30)

And I'll take that back. I'll mention that to my colleagues in British Columbia how the NDP feel about them here. And I won't do that with any joy. I'll say this to the member: it'll hurt me, actually, in many ways, to have to make that call and to say what the member has said about the NDP government in British Columbia. But I'll do it because I think it's important. It's important to try to learn about a better way to have discourse.

But—so, I've made the commitment that I'll speak to the NDP in British Columbia and let them know that the member opposite feels that they're a racist government.

I don't feel that way, by the way, for the record. I don't feel that way. But I know the member opposite does.

I think what they were trying to convey in the letter, though, is that there is overrepresentation in the

justice system of the groups that they've identified, that there's over-incarceration. That's actually not something that I don't think is controversial. And the federal Liberal government has talked about that. I think most NDP governments and most ministers of justice have talked about that.

Now, it may be the member opposite doesn't feel that way and feels that those incarceration numbers are fair and representative. But, I mean, I'll let her sort of defend that if that's how she feels.

But the NDP government in British Columbia, the officials who wrote the letter, who the member opposite feels are racist, were expressing the concerns, I think, of ministers of justice across the country. And the concerns expressed in the letter is that violent crime is going up. It's undeniable. You simply have to look at the newspapers, you simply have to look at the news.

And that they were hoping that the federal Liberal government would recognize that some of the changes that they've made through bill 75 and others maybe had unintended consequences. Those were actually the words used by the—Minister Lametti that there may have been unintended consequences, which I thought was good of him to say. Because it was a recognition that it might not have been intentional, but that maybe things had happened that were not well crafted or maybe just—and it happens with legislation sometimes. My deputy for many years was involved with drafting legislation, and we would often talk about the unintended consequences of legislation.

So, I appreciated the fact that Minister Lametti acknowledged that. I appreciate the fact that British Columbia spearheaded this letter, despite the fact that the member opposite feels that they're a racist government.

I do think that it was important to have those words expressed to the federal government. And I'm disappointed that the member opposite feels so badly about their colleagues in BC, but I will certainly pass that on to them.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I mean, the minister can try to spin and twist what I'm saying as much as he wants. It's all good. He can do that.

That's—you know, and I find it, you know, typical that when an Indigenous person tries to raise concern about the language that is used in such an important letter to federal ministers signed by other ministers from four different jurisdictions, then the Indigenous

member is chastised on—you know, on the language that I'm using.

So, that's typical. That's typical what happens when you try to bring out the fact that this is language used in here that is constructing Indigenous peoples and marginalized peoples as the—as violent and as the only ones that we need to be dealing with here in the purpose of the letter.

So, I'm good. The minister can do and spin however he chooses. That's his prerogative. But I'll bring it back to the original question.

And the minister—I don't think the minister answered if he's going to provide me with the list and number—even percentage—but, again, you know, of those BIPOC folks that are working in Justice. But, again, to lay out those that are actually in management, middle management positions, those folks that actually have some decision-making capacity.

And—because, I mean, the minister just said that, you know, his folks are the ones that draft that legislation. And again, that is the material point here, is that if BIPOC folks, if Indigenous, Black and people of colour are not involved in any of that, that's where we get into the issues of unintended consequences. And that truly is, you know, a very important discussion that I would hope that the minister would undertake and take seriously.

And so, is the Justice Minister deeply involved with the awarding of general patient air transport services?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, I thank the member for the question.

Hey, I want to be clear, because it's important. I mean, the member has sort of made some accusations against me—and she knows, I actually have great respect for the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine). We've worked together now for some time as House leaders—we have different roles now, as minister and critic, and—but I think we've actually worked well together as House leaders. Not that we've agreed on everything; but I believe that I've treated her with respect and I've generally felt the same back, in terms of a reciprocal relationship with the member opposite.

And sometimes the thing that's not always understood, Mr. Chairperson, that question period is one thing and the debate that happens between members is one thing, but this House only operates where there is that sort of co-operation on a whole host of things

that the public never sees and that often happen behind the scenes.

So, it's important to me and my ongoing positive relationship with the member opposite that she understands clearly my own feelings on this.

And, you know, if I'm wrong, I would—I think I would go and declare—tell her that I was wrong. But if I—when I review Hansard tomorrow—and I often review Hansard the day after to see what members have said, because I'm just generally interested in the things the members say—if I were to review Hansard, I'm pretty sure that the member opposite said that she found the letter to be racist. And the letter was written by representatives—officials in British Columbia.

So, if somehow those two things aren't true—and I certainly know one is true, and I believe that the first one is true, and I'll go review Hansard—then the member is taking offence not to my words, but to her own words. And I'll leave that for her to reflect upon.

I do want to say, though, that I know our department, and led by our deputy—before I was there—you know, were taking significant effort when it came to ensuring that there was exactly the diversity—not of views, but it results in a diversity of views—but a diversity of individuals who are in the Department of Justice. Because just like the police will say sometimes that it's important that the police forces reflect the diversity of those whom—with whom they police, we would also say in the Department of Justice that that diversity is important.

And so, I've heard this, actually, from leaders in the Indigenous community, that they very much appreciate the efforts that were taken by the Department of Justice. And by the way, because I don't want the member to misconstrue this and think that I'm somehow pumping up my own political tires on this, this happened before I was Minister of Justice, and I would give credit to the deputy minister and the officials within the department for taking the efforts to ensure that Indigenous voices were not only working in the department, had significant influence in the department, but there are actually actions taken within the department that reflected that.

And I think that if the member opposite, my friend from St. Johns, were to take time to speak to Indigenous leaders in the province of Manitoba—as I know that she does, but specifically ask about some of those efforts—don't get me wrong, I'm sure they would say there's other things that could be done, that's the nature of the business that we're in, that our work is

never done—but I think she would find that there has been significant steps taken over the last number of years to ensure that those voices are at the table, that they're in leadership roles, that their suggestions are not just being heard but being acted upon where they can be acted upon.

And I can give a list of those actions to the member opposite. It might take me longer than the hour and 20 minutes that we have remaining today, but we have all day tomorrow and maybe all day, all next week, perhaps, to do that.

So, you know, I think it's important that I both say that the member herself put words on the record that I think needed to be highlighted—they were not my words—and that the department has taken significant efforts. In fact, if she looks, I think, at our Estimates book at page 28, she'll find the result of some of those efforts.

\* (15:40)

And not that those—that that's done and that's the totality of the efforts. Of course, always more work to do. And nobody's suggesting that we've achieved all that we want to achieve, but I would be—I wouldn't be doing my job as a minister if I didn't clearly show the member opposite the significant steps that the leadership within our department have taken separate and apart from whomever the Minister of Justice has been over the last few years.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I'll reiterate my last question: Is the Justice Minister deeply involved in the awarding of general patient air transport services?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, maybe the member wants to define deeply involved. I mean, I suppose, you know, as ministers, we sign Cabinet submissions and Treasury Board submissions.

Does she—is she asking if I'm inspecting planes, or—like, what is her definition of deeply involved?

**Ms. Fontaine:** Let me just word it a different way: What is the Justice Minister's involvement with the awarding of general patient air transport services?

**Mr. Goertzen:** My understanding in talking to officials is contracts such as the one the member is talking about go through an RFP, a request for proposal, a proponent is selected that gets funding authority, I suppose, through the funding authorities of government and then gets approved through the normal process of government.

But there was an RFP involved, so I would suggest that my involvement is minimal, if not close to none.

**Ms. Fontaine:** The department recently undertook a review of the Province's contract for general patient air transport services.

What were the results of this review, and are we getting value for that money?

**Mr. Goertzen:** My understanding in talking to officials is that we transport court officials and those who are involved in the justice system, not patients. I think I may have used to have been responsible for that a few years ago in a different portfolio, but I think those are more appropriately directed to the Department of Health.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Yes, you know what, that's my mistake. That is actually what I'm discussing here. I don't know why I put patient in there. I apologize.

So, I am talking about court officials and folks that are presently incarcerated. So I'm talking about that infrastructure.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, I thank the member for that clarification. I was wondering if I was flashing back to Health Minister days.

But the contract that the member is referring to, while it's true that they—that the planes transport, those who are involved in the Justice system and those who are in the court system, as she mentioned, and those who are working in the court system, the contract is actually administered and issued after an RFP from the Department of Labour, not the Department of Justice.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I'm curious for today to see where we are at in respect of citizens who are presently incarcerated. So, what I'm looking for is, in all of the correctional facilities, what the capacity is and what the current levels are today.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I thank the member for the question. I do have those numbers here, and I'll read them by facility, recognizing that they change, of course, day-to-day, if not—well, maybe not hour by hour, but certainly day by day.

So, this as of this morning, and they'll be relevant as of this morning, but might change as of tomorrow: the Brandon Correctional Centre, the rated capacity, so the rated number of beds, is 252, and as of this morning there were 292 individuals who were incarcerated in the facility; Headingley Correctional Centre

is rated for 549 individuals, and as of this morning there was 547 individuals in custody; the MRCC, Manitoba Remand Centre—Milner Ridge, is rated as a capacity of 524, at Milner Ridge this morning there was 431 individuals; at The Pas Correctional Centre, there—the rated capacity is 114, as of this morning it's 162 individuals; at the Women's Correctional Centre, the rated capacity is 196, this morning there was 200 individuals; at the Remand Centre across the street, the rated capacity is 289, and as of this morning there was 202 individuals; at the Manitoba Youth Centre, the rated capacity is 150 youth, and as of this morning there were 84 who were in custody.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Can the minister provide a further breakdown of how—obviously, not for the women's, but for how many women and men are in each, minus the women's? Can you do—where it's appropriate, can the minister break down those citizens, those female and male and maybe, perhaps, gender-diverse folks that are in each of them, where it's appropriate?

\* (15:50)

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, I hope that I'm answering the right question that the member asked. If not, she'll ask it again, I'm sure, and correct me.

Brandon Correctional Centre, there are 286 males who are housed as of this morning, and there are six females—I'm sorry, it's not broken down in any other way. We'd have to do a different analysis, but I'll give you what I have in terms of male and female.

At Headingley, of course, they are all male who are incarcerated. In The Pas, there are 155 males incarcerated and seven females. At the Women's Correctional Centre, there is one male and 199 females, and at the Remand Centre, there are 188 males and 14 females as of this morning. And then at the Manitoba Youth Centre, as of this morning, there are 69 males and 15 females.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Thanks. That's exactly what I was asking. I'm confused, though, about the women's correctional facility. Is—that's it.

**Mr. Goertzen:** If the member is confused about the one male, I'm confused, too, and we'll find out.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I wonder—and I just put this on the radar—if it is—I would imagine—again, not knowing anything, I would imagine that perhaps it's somebody who is—I don't know, actually; I don't know. So, if I could get an answer on that, that would be great.

So, in respect of those correctional facilities that are over capacity as of today, so we've got Brandon,

The Pas, women's. What is the plan or how is that addressed in respect of the overcapacity of those particular facilities right now?

**Mr. Goertzen:** So, important to remember, it's not a—didn't run the numbers right off my head, but it's not a system overcapacity. I think there's still excess capacity in the system. But sometimes it's just a matter of it being kind of a transient sort of overcapacity for a variety of reasons at any given time.

And then officials indicate as well that the rated capacity is the rated capacity when a facility is opened or has been—had significant, I guess, changes made to it. But sometimes there are other changes made within a facility that aren't as significant in terms of construction or reconstruction, but that still allow for more individuals to be there. But the rated capacity, it doesn't change. So, it might very well be that there's actual appropriate space available but that the rated capacity doesn't reflect that.

But, again, it's not a system overcapacity; sometimes, it's just a moment in time as well.

**Ms. Fontaine:** So, one of the things that I'm sure the minister is well aware is that there have been, you know, several different organizations and different programming that have tried to get into some of our correctional facilities, and I'll give an example.

So, the John Howard Society has a literacy program. They haven't been able to get into the Remand since the start of COVID. And I've heard from, in fact, several women, Indigenous women, arguing or trying to figure out how they can get in for some of their programming, as well, in the woman's correctional facility but that, in general, they haven't been able to get into some of the facilities to do programming since the beginning of the pandemic.

And so, I think the worry and the concern and the narrative that I'm hearing is that the pandemic—you know, obviously, at the beginning it was important to keep, you know, citizens and staff safe, but that with the lack of restrictions anywhere else, why is there—and, actually, even to further break it down is, which facilities are allowing outside groups to come in and do programming? Because, like I said, the Remand—so the John Howard Society isn't able to get into the Remand.

**Mr. Goertzen:** So, I've visited some of the facilities and certainly have heard about programming that's happening in facilities. The member opposite raises specifically the John Howard Society and then references that there might be others. You know, that's

something I'd be, you know, very interested in looking into. We've made note of the John Howard Society—if there are others the member wants to share.

No question, obviously, during the worst of the COVID situation, there was lots of reasons why accessing, well, virtually every facility in society let alone a correctional centre, was difficult but, you know, when people are living in close quarters, for sure. But, you know, I'd want to look a little bit further into it if there is something in particular that's happened or that is happening that's preventing that.

But I would share the same, I think, opinion of the member opposite, that programming like literacy programming or other programs within correctional facilities are important where they can be offered and can be offered safely.

So, we'll look into the particular issue on John Howard Society, and if the member opposite wants to share other specific examples she has, we'd look into that as well, because I don't think we are misaligned in terms of seeing the value of those programs where they can be offered.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Can the minister give an update—I know that the minister closed Agassiz Youth Centre, and we're—I'm curious about the commitment to the healing program that was shared at that time.

Can the minister give a overall update in respect of all of that?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, I thank the member for the question. It's really a good question, actually. We saw with the numbers that I provided her a little bit earlier on, the number of youth currently at the Youth Centre in Winnipeg out on—or near Kenaston Boulevard, that still a significant available capacity there in terms of what its rated capacity is.

\* (16:00)

And I think that that not only justifies that use of space—and don't take that, you know, to mean that I agree with everything in the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

But the reality is that the federal Youth Criminal Justice Act has changed incarceration numbers of youth, and I'm sure in many ways appropriately and in many other ways where there might be discussions about it—but it has definitely changed the number of youth in custody across the country.

So, it made sense to close the Agassiz Youth Centre, and I think the numbers shared today confirm that.

But, she raises a very good point that it wasn't just about closing a facility, that we wanted to ensure that there was additional resources then that were added into the system. And one of those was the healing lodge in Thompson that was announced at the time, together with MKO and Grand Chief Garrison Settee, who made the announcement together.

And I think that is the first healing lodge in that—in Manitoba justice system that was announced for Thompson. We've announced a couple of others in facilities since then, but I think it was a first for Manitoba and very well received by MKO and their leadership.

And because of the nature of that facility being a healing lodge, obviously having significant Indigenous programming, as it should be, led by Indigenous leadership, as it should be, and the member has spoken about the importance of that earlier in the questions today, it is MKO that is the lead in the establishment of the healing lodge. My understanding from officials is that they've identified and, I believe, secured land in Thompson, and so we look forward to hearing more about that.

And I'd invite the member opposite—perhaps we'll both find ourselves in Thompson at some time and we can tour it when it's open, because it's important and it's important to explain to folks what it is and what it isn't. Because sometimes there's misconceptions about that and those misconceptions can cause problems when it comes to how people view and value the healing lodges.

But looking forward to MKO's update in terms of how they're progressing on that.

**Ms. Fontaine:** So—well, two things, but I'll concentrate on this first question. So, the—because the minister had talked about the closure of Agassiz included, and to quote his words, additional resources. So, one of them is this healing lodge.

I would like a little bit more details in respect of the healing lodge. Is there a time frame that you know of? What was the government's financial commitment to the healing lodge? And I—yes—what's the timeline to have the healing lodge up and running?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I mean, at the highest level—and I appreciate the questions on this important initiative.

At the announcement, \$2 million of capital was committed to MKO and \$1 million of operating.

In terms of the timeline, I'd want to check with MKO to see where they're at. I mean, I know they'll be developing programming and obviously, securing the land is an important part of what they need to do. But the programming will be the most important part once the facility is established.

But in terms of the high level of investment—and not to say that there won't be more investment but, of course, before one can do more, you have to have the building and then make an initial operating commitment.

So, those are the initial commitments to that particular facility. I mentioned that there are other healing lodges that were announced for the Brandon Correctional Centre and for The Pas as well, and those were announced about a month ago or so. But that particular one in Thompson had a \$2-million capital investment and a \$1-million operating investment at the outset.

I should mention, as well, that Mayor Colleen Smook was also very, very supportive of that initiative, came to the announcement. It was held, I think, at the MKO headquarters or office here in Winnipeg, and Mayor Smook made the trip down from Thompson to that announcement.

It was just incredibly supportive and I will echo the comments that were made earlier in this House and congratulate her on her re-election as mayor.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Can the minister—and of course, Agassiz is now closed, but I would imagine that the minister would still have access to information on what the Agassiz Youth Centre would cost per fiscal year.

So, in its totality—so, salaries, operations, programming—what would that—what would those costs have looked like?

**Mr. Goertzen:** We'll endeavour to get that for the member.

**Ms. Fontaine:** So, in his first response when I asked this question on Agassiz Youth Centre, the minister had advised that there were additional resources that were also identified in the closure of Agassiz Youth Centre.

What are those additional you—resources?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'm not sure if I'm understanding the question correctly. There are additional resources at Agassiz, which is now closed.

If she's asking about what additional efforts were taken beyond the Thompson healing centre, identified a couple of others when it came to the healing lodges in The Pas and the healing lodges in Brandon.

I'm sure she'll hear of more initiatives in the days and months to come, but certainly, those three healing lodges, two which are in a facility and one which is more of a probably combined open and closed custody facility in Thompson, are significant. Not only are they the first—well, they're certainly the first in Manitoba, those three. I think they're among the first in Canada when it comes to youth.

But it recognizes, I think, very much the—go back to what the member opposite was saying at the beginning of the Estimates process and ensuring that the voices around the table are speaking to the experiences of those who have different experiences than myself or others, and I think those are very reasonable points.

And some of what we were—have been informed by those who have different lived experiences are the importance of culturally appropriate supports in facility and out of facility. And so, that would include the healing lodges, of course.

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

We've also provided support for wraparound services for youth. I recently announced with Marymount in the city of Winnipeg, but it will involve youth in Thompson. And there'll be, of course, you know, more announcements to come.

So, significant resources being announced. That—but I also want to say that that's not a reason to close AYC. The resources are being used, now, in different ways, but the closure of the Agassiz Youth Centre was simply, you know, looking at the numbers and recognizing that with the Youth Criminal Justice Act that exists in Canada and not a lot of prospect of that changing that—in a way that would change the incarceration numbers for youth.

Not putting a value on whether or not it should change or not, but just the reality of it not changing, it didn't make a lot of sense to have two facilities that were operating at below 50 per cent—well below 50 per cent capacity when we could use resources in a way where there were communities asking for resources.

**Ms. Fontaine:** So, to be clear, when the minister had spoke about—initially about the closure of Agassiz, and he had said the additional resources.

So, the additional resources that we're talking about is the Thompson or slash northern healing lodge, The Pas healing lodge, Brandon healing lodge, wraparound services for Marymount—and Marymount will be going in the North, I'm assuming.

\* (16:10)

Is that—that's what the minister was referring to?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, I've been referring to a lot of different ways which we're investing in culturally appropriate and supportive programming. But the member should stay tuned, I'm sure, for more announcements that I'm sure that she'll support.

**Ms. Fontaine:** How many male residents presently incarcerated have spent time in solitary confinement? And I guess I'm specifically looking for numbers for fiscal years—or, for years 2019-2020, 2020-21 and 2021-22.

And then, of course, I would—I'll be asking, so I'll save that time, I'll be asking that for women, as well.

**Mr. Goertzen:** And for both of those, we'd have to endeavour to see what information we have on that.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I know the minister was very excited about Estimates, but almost all of the questions I've asked so far, the minister's endeavouring to find that—those answers, so I would have thought that the minister would have had those available.

I guess, what is the—and I—you know, in respect of that question that I just asked, what was the longest period that a citizen spent time in solitary confinement, again, over the last three years?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, I was very and am very excited for Estimates. A lot of that is just because I want to hear what the priorities of the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) is. That means a lot to me, to hear what your priorities are and how you feel about different sorts of things. I take that very seriously.

But, of course, the member will also know that a department of hundreds of millions of dollars, we don't have every answer immediately here, but as I've indicated and we will endeavour to get a response to her when that information is available.

So, I don't want her to take my responses in terms of endeavouring to get her answers as the rules allow



for in this House to be anything to dampen the enthusiasm that I have for the Estimates process.

**Ms. Fontaine:** So, to be clear, while the minister is trying to find that information, so what I'm specifically asking for is how many male residents spent time—and, again, and this is for each of these categories: for the 2019-2020, 2020-21, 2021-22—so, how many male residents spent time in solitary confinement, how many female residents spent time in solitary confinement for the exact same years. And, again, I would also ask for those categories of citizens who may be gender-diverse or non-binary or two-spirited, so I'm asking for that.

And then also for youth. As I'm sure the minister is well aware, there is a push from MACY to, you know, remove the ability to have youth spend any time in, you know, for a lack of a better word, solitary confinement.

So, also for youth for both male and female and gender-diverse folks.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, I thank the member for the clarification in terms of the requests. And certainly, again, similar what—I don't know how, when it comes to some of the specific categories that she's mentioned, I don't know to what extent that can be identified.

But to the extent we can provide information, we will endeavour to do so and do so within the time frames that are set out in our rules.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I referred a little bit earlier about programming or access to citizens currently incarcerated and having access to programming. I am curious right now in—about the programming that is available to women and gender-diverse folks who are currently incarcerated.

And I would probably specify that for—specifically for the women's correctional facility.

**Mr. Goertzen:** We don't have a break—it broken down by facility—we may be able to get that in a longer period of time—but we do have a number of the programs. I'll run through some of them in the time that I have.

I will mentioned—before that, I think the member was suggesting, although I don't think she said it on the record, about why there might be one male incarcerated at Women's Correctional Centre. It's an individual who is transgender, and so that is the one individual who is identified as a male in the Women's Correctional Centre.

In terms of her question regarding programming, number of programs: Thinking Awareness Group, a program designed to provide participants with an introduction to the concept of cognitive behaviour therapy; Reclaiming Our Identity, which is a self-awareness program that promotes personal growth and identity through education of the historical impacts of colonization, discrimination, racism and the residential school system. I won't go through the full description of the program but I'm sure we could always provide that, if the member wants.

Informational Anger Management programming, End to Aggression programming; Introduction to Health Relationships; Making a Connection program, which is an intervention for offenders who've been charged with intimate partner violence; Reclaiming Your Self Expression program, which is an evidence-based cognitive behavioural program designed to help female participants avoid further assaultive and/or aggressive behaviour by understanding how the way we think affects how we feel and ultimately affects our actions, which can lead to aggressive behaviour.

Healthy Options for Personal Empowerment is another program; the MIHSOU Sexual Offender Program; Sex Offender Program Unit program at 225 Garry Street; the Coming to Terms program, which is a short-term, informational program that assists participants to realistically evaluate their alcohol and/or drug use and the effect it is having on their lives and the lives of those around them; a behavioural therapy program; the 4R program: it's a skill-based program that promotes healthy relationships, targets violence, risky sexual behaviour and substance use among adolescents; Creating New Choices program: it is a program for—anger management program that explores the costs of using anger and aggression; Helping Women Recover program provides a gender-responsive treatment for women who abuse alcohol and/or other drugs, integrates treatment or substance abuse with issues of trauma—and I think I'm having a bit of—no, I've got more—figured out the technology issues—the Nobody's Perfect program, which I suppose could be applied to all of us. It's a facilitated informational program designed to meet the needs of parents who are young, single, socially or geographically isolated.

My Tween and Me program is a facilitated group program that provides participants with the knowledge, tools and support they need during a child's transition to adolescence; a program of self discovery and empowerment for girls, trauma-informed curriculum that uses a variety of therapeutic approaches,

including psycho-educational cognitive behaviour, expressive arts and relationship therapy.

The Winding River Therapeutic Community—of course, this is the WRTC program for those in custody at Headingley Correctional Centre and continues in the community for individuals on probation. This, I believe, is the therapeutic drug program, which I think has been, you know, very well received and something I remember talking about as a critic back when I was a young man and glad to see that it's come to fruition. I think it might have been the minister, current Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), who opened that program. And so I commend him for that.

\* (16:20)

There's a therapeutic community at the Winnipeg—or Women's Correctional Centre as well; I think that'd be similar. And there's many more programs that I'm about to run out of time, but that's a sampling of the programs that are offered in facilities.

**Ms. Fontaine:** So—so many questions, so little time here.

I'm—I want to ask about, particularly after the last two and a half years, what supports the government specifically is doing to support women leaving correctional facilities.

We know that housing is critically—a critical issue right now, with housing stock—or, social housing stock critically low. And so, that is typically a very huge—it's a huge barrier for women and citizens in general when they're leaving correctional facilities, but often it is attached to them getting children back or trying to get into, you know, whatever kind of schooling or training.

So, specifically, what type of supports is the government resourcing for women leaving correctional facilities?

**Mr. Goertzen:** And I've actually spoken a bit about this, so I think the member and I share a common feeling about the importance of the connections that are made, you know, leaving facility, but those often start when an individual is in facility.

And it's a particular challenge in a provincial context, of course, because those who are in a provincial correctional facility are there for two years less a day for sure, but usually a much shorter time than that, and so there's not a lot of time, whether it comes to training or other sorts of connections that one can make. But that doesn't mean—and I listed off a series of programs

in the last answer—that we don't take those efforts and we don't make those efforts.

And so, just as a more recent example, so I'm sure there's many more, but they come top of mind because they're more recent, and as I get older my memory is only good for more recent events. But when I think about the healing lodge in—that we're going to be establishing in Brandon, the one in The Pas, that connects individuals who are in facility to those who are in the community at that time.

But the hope, really, is that when they leave the facility, that that connection continues because we know that if an individual leaves a facility and there are not supports, they haven't made appropriate connections within a facility, they're likely or more likely to return to life as how they otherwise would've.

I spoke earlier about the wrap-around program that Marymount is running, and that very much is about, you know, helping individuals, youth in this case, but there'd be women as well, to transition into a more productive way. And that's often high-risk youth, high-risk women offenders, men—male offenders, but to connect them into a community.

And so, the member will know, but others might not, her reading Hansard, that wrap-around truly means reaching into the community for psychological support, for health support, for, sometimes financial support, for work-related support.

And all of those supports come around an individual to provide, truly, the ability to properly transition back into the community from what otherwise would've been a criminal lifestyle. Now, that doesn't work for everybody, but we know it works for many people, and many more people that have none of those supports exist.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

So I think part of the question that the member was asking, which is a good question, probably relates a little bit to the Department of Families as well and to other departments in terms of housing support and those sorts of things, but I wanted to give her those examples because they're the most recent examples of initiatives that the government is taking, and there'll be more examples in the days and months to come.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I'm going to spend a little bit of time on courts here.

Can the minister list the court offices and vacancies at each office?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I think the court offices are on the website, but we can get—endeavour to get to the vacancies as they exist.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I want to read the minister a letter that was shared with me today in respect of The Pas court office.

We are writing to you to express our concerns with respect to the operation of The Pas court office. Specifically, for the past two years, there has been an extreme staffing shortage and lack of resources provided to our office—our court office that has resulted in significant prejudice to our clients.

Lately, it seems that the court office is closed as frequently as it is open, if not more frequently. This renders us unable to file court documents on our clients' behalves, creating a complete lack of access to justice.

Additionally, there have been filing materials that have been lost at the hands of the court office, and there has been paperwork that has been misplaced, or rather, simply not completed. This has resulted in clients being brought into custody for breach of conditions that they are no longer bound by, therefore infringing on their rights afforded to them pursuant to section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

These issues impact our clients in The Pas, Manitoba, as well as our clients in surrounding communities such as Moose Lake, Easterville, Grand Rapids and Pukatawagan, where there are already access-to-justice concerns.

It is disheartening that an individual living in northern Manitoba should be afforded less access to the courts simply due to their geographic location, and that this amount of time has lapsed without anything being done to rectify the situation.

We have advised the court office and the Law Society of our concerns, however, to date, nothing has been done to rectify any of these issues. We hope that, with your attention to the matter, we can ensure that our court office obtains the resources it requires in order to operate efficiently.

I share that because that was a letter that was sent to my colleague, the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin), and she shared it with me today, trying to draw attention from the minister to what is really a violation of folks in the North and their access to justice and to speedy justice, and not to be penalized for things that are beyond their control. And so, I do

think that it is very concerning to hear that citizens are having—are being breached for things that are well beyond their control, but that are actually the control of the minister and all of the folks who work for you.

So, again, you know, I'm asking about court offices and what the minister is doing to deal with the extreme—and I quote, again: extreme staffing shortages and lack of resources provided to our court office. End quote.

So, that's specifically from—about The Pas, but I would submit to the minister that that's a concern that we've heard from several court offices across the province.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I do appreciate the member raising the issue. I suspect the letter has probably been copied to our office, and so I'm sure there is a response that's being developed to the specific writer of the letter. But the more general concern is not an inappropriate concern to raise.

You know, I think you start at the level of what society generally is facing when it comes to the ability to fill certain positions—very difficult in, really, almost every sector.

And the—and for whatever reason, it's worse after the last two years—and there were challenges even before that, but for whatever reason it's worse over the last couple years. I sometimes hear employers say to me, where did all the workers go? And I don't have an easy answer for them.

\* (16:30)

But then overlaid on top of that, of course, is the difficulty that it has often been, in terms of recruiting for those working in the North. And I can't always explain that.

I've had the opportunity to visit the North many times—wonderful people and wonderful country. But there is a reality that it is a challenge sometimes to fill positions, whether it is in business, whether it's in education—and I experienced that in terms of, you know, teachers in the North. Of course, well documented about health-care workers in the North, and that's not a political statement, because it was challenging when the NDP were in government—Theresa Oswald would tell me that, Sharon Blady would tell me that. The former ministers of Education, whether it was, you know, Peter Bjornson, or other ministers would talk about the difficulties sometimes in filling those positions in the North. So, that's a long-standing challenge.

I know, for example, you know, sometimes even filling positions when it comes to judicial justices of the peace or judges or justices, it can be difficult in the North. And those are often very well sought-out positions for those who are in the legal profession or maybe, in the case of JJPs, in other places in societies.

So, that doesn't diminish the concerns that were raised by the author of the letter or by the member herself, who raised this. It just brings context to the challenges that every government and every non-government entity faces sometimes in recruiting to the North.

Having said that, I do know that the department understands those challenges, have been taking initiatives to try to recruit and to fill positions in the best way that they can. I can assure the member that it's not for lack of interest or lack of trying or lack of resources when it comes to the finances to fill those positions. It is a challenge, though, because of the historical challenges in those positions.

But we'll endeavour to look further into the letter that the member has put onto the record and that I suspect has already made its way to our office.

**Ms. Fontaine:** You know, the minister is talking that he—that, you know, he's saying that it's very difficult to recruit and, of course, everybody knows that that's an issue right now.

And—but there's a fundamental difference between, you know, if you can't fill a position at a restaurant or at a movie theatre or at, you know, a clothing boutique. There's a fundamental difference in not being able to fill that position and where, you know, perhaps there's going to be some folks that are working more and have to do more shifts versus not being able to have the infrastructure to exercise justice.

And certainly there's a fundamental difference when, in that not being able to fully exercise justice, people—and often the most marginalized people—are being penalized because of that. And so, you know, I understand that, you know, there is—and I understand that that's a longstanding issue in respect of trying to recruit folks to work in the North.

And, certainly, the pandemic has left folks with challenge, but that doesn't diminish the urgency to have folks working in courts. Because, again, it is impacting on the most marginalized and putting them more into contact and more into conflict with the overall justice system.

So what, specifically, is the minister or the department doing to address the vacancies within the courts?

And then, of course, I haven't even—you know, we haven't even begun to ask the questions in respect of Crown prosecutions, which, of course, we asked that in QP today, and then certainly the minister would have received or seen that letter that was sent out yesterday from Crown prosecutors.

So, what is the department actually doing to rectify that? And before the minister does that, I just want to table the letter for the minister that I just read into the record.

Miigwech.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I want to, you know, just be clear: I'm not trying to draw a moral equivalency between vacancies that exist in one sector versus vacancies that exist in another sector. They're different problems, but they're all problems.

And it's a problem that is generally being faced in society and that has been specifically faced in northern communities long before this government came to government.

And for however long this government remains in government, whether it's 10 years or 20 years, I suspect that that challenge is going to remain for a lot of reasons that are simply not within the control of any government. But I can assure the member that whether it's Crown attorneys where there's a vigorous recruitment effort underway for, or whether it's positions in the North, there are significant recruitment efforts that are always undertaken and trying to determine where there are individuals who can fill those positions—and not only fill them, but hopefully stay in those positions.

Because, I know in previous roles we sometimes were successful in getting individuals to fill a position—I'll use health care as an example, because I was in that file for about three years—and—but they wouldn't stay very long. And that became a challenge into of itself, because individuals within a community would find that they draw a connection with somebody who is filling a position and then non-long after they're gone and those connections are lost and it was almost as disruptive as before they became and went into those positions.

So, the department is very actively engaged with the strategy in trying to ensure that they can not only fill those positions but try to find people who are

interested in living and becoming part of the communities in which they're filling those positions.

**Ms. Fontaine:** So, again, I don't know if I—I know that the minister talked about recruitment efforts, but I don't know if there was any specifics in that. So, I'll ask it in respect of, like, Crown prosecutions, because I know he did mention—and again, I quote, that there's recruitment efforts going on.

But—so, in respect of Crown prosecution—the prosecutors. There's a significant vacancy and it's—there's been—the alarm has been raised by Crown prosecutors in respect of them being able to do their job, the jobs that they're hired for, which contributes—obviously, is one of the cogs within the justice system.

And so, I know that the minister during QP kept trying to say that there, you know, there were no cuts or—to positions. So I'm curious what the department is doing in respect of Crown prosecutors and, you know, whether or not the minister and the department is taking seriously the letter that was sent out yesterday that raises some serious concerns to the overall justice program.

So, specifically, what's the minister and the department doing about Crown prosecutions and what are specifically those recruitment efforts?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Absolutely, it's being taken seriously.

You know, and without being political, because I don't like to be political, but I remember 'sutting'—sitting in the seat—might be the exact same seat the member opposite is sitting in right now—in 2006 and asking those same questions when the Crown prosecutors were filing complaints about the working conditions within the Department of Justice at that time.

And I don't recall—I don't know if I made it a political issue. You know, I was younger and sometimes more aggressive in my—in those days than I am today, but—I think I'd like to be—think I'm more magnanimous, you know, as—with age, and that sort of thing. My wife tells me that I should try to be—look at every side of the issue, but I—

**An Honourable Member:** How's that working out for you?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, it works out okay some days and not so well other days.

But I know that in 2006, when this was an issue, I'd like to think that the minister at the time—it may have been Minister Mackintosh—also took it seriously.

But I think that that speaks to the fact that there are times when it is more difficult, for a variety of reasons, to recruit into certain positions. I think there are currently around 15 or so vacant positions when it comes to the Crown attorneys, and that would equate to about an 8 per cent vacancy rate—that's too high. And it's not intentional and it's not desirable.

\* (16:40)

And so, you know, obviously it's a relatively confined pool of individuals who can be Crown attorneys because they have to have fulfilled certain, you know, professional standards and educational standards. But whether it's, you know, trying to, at the—I don't want to say the lowest level, but at the most entry level—and, you know, speaking to those who are graduating from law school and who are looking for articling positions; and I know that articling positions are offered within prosecution, and many of those articling students have continued on in prosecutions—or, we're speaking, you know, more broadly to those who are—have been or are currently at the bar and been called to the bar for many years, and trying to recruit those positions.

So I'm—I know that those active recruitment efforts are happening within the legal profession, a relatively contained group of individuals in Manitoba. It's not for a lack of desire or a lack of effort or a lack of willingness to have those positions filled.

Now, I will also say that, you know, the member will know that there are active labour negotiations happening now. And so, to the extent that some of these concerns drift into the area of labour negotiations, you know, I won't speak to those. I mean, the process of labour negotiation and contract negotiation happens in an independent way without interference—or, it should. I mean, I can excite examples in—I would cite—I could cite examples in this House where previous governments have interfered in labour disputes, but then I'd be coming political again, and then I'd go home and my wife would tell me to stop doing that. So I won't.

But I won't drift into areas of labour negotiation, if that's where the member's heading.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I'm going to move on to the IIU.

Can the minister provide an update on the makeup of the unit? So, specifically, you know, what are the positions that are currently there? Are all the positions filled? And then, what is the gender breakdown of those positions?

**Mr. Goertzen:** We'll endeavour to get the information for the member.

I can't, you know—when she's asking for questions around gender and that, I think it's—I'm not sure how comfortable we are providing every piece of information on certain things and to make sure we're doing it in a right and appropriate way, but we will certainly look to get the information on the positions that are available and those that may be vacant.

**Ms. Fontaine:** So, I was also specifically asking about the positions as they exist right now.

Like, what's the complement of the IIU? And so, I imagine you guys must have that. And then I'll add to that, how many of the current investigators are Indigenous?

**Mr. Goertzen:** If my honourable friend would draw her attention to page 46 of the Estimates book, she'll find that the number of FTEs, the number of positions within the IIU, is 15. We'll endeavour to get the vacancy rate.

And I know she's asked a more specific question about identity, and we'll see what information we have on that.

**Ms. Fontaine:** What is the minister doing to add non-formal—or, non-former law enforcement members as investigators to the IIU?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, it's a long-standing issue, and I remember sitting on the couch in the loge over there with the former minister of Justice, Dave Chomiak, right below Solwon [phonetic] the lawmaker, and having that discussion about this. And at the time, when he was creating the IIU—and I think that the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) may have been working for the government at the time—you know, he was pretty adamant that it needed to be law enforcement officials who were seconded or, I think, otherwise deployed into the IIU.

And I questioned that about—not because I question the law enforcement officials themselves, but whether or not that would be perceived as being a conflict. And Mr. Chomiak, at the time, I think made a pretty impassioned and I think compelling argument that—at the start-up of this, that it would be difficult to find individuals who had the training to do that kind of work and to receive the sort of evidence that needed to be received and to conform to the law to receive that evidence if they weren't law enforcement officials. And so, I didn't make that a political issue; I supported the decision, and the member opposite may

have—if she was employed with the government at the time, may have also supported that decision.

But, of course, we've taken further steps now to move this into retired officers and officers who are not currently within a force, but still have the skills. But that doesn't mean that those who have never been in law enforcement, you know, that there wouldn't be discussions about how, at some point, to ensure that those individuals can be more fully utilized and maybe at a broader complement.

But I recognize the challenge that Mr. Chomiak—by the way, who I have great respect for, and I think we developed—in a similar way with the member opposite, he was also the House leader for the NDP and I was his critic, and he was the minister of Justice, and, you know, so we played a similar role that—to the way the member for St. Johns and I do. And we had a good relationship. And I took him both at his word, and I think what he said was right: it's difficult to find people who don't have some background in law enforcement to have those sort of investigative skills and to be able to discern evidence in an appropriate way.

But I also believe, as I believed then, that having individuals who are active members of law enforcement pauses—or causes that potential for concern over conflict of interest, which is why changes have been made.

**Ms. Fontaine:** And so, to clarify, I wasn't working for the government at the time. I was the director of justice for the Southern Chiefs' Organization, and I participated in that process of the changes to the police act and the development of the IIU as a representative of 36 southern First Nations. So, just to put that directly on the record there.

So, one of the things that was recently—that came about was the director of an Indigenous—of Indigenous and community relations. So, I'd like an update on where that's at in respect of the IIU, and who's been hired in that position. There was a lot of discussion or debate in the House that the director of an—of Indigenous and community relations should be Indigenous, and so I am curious to see what's happened with that position, whether or not somebody's been hired and who exactly that is.

\* (16:50)

**Mr. Goertzen:** I want to thank the member for correcting my mistake on suggesting she was employed in—I knew that she'd had some role, and I would say it's significant role, in the crafting of the IIU originally.

And so I think my intention, and coming from my heart, what I was looking to say is that the member had a significant role in development of the IIU, even through an advisory role outside of government. And I meant that in a positive way and in a complimentary way and in no other way.

In terms of the particular role that the member opposite is referring to, a very important role—and what I know there was identified as important by the former minister of Justice, the current Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen)—my understanding is that the process in terms of recruitment for that position is ongoing and that there is involvement with Indigenous leadership in terms of how that recruitment should happen. And I think that that's important, given the nature of that commitment, that that consultation happens.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I'm pretty sure that the current—although I could be wrong—that the term for the current IIU director ends relatively soon, I think. Again, I could be wrong on that, but if Zane's term is ending, is there a recruitment strategy going right—on right now for an appointment for an IIU civilian director?

And, again, I want to stress, you know, in the same way that I started some of those questions about asking about, you know, the number of BIPOC folk that are employed with the Department of Justice—and, again, particularly in those positions of management and upper management and middle management—I'm wondering if, in that recruitment strategy, there is a move towards the appointment of a BIPOC IIU civilian director.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, I'm advised from officials that the member's correct in terms of the term expiring and that the position is currently being advertised.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Where is that being advertised, and what's the—I haven't seen any of that.

What's the deadline on that? And, again, specifically, is there a move towards supporting the appointment of a BIPOC IIU civilian director? And in that, is there a strategy at ensuring there are BIPOC individuals that are applying for that position?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, in fairness to the member, and probably to her research staff, I think that that the position, I'm told, was just posted today online. So I don't—sure that her research staff is doing a fine job, and wouldn't want to suggest otherwise.

And then in terms of that position, this consultation that's happening with MKO, SCO and AMC on the recruitment and ultimately the fulfilling of that position.

**Ms. Fontaine:** What's the current public inquest backlog? Where are we at in respect of a backlog within our public inquests?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Just for clarity, the member's asking for backlog on inquests, not on the backlog on inquiries she may have demanded?

There's a big backlog on both of them, but, you know—okay—[interjection] Well, I won't speak on inquiries she's demanded, but we will then for—she's clarified—we will endeavour to find out where the status of an—inquests are.

**Ms. Fontaine:** In that endeavour, perhaps the minister could provide information on what he and his department think the estimate will be to clear that backlog.

And I guess, you know, to that end, like, what's the average times to complete inquests?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I don't know if we would track average times. I imagine that could be calculated.

We could probably find you the last times of the inquest for a sampling of previous inquests and you can do the calculation, but we've already endeavoured to find out the status of inquests and we'll provide that within the rules of the—of this proceeding.

**Ms. Fontaine:** So, the minister and the department will be well aware that—I don't know when it was—maybe last year or in the last year, at any rate—there was concerns about a directive about lumping inquests together. And so there was concerns from family members that felt that there—the, you know, an inquest into how their family members died warranted its own inquest. And so, you know, I'm curious for a breakdown on all the different cases that are being lumped together in one inquest.

And then how—what was the criteria that was used to determine how different inquests were going to be kind of lumped together?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, sure.

We've endeavoured already—are committed to try to get some of that information. It's just important to put on the record that—and the member knows this. I'm not—I'm saying this more for those who might read Hansard, the hundreds of people who review it daily—that the Chief Medical Examiner, generally, is the person who will be calling inquests. And, you know,

decisions about how they're conducted or the way in which they're conducted aren't being made by the Minister of Justice or Attorney General. That would—it wouldn't be appropriate.

And, again, the member knows that. I'm just making sure that others would know that as well.

**Ms. Fontaine:** But, again—and I understand what the minister is attempting to say, but the direction came from somewhere to lump inquests together when traditionally—and again, maybe that's something that also needs to kind of be highlighted—traditionally, inquests have been, you know, done individually.

So, where did the direction come to lump them, all of a sudden, all of these Manitobans who passed into, you know, one or two different, two or three—whatever it is—inquests? So—the direction came from somewhere.

And so, I do think that it's important for Manitobans and the—particularly those families that were concerned with that process, how those decisions came to be and where that direction came from and what that currently looks like within the—and where we're currently situated right now with inquests, because there are Manitoba families that the minister knows has been waiting quite a while.

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

Call in the Speaker.

#### IN SESSION

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

Have a good evening, and see you all tomorrow.



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Thursday, October 27, 2022**

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